

מסכת תענית · דף ט"ו

Elucidated Talmud · Statement and Proof · Navy & Gold Edition

THE SUGYA

In this chapter, we are zocheh to learn the detailed order of the public fast days that the community would establish in times of tzarah, such as a drought. The Gemara begins by finishing a beautiful discussion on the great reward and light that Hashem has in store for the tzaddikim and the upright who serve Him with a complete heart. We then enter the main Mishnah of the perek, which describes the moving public gathering in the city square, where the holy ark was brought out and ashes were placed on it and on the heads of the Nasi, the Av Beis Din, and the entire tzibbur as a sign of deep humility and teshuvah.

We also learn about the powerful words of chizuk and reproof delivered by the elder of the community, reminding everyone that Hashem does not merely look at sackcloth and fasting, but at a person's actual deeds and sincere return from their evil ways. The Mishnah then outlines the special tefillos of the day, including the addition of six special brachos to the Shemoneh Esrei, and the qualifications of the shliach tzibbur who must be a humble man of family and meager means so that his heart is entirely poured out for the community's needs.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

STATEMENT

לְבוֹזָה נָפֶשׁ לְמַתְעֵב גּוֹי לְעֶבֶד מַשְׁלִים מְלָכִים יֵרָאוּ וְקָמוּ.”

The Gemara continues to expound the verse: “To him who is despised of soul, to him who is abhorred of nations, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise”.

STATEMENT

וְשָׂרִים בְּהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיָּה, דְּכָתִיב: “שָׂרִים וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ.”

And as for **ministers**, they shall honor him by **bowing**, as it is written in the continuation of the verse: “Ministers, and they shall bow.”

OBJECTION

מִתְקִיף לַהּ רַבִּי זִירָא, וְאִיתִימָא רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי:

Rabbi Zeira strongly objects to this interpretation, and some say it was Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani who objected:

OBJECTION

אִי הָוָה כָּתִיב “וְשָׂרִים וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ” — כְּדָקְא מֵרַת.

If it were written, “And ministers shall bow,” then the meaning would be as you said, that the ministers only bow but do not stand.

OBJECTION

הַשָּׂמָה דְּכָתִיב "שָׂרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ" — הָא וְהָא עָבִיד.

But **now that it is written**, "Ministers, and they shall bow," with the conjunctive 'and', it implies that **they will do both this and that** — they will first arise like the kings, and then they will also bow.

STATEMENT

אָמַר רַב נַחֲמָן בַּר יִצְחָק, אַף אֲנִי אוֹמֵר: לֹא הַכֹּל לְאֹרָה, וְלֹא הַכֹּל לְשִׂמְחָה.

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: I too say a similar distinction: **Not everyone** is destined for light, and **not everyone** is destined for gladness.

STATEMENT

צְדִיקִים — לְאֹרָה, וְיֹשְׁרִים — לְשִׂמְחָה.

Rather, the **righteous** are destined for light, and the **upright** are destined for gladness.

PROOF

צְדִיקִים לְאֹרָה, דְּכָתִיב: "אֹרֶךְ יָרֵעַ לְצְדִיק".

The **righteous** are destined for light, as it is written: "Light is sown for the righteous."

PROOF

וְלִישְׁרִים שִׂמְחָה, דְּכָתִיב: "וְלִישְׁרֵי לֵב שִׂמְחָה".

And for the **upright**, gladness, as it is written in the end of that same verse: "And gladness for the upright in heart."

STATEMENT

הֲדַרְזוּ עֲלֶיךָ מְאִימָתִי

May we return to you, "Me'eimasai"!

מִשְׁנָה MISHNAH

MISHNAH

סֵדֶר תַּעֲנִיּוֹת בִּיצֵד ?

What is the **order** of the public **fast days** on which the community is answered?

MISHNAH

מוֹצֵיאִין אֶת הַתִּיבָה, לְרַחֲוָהָ שֶׁל עִיר,

They bring out the **Ark** containing the Sefer Torah into the open square of the city,

MISHNAH

וְנוֹתְנִין אֶפֶר מִקְלָה עַל גְּבֵי הַתִּיבָה, וּבְרֹאשׁ הַנָּשִׂיא, וּבְרֹאשׁ אַב בֵּית דִּין,

and they place burnt ashes upon the Ark, and upon the head of the Nasi, and upon the head of the Av Beis Din,

MISHNAH

וְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נוֹתֵן בְּרֹאשׁוֹ.

and each and every member of the congregation places ashes upon his own head.

