

Cleave to God (*Ekev*)

Twice in *Parshat Ekev* we are taught about the mitzvah of *dveikut* – cleaving to God: ‘Revere the Lord your God and worship Him. Cleave to Him and swear by His name’ (*Devarim* 10:20); ‘If you carefully keep all of this command with which I am charging you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all His ways, and cleaving to Him’ (ibid. 11:22).

Significantly, the Torah makes three further references to the mitzvah of *dveikut* (*Devarim* 4:4, 13:5 & 30:20). Nevertheless, in terms of the *mitzvah* of *dveikut* as classically understood, it is derived from our *parsha* (see *Sefer HaMitzvot Asseh* 6, *Sefer HaChinuch* No. 434).

I stress the words ‘as classically understood’ because there are at least four different approaches to the mitzvah of *dveikut*, and whether or not word *dveikut* is part of your religious or spiritual lexicon is likely based on which approach you have adopted (or which you’ve been taught to adopt).

The ‘classically’ understood approach to *dveikut* is found in the *Sifrei* as quoted by Rashi in his commentary to *Devarim* 11:22 who writes: ‘How is it possible to ask us to cleave to God? Is God not “a consuming fire” (*Devarim* 4:24)? Instead, this is understood to mean that we should cleave to Torah scholars and their students, and by doing so, God will consider doing so as if we are cleaving to Him.’ What this implies is that we can cleave to God by studying Torah and by cleaving to those who study Torah. In fact, the Gemara (*Ketubot* 111b) stretches this principle to claim that by marrying a Torah scholar, you are ultimately fulfilling the mitzvah of cleaving to God.

A different approach to *dveikut* is offered by the Gemara (*Sotah* 14a) and is quoted by Rashi in his commentary to *Devarim* 13:5 who explains that we ‘cleave to His ways’ by bestowing kindness as God bestows kindness, by burying the dead as God buries the dead, and by visiting the sick as God visits the sick. This means that we cleave to God by imitating God (*Imitatio Dei*) and by following His ways.

A third approach to *dveikut* considers this duty in its more literal form – namely communion with God. As the Ba’al Shem Tov explains in *Likkutei Yekarim* no. 175 (as quoted by R’ Lamm in *The Religious Thought of Hasidism* p. 156): ‘when you seek to achieve *dveikut*, you must first traverse the world of *Asiyah*. Then, in thought, you must soar much higher, and still higher, to the world of the angels and the *ophanim*, and after this to the world of *Beriah*, until you feel that your thoughts have soared as high as the world of *Atzilut*. In the Zohar this is called “thought in which there is no action.”’ As should be evident, and as Rabbi Lamm points out, this approach to *dveikut* is likely to be achieved ‘privately, in seclusion and isolation’.

Finally, the Ramban (in his commentary to *Devarim* 11:22) explains that, ‘included in *dveikut* is remembering God and loving Him constantly; your thoughts never leaving Him when you walk, when you lie down, when you rise; so much so that when you talk with others, it is only with your mouth and tongue that you talk, but your heart is not in it because it is in the presence of God.’ As Rabbi Lamm observes, ‘what is especially noteworthy is the Ramban’s understanding of *dveikut* as taking place not in seclusion, but [instead] in the course of day-to-day life.’

Clearly, some of these approaches to *dveikut* will likely resonate with us more than others. Still, the Torah speaks of this mitzvah five times. As such, we are dutifully bound to consider how we fulfil this mitzvah and how we choose to live our lives in a manner that is reflective of *dveikut*.

I shall end with a beautiful thought of the Kotzniczer Maggid (in his *Avodat Yisrael*, commenting on *Avot* 3:10), as shared by the Slonimer Rebbe (in his *Netivot Shalom: Devarim*, in his essay on cleaving to God). The Gemara (*Shabbat* 31a) relates how a prospective convert approached Hillel and requested that he teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot, to which Hillel responded: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary, go and learn!”.

In response to this teaching, the Kozniczer Maggid writes that he once heard his teacher explain that when Hillel referred to ‘your friend’, this refers to God who is our ultimate friend. On this basis, Hillel’s lesson teaches us that the entire Torah is about acting in a way that shows sensitivity to our relationship with God towards whom we are commanded to cleave.

Shabbat Shalom!