

To love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (11:13)

Rashi comments that "serving with the heart" is a reference to *tefillah*, prayer. Yet, there is a dispute among the *Rishonim* if daily prayer is *min ha'Torah*, a Biblical command, or *m'dRabbanan*, a Rabbinnical decree. While granting that the number of prayers, their text and content reflect Rabbinic input, the *Rambam* asserts that the origin of prayer is Biblical. Ramban contends the concept of prayer, excluding prayers of distress, is Rabbinic in origin. Indeed, since prayer is *avodah she'blev*, service of the heart, the expression of human feelings and emotions should be man's creation. Hence, *Chazal* composed the various *tefillos* that are recited.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, takes a unique approach to the role of prayer, its definition and purpose. The accepted definition of prayer is a plea for help, the act of imploring the Almighty to grant our wishes, to help us in our time of need. As *Horav* Hirsch questions, can man really expect Hashem to change His decree just because it suits man? Either Hashem "feels" that it is necessary -- and will consequently proceed to "help" -- or He deems it either unnecessary or unjustifiable, in which case one cannot expect prayer to "change" His decision. *Horav* Hirsch notes that the verb "to pray" - "L'hispa'el" is the reflexive form of the Hebrew word "pa'el" which means "to judge." Thus, to pray means to judge oneself. Each prayer is a reflection of one's introspection, self-examination and soul-searching.

In effect, as **Horav Eli Munk, zl**, explains, prayer is actually a process in which we seek to make our ethics, actions and thoughts parallel to the ideal principles of Jewish behavior expressed by *Chazal*. The fixed form and text of the *tefillos* serve as the paradigm by which we measure our present character. When in our prayers we mention the concept of love, we judge ourselves to determine whether our love for Hashem meets the standard that is expected of us. This idea applies equally to Hashem's other attributes. We are to ask ourselves: Do we measure up to the standard? Is our intensity on the proper level? Consequently, we adjust our attitudes for the better. In doing so, we attain that level of achievement that makes us worthy of receiving Hashem's favor. Our *tefillos* create the context in which our requests will be answered. Prayer is a devotion through which man introspects and transforms. Through the vehicle of prayer, man has the opportunity to transform himself to reach levels of spirituality he never would have expected. This, however, is true only if the prayer is replete with objectivity and sincerity. Only then will the individual truly "judge" himself.