MISHNAH

הַזָּקֵן שֶׁפָּהֶן אוֹמֵר לְפָנֵיהֶן דְּבָרֵי כְּבוֹשִׁין:

The eldest among them says before them words of admonition to move their hearts to teshuvah, saying:

MISHNAH

אֲחֵינוּ! לֹא נֶאמַר בְּאַנְשֵׁי נִינְוָה "וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת שָׂקָם וְאֶת תַּעֲנִיתָם",

“Our brothers! It is not said regarding the people of Nineveh, ‘And God saw their sackcloth and their fast,’

MISHNAH

אֶלָּא: "וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶךְ הָרָעָה",

but rather: ‘And God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way.’

MISHNAH

וּבִקְבָלָהּ הוּא אוֹמֵר: "וְקִרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶּם וְאַל בְּגַדֵיכֶם".

And in the Prophets it says: ‘And rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to Hashem your G-d.’”

MISHNAH

עֲמָדוֹ בַּתְּפִלָּה — מוֹרִידִין לְפָנָי הַתִּיבָה זָקֵן וְרָגִיל וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ בָּנִים, וּבֵיתוֹ רֵיקָם,

When they stood for prayer, they send down before the Ark to lead the service an elder who is experienced in prayer, and who has children, and whose house is empty of sustenance so that he feels the pain of poverty,

MISHNAH

כְּדֵי שְׂיֵהָא לְבוֹ שְׁלֵם בַּתְּפִלָּה.

so that his heart will be completely poured out in prayer.

MISHNAH

וְאוֹמֵר לְפָנֵיהֶן עֲשָׂרִים וָאַרְבַּע בְּרָכוֹת:

And he recites before them twenty-four blessings:

MISHNAH

שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂרָה שְׁבָכָל יוֹם, וּמוֹסִיף עֲלֵיהֶן עוֹד שֵׁשׁ,

the eighteen blessings of every day, and he adds to them another six blessings.

MISHNAH

וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: זְכוֹנוֹת וְשׁוּפְרוֹת,

And these are they: The blessings of Zichronos and Shofaros,

MISHNAH

”אֶל ה' בִּצְרָתָהּ לִי קָרָאתִי וַיַּעֲנֵנִי,” ”אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים וְגו'”,

and the chapters of Tehillim: “In my distress I called to Hashem and He answered me,” “I lift my eyes to the mountains, etc.,”

MISHNAH

”מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ ה'”, ”תַּפִּלָּה לְעַנִּי כִּי יַעֲטֹף”.

“From the depths I called to You, Hashem,” and “A prayer of the afflicted when he faints.”

MISHNAH

רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: לֹא הָיָה צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר זְכוֹרֹנוֹת וְשׁוֹפָרוֹת,

Rabbi Yehuda says: He did not need to say Zichronos and Shofaros, which are unique to Rosh Hashanah,

MISHNAH

אֲלָא אוֹמֵר תַּחֲתֵיהֶן ”רָעַב כִּי יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ דְּבַר כִּי יִהְיֶה”, ”אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְּבַר ה' אֶל יִרְמְיָהוּ עַל דְּבָרֵי הַבְּצָרוֹת”.

but rather he says in their place the passage of Shlomo's prayer: “If there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence,” and the passage: “That which was the word of Hashem to Yirmeyahu concerning the droughts.”

MISHNAH

וְאוֹמֵר חוֹתְמֵיהֶן.

And he recites their unique concluding formulas for these blessings.

MISHNAH

עַל הָרֵאשׁוֹנָה הוּא אוֹמֵר: ”מִי שָׁעֲנָה אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּהַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה הוּא יַעֲנֶה אֶתְכֶם וַיִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל צַעֲקֹתְכֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' גּוֹאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל”.

For the first of the added blessings he says: “He Who answered Avraham on Mount Moriah, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Redeemer of Israel.”

