

PARASHAT EIKEV- 2014, 5744

Every Jew knows the importance of “davening” (Yiddish for “praying or “Tefillah”). Tefillah and Torah are the hallmark of Judaism. Yet, nowhere in the Torah is it written that we must daven. What we do find in the Torah, in our Parasha, is the commandment to “*Le’ahava Et HaShem Elokeichem*” (to Love HaShem your G-d,) and “*U’le’avdo be’chol Le’vav’chem*” (and to serve Him with all your heart) (11:13). How does one “serve” G-d? To which the Gemara (Ta’anit 2a) comments, serving HaShem means with “your heart” and that translates into Tefillah.

The RambaM (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon-1135-1204) indeed takes this literally and states that is a Biblical Mitzvat Asei (positive Mitzvah) to pray to HaShem daily, and Rambam counts this as one of the 613 Mitzvot.(Hilchot Tefillah 1:1). Different from most other Mitzvot that have a specific text in the Torah, in the case of Tefillah, our Chazal add a clarifying note: And what is service of HaShem with one’s heart? It is Tefillah. And just as many Mitzvot have 2 components; a Maaseh- a physical action, and a Kiyum an essence and purpose. Example- a fast day, the Maaseh is physically abstaining from food, but the real Kiyum is doing Teshuva –repenting. So too, with Tefillah. The Ma’aseh is expressing words, saying the required text of Shemoneh Esrei, but the real Kiyum of Tefillah is the heart, giving your heart to HaShem with concentration, devotion, and meditation.

The RambaN (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachmanides-1195-1270) holds that prayer is a Rabbinic command-inspired by the Torah’s words to serve HaShem with your heart; inspired by the accounts in Torah and Tenach of our ancestors’ prayer. Tefillah says the RambaN is a rabbinic command that our Chazal understood was what HaShem wanted us to do- even without being specifically commanded. It is to our credit that HaShem considers our relationship as intimate as between a husband and wife; that one spouse knows what the other desires without being told. So too with us. HaShem is saying that we should be perceptive enough to understand that HaShem wants us to daven to Him, to pray for our needs and to express to HaKadosh Baruch Hu that we constantly need Him. Even if we are not lacking anything today, at the moment, we never know what tomorrow will bring

We must note, that even according to RambaM, the Torah only commands a basic, elementary prayer-once a day, any time, any words. The entire structure of Tefillah-the three times a day, the timing and the text- are all rabbinically understood. But the basic concepts of Tefillah in terms of Maaseh and Kiyum are the same for RambaM and RambaN.

It behooves us therefore, to make the Kiyum of our prayers meaningful and relevant, especially during these trying times in Israel. Saying all the words of Shemoneh Esrei is the Maaseh, but that’s not enough. The Kiyum requires us to add something new and relevant by each Tefillah, even just to thank G-d for protecting us against the thousands of missiles aimed at us but the Yad HaShem (and the Iron Dome) miraculously protected us.