## Why We Pray

Source Sheet by Larry Magarik

### 1. Siddur Ashkenaz, Weekday, Shacharit, Preparatory Prayers, Torah Blessings (\*\*All 3 blessings)

(1) Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us to be involved with words of Torah.

## סידור אשכנז, ימי חול, תפילת שחרית, הכנה לתפילה, ברכות התורה

(א) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוּלֶם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשֶׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִנְּנוּ לַעֲסוק בַּדְבַרֵי תורָה:

### Deuteronomy 11:13

(13) If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul,

### דברים י"א:י"ג

(יג) וְהָנָה אִם־שָׁמְעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתֵׁי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכֵי מְצַנָּה אֶתְכֶם הַיֵּוֹם לְאַהָּבֶּה אָת־יִהוָה אֱלְהֵיכֶם וּלְ**עָבְדֹוֹ בְּכֶל־לְבָבְכֶם** וּ**בְכָל־נַפִּשִׁבֵּם**:

#### Sifrei Devarim 41:25

(25) Another interpretation: "and to serve Him": This is prayer. — But perhaps it is service literally [i.e. sacrifice.] It is, therefore, written "with all your heart." Now is there "service" [i.e. sacrifice] in the heart? What, then, is the intent of "and to serve Him with all your heart? This is Prayer.

### ספרי דברים מ"א:כ"ה

(כה) ד"א: "לעבדו" - זו תפילה. זו תפלה, או אינו אלא עבודה? - ת"ל "בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך", וכי יש לו עבודה בלב? הא מה ת"ל "ולעבדו בכל לבבכם"? - זו תפלה.

## 4. Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandments 5

#### Rambam (Maimonides)

(1) The 5th mitzvah is that we are commanded to serve God (blessed be He). This commandment is repeated

### ספר המצוות, מצוות עשה הי

(א) הוא שצונו לעבדו, וכבר נכפל זההצווי פעמים באמרו ועבדתם את ה'אלהיכם, ואמר ואותו תעבודו. ואע"פשזה הצווי הוא גם כן מהצווייםהכוללים כמו שביארנו בשורש ד', הנה

many times: "And you shall serve God, your Lord"; "And you shall serve Him"; "And to serve Him." Although this commandment is of a general nature, as explained in the Fourth Principle [and] apparently should not be included in the count of the 613 mitzvot from the Torah], nevertheless it has a specific quality, since it is the commandment Pray for, to recite Tefilah=Shemoneh Esrey]. [We see that "service" is not just a general command from the following statements: The Sifri says, "The verse, 'And to serve Him' means prayer." The Sages also said, "The verse, 'And to serve Him' means Torah study. In the Mishnah of Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Rabbi Yosi HaG'lili, the Sages said, "What is the biblical source to include prayer among the mitzvot? From the verse, 'You shall fear G-d, your L-rd, and you shall serve Him.' " They also said, "Serve Him through His Torah; serve Him in His Temple." This [statement, 'serve Him in His Temple,' means that one's goal should be to pray in the Temple or in the direction of the Temple, as King Solomon, peace be upon him, explained [in I Kings 8:22-37, when dedicating First Temple.]

יש בו יחוד אחר שהוא צווי לתפלה.
ולשון ספרי ולעבדו זו תפלה. ואמרו גם
כן ולעבדו זו תלמוד, ובמשנתו של רבי
אליעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי אמרו
מנין לעיקר תפלה מצוה מהכא את ה'
אלהיך תירא ואותו תעבוד, ואמרו
עבדוהו בתורתו ועבדוהו במקדשו,
רוצה לומר הכוון אליו להתפלל שם
כמו שבאר שלמה ע"ה. (בפרשת ואלה
המשפטים, אהבה הלכות תפלה וברכת
כהנים פ"א):

# Hasagot HaRamban on Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandments 5:1

### Ramban (Nachmanides), Comments

The Rav [Rambam] wrote that ... we are commanded to serve Him...and this is the mitzvah of Prayer ...

But this is incorrect because the Sages already explained in the Gemara that Prayer is D'Rabbanan (of rabbinic origin) as they said in B. Berachot 21a with regard to ...the Shema and reciting

## השגות הרמב"ן על ספר המצוות, מצוות עשה ה׳:א׳

(א) **כתב הרב** מצוה חמישית שנצטוינו בעבודתו שנאמר... ולעבדו זו תפלה ...