MISHNAH

עַל הַשֵּׁנִיָּה הוּא אוֹמֵר: ”מִי שָׁעֲנָה אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עַל יַם סוּף הוּא יַעֲנֶה אֶתְכֶם וַיִּשְׁמַע קוֹל צַעֲקֹתְכֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' זוֹכֵר הַנִּשְׁכָּחוֹת”.

For the second blessing he says: “He Who answered our forefathers at the Red Sea, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who remembers the forgotten.”

MISHNAH

עַל הַשְּׁלִישִׁית הוּא אוֹמֵר: ”מִי שָׁעֲנָה אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּגִלְגָּל הוּא יַעֲנֶה אֶתְכֶם וַיִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל צַעֲקֹתְכֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּרוּעָה”.

For the third blessing he says: “He Who answered Yehoshua in Gilgal, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who hears the Teruah.”

MISHNAH

על הרביעית הוא אומר: “מי ששענה את שמואל במצפה הוא יענה אתכם וישמע בקול צעקתכם היום הזה, ברוך אתה ה' שומע צעקה.”

For the fourth blessing he says: “He Who answered Shmuel at Mizpah, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who hears cries.”

MISHNAH

על החמישית הוא אומר: “מי ששענה את אליהו בהר הפרמל הוא יענה אתכם וישמע בקול צעקתכם היום הזה, ברוך אתה ה' שומע תפלה.”

For the fifth blessing he says: “He Who answered Eliyahu on Mount Carmel, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who hears prayer.”

MISHNAH

על הששית הוא אומר: “מי ששענה את יונה ממעי הדגה, הוא יענה אתכם וישמע בקול צעקתכם היום הזה, ברוך אתה ה' העונה בעת צרה.”

For the sixth blessing he says: “He Who answered Yonah from the belly of the fish, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who answers in a time of distress.”

MISHNAH

על השביעית הוא אומר: “מי ששענה את דוד ואת שלמה בנו בירושלים, הוא יענה אתכם וישמע בקול צעקתכם היום הזה, ברוך אתה ה' המרחם על הארץ.”

For the seventh blessing he says: “He Who answered Dovid and Shlomo his son in Yerushalayim, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who has mercy on the Land.”

MISHNAH

מעשה בימי רבי חלפתא ורבי חנניא בן תרדיון שעבר אחד לפני התיבה וגמר את הפרכה כולה, ולא ענו אחריו אמן.

An incident occurred in the days of Rabbi Chalafta and Rabbi Chananya ben Teradyon, when someone passed before the Ark to lead the prayers and completed the entire blessing, and they did not answer Amen after him.

MISHNAH

תקעו הכהנים תקעו!

Instead, the synagogue attendant called out: “Blow, Kohanim, blow!”

MISHNAH

מי שענה את אברהם אבינו בהר המוריה, הוא יענה אתכם וישמע בקול צעקתכם היום הזה.

The chazzan then said: “He Who answered Avraham our father on Mount Moriah, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day.”

MISHNAH

הָרִיעוּ בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן הָרִיעוּ!

The attendant called out: “Sound a Teruah, sons of Aaron, sound a Teruah!”

MISHNAH

מִי שֶׁעָנָה אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עַל יָם סוּף, הוּא יַעֲנֶה אֶתְכֶם וְיִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל צִצְקַתְכֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

The chazzan said: “He Who answered our forefathers at the Red Sea, He shall answer you and hear the voice of your cry on this day.”

MISHNAH

וּכְשָׁבָא דְבַר אֶצֶל חֲכָמִים, אָמְרוּ: לֹא הֵינּוּ נוֹהֲגִין בּוֹ, אֶלָּא בְּשַׁעַר מְזֻרָח וּבְהַר הַבֵּית.

And when the matter came before the Sages, they said: We only practiced this custom of blowing the shofar and not answering Amen at the Eastern Gate and on the Temple Mount, but not in the provinces.

MISHNAH

שְׁלֹשׁ תַעֲנִיּוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת — אֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶר מִתְעַנִּין וְלֹא מִשְׁלִימִין, וְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אָב לֹא הָיוּ מִתְעַנִּין כָּלֵל.

On the first three fasts, the men of the priestly watch of that week fast but do not complete the fast until nightfall, and the men of the specific family house serving that day did not fast at all.

