

The Jew and Prayer

An overview of the roots, purpose and practice of Jewish prayer.

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Lesson 3: Kavanah – Mindfulness in Prayer

LESSON OVERVIEW

1. Nature of Kavanah
2. Format of Kavanah
3. Requirements of Kavanah

1 Samuel Chapter 1:15

וַתַּעַן חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר	And Chana Answered and said
לֹא אֲדֹנָי	No, my lord
אִשָּׁה קִשְׁת־רוּחַ אֲנִי	I am a woman of sorrowful spirit
וַיִּין וְשִׁכָר לֹא שָׁתִיתִי	Neither new wine or old wine have a drunk
וְאִשְׁפַּךְ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה	I poured out my soul before G-D

Psalms Chapter 78:35

וַיִּזְכְּרוּ, כִּי־אֱלֹהִים צוּרָם	And they remembered that G-d is their Rock
וְאֵל עֲלִיּוֹן, גֹּאֲלָם	And that the supreme high G-d is their Redeemer

Psalms Chapter 78:36

וַיִּפְתּוּהוּ בְּפִיהֶם	But they beguiled him (G-d) with their mouths
וּבִלְשׁוֹנָם, יִכְזְבוּ־לוֹ	And with their Tongue they lied to him

Psalms Chapter 78:37

וּלְבָבָם, לֹא־נִכְוֶן עִמּוֹ	And their hearts were not sincere with him
וְלֹא נֶאֱמְנוּ, בְּבְרִיתוֹ	neither were they faithful to His covenant

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ibn Ezra: on psalms 78:37

הנה התברר	Behold, it has become clear
כי עיקר התפילה כונת הלב	That the main point of prayer is the mindfulness of the heart

Joel Chapter 2:13

וְקִרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם
וְאַל-בְּגְדֵיכֶם
And tear your hearts
and not your garments

Mishneh Torah**Laws of Prayer, Ch. 1, Halacha 1**

מצות עשה להתפלל
בכל יום
שנאמר
ועבדתם את ה' אלהיכם
מפי השמועה למדו
שעבודה זו היא תפלה
שנאמר
"ולעבדו בכל לבבכם"
אמרו חכמים
אי זו היא עבודה שבלב
זו תפלה
It is a positive commandment to pray
Every Day
as [Exodus 23:25] states:
"You shall serve God, your Lord."
by tradition we are taught
this service is prayer
as [Deuteronomy 11:13] states:
"And serve Him with all your heart"
our Sages said:
Which is the service of the heart?
This is prayer

RECAP

1. Prayer is primarily *kavanah*
2. Prayer is empty without *kavanah*

Babylonian Talmud**Yevamot 105b**

ר' חייא ור' שמעון בר רבי
הוו יתבי
פתח חד מינייהו ואמר
המתפלל
צריך שיתן עיניו למטה
שנאמר
והיו עיני ולבי שם כל הימים
R' Hiyya and R' Simeon son of Rabbi
were sitting together
when one of them began and said:
One who Prays
must direct your eyes downward
for it is stated:
"And My eyes and My heart shall be there [in the Temple] all the
days."
וחד אמר
עיניו למעלה
שנאמר
נשא לבבנו אל כפים
אדהכי אתא ר' ישמעאל בר'
יוסי לגבייהו
אמר להו
במאי עסקיתו
And the other said:
(Your eyes should be directed) Heavenward
for it is stated:
"Let us lift up our heart with our hand."
R' Ishmael son of R' Jose came over
[and] asked them:

אמרו ליה:	"What subject are you dealing with?"
בתפלה	they replied:
אמר להו:	Prayer
כך אמר אבא	he said to them
המתפלל"	So said my Father:
צריך שיתן עיניו למטה	"One who Prays...
ולבו למעלה"	...directs his eyes downward
	...and his heart heavenward."

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

1. Meditation on meaning of words
2. Envision G-d standing before us
3. Dismiss distracting thoughts
4. Reflect on G-d's greatness in comparison to a mortal king

Proverbs Chapter 27:21

מִצָּרֶף לְכֶסֶף	The refining pot is for silver
וְכֹר לְזָהָב	and the furnace for gold
וְאִישׁ, לְפִי מִהֲלָלוֹ	Does prayer do for Man

Ethics of Our Fathers 2:13

כשאתה מתפלל	When you pray
אל תעש תפילתך קבע	do not do so by rote
אלא תחנונים לפני המקום	but rather as supplication before G-d

Babylonian Talmud

Brachot 28b

העושה תפלתו קבע	One who prays by rote
אין תפלתו תחנונים	his prayers are not genuine supplication

RECAP

1. If we waited to pray with complete kavanah, prayer would be lost altogether
2. Prayer is the primary expression of connection with G-D
3. Better to compromise on quality than to not pray at all