

INTENTION OF THE HEART (KAVANNAT HALEV)

ACCORDING TO THE MISHNA, GEMARRAH, RAMBAM, AND SHULCHAN ARUCH

"Don't stand up to pray unless you have a heavy head. The early pious ones would wait an hour before prayer and their prayer would last an hour".
(Mesechet Brachot, Chapter 5, Mishna 1)

The commentator Bartenura says a heavy head means a feeling of submission or fear of heaven.

Talmud Bavli – Mesechet Brachot

What is the source for this mishna that a person needs fear of heaven before he stands up to pray?

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak says we learn it for here: "Serve G-d with fear and rejoice with trembling" (Psalms chapter 2, verse 11). The Gemarrah accepts this source because prayer is in place of the sacrifices so it is fitting. So why also with joy (gila)? Because one must be in joy and also in fear during prayer.

RAMBAM

The Rambam (Maimonides) writes that one should pray with intention of the heart. How does this mean? It means that his mind is on the words of the prayer and he is not distracted. "Every prayer that is not recited with intention is not called prayer and if a person did pray like that he must repeat his prayer. If he is troubled and upset, he is forbidden to pray until he calms down." (Mishna Torah, Laws of Prayer, chapter 4, halacha 15)

How does one go about having kavanna?

"What is intention? He should turn his heart from all his thoughts and see himself as if he is standing in front of the Divine Presence. Therefore he should sit for a little while before prayer and intend his heart and afterwards to pray" (ibid. 4, 16)

SHULCHAN ARUCH

"The pious ones and the men of reknown would isolate themselves and intend their prayers until they reached a state close to prophecy. If there would come a distracting thought during prayer, they would stop until the thought was removed." (Orech Chaim chapt 98, halacha 1)