MISHNAH

שְׁלֹשׁ שְׁנִיּוֹת — אֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶר מִתְעַנִּין וּמִשְׁלִימִין, וְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אָב מִתְעַנִּין וְלֹא מִשְׁלִימִין.

On the second three fasts, the men of the watch fast and complete the fast, and the men of the family house fast but do not complete it.

MISHNAH

שִׁבְעַת אַחֲרוֹנוֹת — אֵלּוּ וְאֵלּוּ מִתְעַנִּין וּמִשְׁלִימִין, דְּבַרֵּי רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ.

On the final seven fasts, both these and those fast and complete the fast. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua.

MISHNAH

וּחֲכָמִים אוֹמְרִים: שְׁלֹשׁ תַעֲנִיּוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת — אֵלּוּ וְאֵלּוּ לֹא הָיוּ מִתְעַנִּין כָּלֵל.

And the Sages say: On the first three fasts, both these and those did not fast at all.

MISHNAH

שְׁלֹשׁ שְׁנִיּוֹת — אֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶר מִתְעַנִּין וְלֹא מִשְׁלִימִין, וְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אָב לֹא הָיוּ מִתְעַנִּין כָּלֵל.

On the second three fasts, the men of the watch fast but do not complete it, and the men of the family house did not fast at all.

MISHNAH

שֶׁבַע אַחֲרוֹנוֹת — אֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶרֶת מְתַעַנִּין וּמִשְׁלִימִין, וְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אָב מְתַעַנִּין וְלֹא מִשְׁלִימִין.

On the final seven fasts, the men of the watch fast and complete the fast, and the men of the family house fast but do not complete it.

MISHNAH

אֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶרֶת — מוֹתְרִין לְשָׁתוֹת יַיִן בַּלַּיְלוֹת, אֲכָל לֹא בַּיָּמִים, וְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אָב — לֹא בַּיּוֹם וְלֹא בַּלַּיְלָה.

The men of the watch are permitted to drink wine during the nights of their week of service, but not during the days; but the men of the family house may drink wine neither during the day nor during the night of their service.

MISHNAH

אֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶרֶת וְאֲנָשֵׁי מַעְמָד — אֲסוּרִין מִלְּסַפֵּר וּמִלְכַבֵּס.

The men of the watch and the men of the Ma'amad are forbidden to cut hair and to wash clothes during their week of service.

MISHNAH

וּבַחֲמִישֵׁי מוֹתְרִין, מִפְּנֵי כְבוֹד הַשַּׁבָּת.

But on Thursday they are permitted to do so, due to the honor of Shabbos.

MISHNAH

כָּל הַכָּתוּב בַּמִּגִּלָּת תַּעֲנִית "דְּלֹא לְמַסְפַּד" — לְפָנָיו אֲסוּר, לְאַחֲרָיו — מוֹתֵר.

Regarding any day written in Megillas Taanis on which "not to eulogize," on the day before it, it is forbidden to eulogize, but on the day after it, it is permitted.

MISHNAH

רַבִּי יוֹסִי אוֹמֵר: לְפָנָיו וְלְאַחֲרָיו אֲסוּר.

Rabbi Yose says: Both before it and after it, it is forbidden.

MISHNAH

"דְּלֹא לְהִתְעַנָּה" — לְפָנָיו וְלְאַחֲרָיו מוֹתֵר.

Regarding days on which it is written "not to fast," both before it and after it, it is permitted to fast.

MISHNAH

רַבִּי יוֹסִי אוֹמֵר: לְפָנָיו אֲסוּר, לְאַחֲרָיו מוֹתֵר.

Rabbi Yose says: Before it, it is forbidden to fast, but after it, it is permitted.

MISHNAH

אֵין גּוֹזְרִין תַּעֲנִית עַל הַצָּבוּר בַּתַּחֲיִלָּה בַּחֲמִישֵׁי, שֶׁלֹּא לְהַפְקִיעַ הַשְּׁעָרִים.

They do not decree a fast on the community to begin on a Thursday, so as not to inflate the market prices of food.

MISHNAH

אֵלֶּא שֶׁלֹּשׁ תַּעֲנִיּוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת: שְׁנֵי וַחֲמִישֵׁי וְשֹׁנִי, וְשֶׁלֹּשׁ שְׁנִיּוֹת: חֲמִישֵׁי שְׁנֵי וַחֲמִישֵׁי.