ואין נכונה בזה שכבר בארו חכמים בגמרא תפלה דרבנן כמו שאמרו בפ"ג דברכות (דף כ"א) לענין בעל קרי שקורא ק"ש ומברך על המזון לאחריו ואינו מתפלל והעלו הטעם בזה אלא the Grace after Meals but not Prayer and they raised the reason for this that the recitation of the Shema and Grace after Meals are D'oraita (Ordained by the Torah) while Prayer is D'Rabbanan (of rabbinic origin.)

And in Gemara B. Sukkah 38a ... this [waving the lulav] is D'Oraita and that [Prayer] is D'Rabbanan,

and ... [Rambam] said that a person is obligated from the Torah to pray every day but the frequency and the form of the Prayers is not from the Torah, and ...the times of the Prayer are not from the Torah but the obligation itself is from the Torah,...

but perhaps the point of Prayer is not obligatory in general, but in order to obtain mercy from the Blessed Creator Who hears and answers whenever we cry out Him, and the point of Scripture's injunction to serve Him with all your heart as a positive mitzvah is that all our service to God [i.e. how to do any mitzvah] should ascend with all our heart, with the intention of being fully acceptable to His Name, without any negative motivation -- so the mitzvot are not fulfilled absent kavanah or with ambivalence ...

ק"ש וברכת המזון דאורייתא **תפלה** דרבנן.

ובגמרא סוכה (דף ל"ח) ... הא דאורייתא הא דרבנן,

וכבר ראינו לו...אמר שחייב אדם מן התורה בתפלה בכל יום אלא שאין מנין התפלות ולא משנה התפלה מן התורה ...שזמני התפלה אינן מן התורה אבל חובת עצמה היא מן התורה,

אלא ודאי כל ענין התפלה אינו חובה כלל אבל הוא ממדת חסד הבורא יתברך עלינו ששומע ועונה בכל קראנו אליו, ועיקר הכתוב ולעבדו בכל לבבכם מצות עשה שתהיה כל עבודתנו לאל יתעלה בכל לבבנו כלומר בכוונה רצויה שלימה לשמו ובאין הרהור רע, לא שנעשה המצות בלי כונה או על So what is expounded in the Sifrei ...was just asmachta [Scriptural support for a rabbinic enactment], or that we pray to Him when we are in trouble [as in the examples Solomon gave in praying at the Temple]...

And [hypothetically] perhaps if we expound that the essential Prayer is an obligation from the Torah...it would be that when you are in trouble, you believe in God so the Blessed One will listen when you cry out in heartache, and understand this.

ומה שדרשו בספרי ...אסמכתא היא ... ושנתפלל אליו בעת הצרות ...

ואם אולי יהיה מדרשם בתפלה עיקר מן התורה ...שהיא מצוה לעת הצרות שנאמין שהוא יתברך ויתעלה שומע תפלה והוא המציל מן הצרות בתפלה וזעקה, והבן זה: Iggeret Baal Ha-Tanya, ed. Heilman p. 33 f, Letter R. Shneur Zalman of Liady to R. Alexander Sender of Shklov, quoted in Norman Lamm, The Religious Thought of Hasidism; Text and Commentary (YU Press 1999) pp. 185-186.

עברית

Those who say that the commandment to pray is only rabbinic [in origin] have never seen the light. For while the text of the prayers and the requirement that they be recited thrice daily may be rabbinic, the essential concept and content [of the mitzvah to pray] are the foundation of the whole Torah: to know the Lord; to acknowledge His greatness and glory with perfect and serene knowledge and an understanding heart; to contemplate them to such an extent that the intellective soul is inspired to love the Name of the Lord, to cleave to Him and His Torah, and to crave His mitzvot. All this can be achieved nowadays only by reciting the Pesukei de-Zimra and the blessings before and after the Shema, with full and audible articulation that arouses the concentration of the heart. Would that it were so, and more!

For R. Simon bar Yohai and his colleagues, however, it was sufficient merely to recite the Shema in order to attain all the above. They were able to achieve it in the blinking of an eye because of their humility and loyalty to the Covenant. But nowadays, whoever is close to the Lord and has even once imbibed the taste of prayer, knows and believes that without prayer one cannot begin to serve the Lord in truth, [and can do so] only by rote.