Rather, the first three fasts are scheduled on Monday, Thursday, and Monday; and the second three are on Thursday, Monday, and Thursday.

MISHNAH

רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר: כָּשֶׁם שֶׁאֵין הָרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת בְּחִמִּישֵׁי, כֵּן לֹא שְׁנִיּוֹת וְלֹא אַחֲרוֹנוֹת.

Rabbi Yose says: Just as the first series of fasts does not begin on a Thursday, so too neither the second nor the final series may begin on a Thursday.

MISHNAH

אֵין גּוֹזְרִין תַּעֲנִית עַל הַצָּפוּר בְּרֵאשֵׁי חֲדָשִׁים, בְּחִנוּכָּה, וּבְפוּרִים.

They do not decree a fast on the community on Rosh Chodesh, Chanukah, or Purim.

MISHNAH

וְאִם הִתְחִילוּ — אֵין מַפְסִיקִין, דְּבָרֵי רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל.

And if they had already begun the series of fasts, they do not interrupt them for these days; this is the statement of Rabban Gamliel.

MISHNAH

אָמַר רַבִּי מֵאִיר: אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁאָמַר רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אֵין מַפְסִיקִין, מוֹדָה הָיָה שֶׁאֵין מְשַׁלְּמִין.

Rabbi Meir said: Even though Rabban Gamliel said they do not interrupt, he would agree that they do not complete the fast until nightfall on these festive days.

MISHNAH

וְכֵן תִּשְׁעָה בָּאָב שֶׁחָל לִהְיוֹת בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת.

And likewise, if Tisha B'Av fell on Erev Shabbos, one does not complete the fast until nightfall, so as not to enter Shabbos in pain.

גְּמָרָא GEMARA

GEMARA

גָּמ' סֵדֶר תַּעֲנִיּוֹת כִּיצַד? מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הַתִּיבָה כּו'.
GEMARA: We learned in the Mishnah: What is the order of the fast days? They bring out the Ark, etc.

QUESTION

וְאִפְּלוּ בְּקִמְיָתָא?

The Gemara asks: **And** do they do this **even during the first** three fasts?

OBJECTION

וּרְמִינָהּ: שֶׁלֹּשׁ תַּעֲנִיּוֹת רִאשׁוֹנוֹת וּשְׁנִיּוֹת נִכְנָסִים לְבֵית הַכְּנָסֶת, וּמִתְפַּלְלִין כְּדָרָךְ שֶׁמִּתְפַּלְלִין כָּל הַשָּׁנָה כּוּלָּהּ

But they raised a contradiction from a Baraisa: On the first and second three fasts, they enter the synagogue and pray in the same manner that they pray all year round,

OBJECTION

וּבְשָׁבַע אַחֲרוֹנוֹת מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הַתִּיבָה לְרַחֲוָכָהּ שֶׁל עִיר, וְנוֹתְנִין אֶפֶר עַל גְּבִי הַתִּיבָה, וּבְרֹאשׁ הַנָּשִׂיא, וּבְרֹאשׁ אֶב פֵּית דִּין, וְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נוֹטֵל וְנוֹתֵן בְּרֹאשׁוֹ.

and only on the final seven fasts do they bring out the Ark to the open square of the city, and place ashes upon the Ark, and upon the head of the Nasi, and upon the head of the Av Beis Din, and each and every person takes and places ashes upon his own head!

OBJECTION

רַבִּי נָתַן אוֹמֵר: אֶפֶר מְקַלָּה הֵן מְבִיאִין!

Rabbi Nathan says: They bring burnt ashes specifically.

ANSWER

אָמַר רַב פָּפָא: כִּי תִנּוּ נִמִּי מִתְנִיתִין — אֲשָׁבַע אַחֲרוֹנוֹת תִּנּוּ.

Rav Pappa said: When we also learned our Mishnah, we learned it as referring only to the final seven fasts, and not the earlier ones.

GEMARA

וּבְרֹאשׁ הַנָּשִׂיא, וְהֵדָר תָּנִי כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נוֹתֵן בְּרֹאשׁוֹ.

The Mishnah states that they place ashes upon the head of the Nasi, and then it teaches: And each and every one places ashes upon his own head.

QUESTION

אֵינִי?! וְהִתְנַיָּא: רַבִּי אוֹמֵר: בְּגִדּוּלָהּ מִתְחִילִין מִן הַגָּדוֹל, וּבִקְלָלָהּ מִתְחִילִין מִן הַקָּטָן.

The Gemara asks: Is that so?! But wasn't it taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi says: In matters of greatness, we begin with the greatest person, but in matters of curse, we begin with the least significant?

PROOF

בְּגִדּוּלָהּ מִתְחִילִין מִן הַגָּדוֹל, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־עֲזָרָה וְאֶל־יִתְמָר."

In greatness we begin with the greatest, as it is said: "And Moshe said to Aaron, and to Elazar, and to Itamar," addressing the High Priest first.

OBJECTION

ובקללה מתחילין מן הקטן — שבתחלה נתקלל נחש, ואחר כך נתקלה חוה, ואחר כך נתקלל
אדם!

And in a curse we begin with the least, for first the serpent was cursed, and afterwards Chavah was cursed, and only afterwards Adam was cursed! Placing ashes on the head is a sign of disgrace and curse, so why do we begin with the Nasi?

ANSWER

הא חשיבותא לדידהו, דאמרי להו: אתון חשיביתו למיבאי עלו רחמי אכולי עלמא.

The Gemara answers: This is actually a matter of importance for them, as the community says to them: “You are important enough to seek mercy for all of us.”

QUESTION

כל אחד ואחד נויתן בראשו. נשיא ואב בית דין נמי נשקלו אינהו ונינהו בראשיהו, מאי שנא
דשקיל איניש אחרינא ומנח להו?

The Mishnah says: Each and every one places ashes upon his own head. The Gemara asks: Let the Nasi and the Av Beis Din also take the ashes themselves and place them on their own heads! What is different that another person takes the ashes and places them upon them?

ANSWER

אמר רבי אבא דמן קסרי: אינו דומה מתבייש מעצמו

Rabbi Abba of Caesarea said: One who is shamed by himself is not comparable to one who is shamed by others, which causes greater submission.

SUMMARY

The perek details the structure of the public fast day prayers, explaining how the shliach tzibbur leads the congregation through twenty-four brachos by adding six unique blessings to the daily eighteen. These additional brachos invoke the merit of how Hashem answered our holy ancestors and prophets in times of distress—including Avraham Avinu on Mount Moriah, the Bnei Yisrael at the Yam Suf, Yehoshua at Gilgal, Shmuel in Mizpah, Eliyahu on Mount Carmel, Yonah in the belly of the fish, and Dovid and Shlomo in Yerushalayim. Finally, the Mishnah records a historical incident in the days of Rabbi Chalafta and Rabbi Chananya ben Teradyon, where the congregation did not answer ‘Amen’ after the brachos but instead blew the shofaros and trumpets in a unique manner, demonstrating the special, awe-inspiring character of these communal cries to Hashem.

The Mishna teaches us a profound truth about what Hashem truly desires from us when we cry out to Him. When the community gathered in the city square on a fast day, the elder would stand before them and deliver words of reproof. He reminded them that when the people of Nineveh repented, the pasuk does not say that Hashem saw their sackcloth and their fasting. Rather, it says, "And God saw their deeds, that they had turned from their evil way."

It is so easy for us to fall into the trap of externalizing our avodah. We might put on the outward show of distress, we might fast, and we might say the words of prayer with great intensity. But the essence of teshuvah, the very thing that pierces the heavens and brings Hashem's compassion down to us, is the quiet, internal decision to change our actual behavior. As the Navi Joel says, "Rend your hearts and not your garments."

When we look at the list of those whom Hashem answered—Avraham Avinu on Har HaMoriah, Yosef in prison, Yonah in the belly of the fish—they were answered because their hearts were entirely turned toward Hashem, ready to do His will. External rituals are meant to be a vessel, a wake-up call to stir the neshama, but they cannot replace the hard work of fixing our middos and correcting our daily actions.

Today, when you daven or speak to Hashem, do not just focus on the words or the external feeling of devotion. Take one small, concrete action that you know you need to improve—whether it is speaking gently to a family member, showing more honesty in business, or holding back from lashon hara—and make a real change in that area as a physical vessel for your prayers.