

Tal Orot Meditation Videos

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Second Meditation: Direct Emunah

לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל לאה בת ברוך בענדיט ע"ה

Once we have mastered Hashkawah to some extent, meditation can move effectively from **attention** to **cognition** – from **factual** awareness to **meaningful** awareness. Stabilizing and expanding comprehensive **attention** is a good start. Next, we want to appreciate and process reality **cognitively**, not just perceiving **fact** but appreciating **meaning**. But we want to attain this, not using concepts or ideas framed in words, which grab at reality in small handfuls, but rather with direct full cognition. Once our thinking quiets down and we can effortlessly sustain an open, stable and receptive awareness, unruffled by streams of thought, we're ready to sense the meaningful context of reality.

The fundamental context of our reality is our connection with HaShem. We want to appreciate this not as a concept, not as an idea framed in verbal terms, but as direct experience. Our aim is direct awareness of our connection with HaShem and a direct trust in HaShem's care for us. In Torah terms, this is the direct experience of **Emunah**.

Emunah is not belief – belief is just to pretend you know something when you don't really know it – not real knowledge, and often with no connection to reality. Emunah is often translated in English as faith – but we don't know what the English term faith really means.

Emunah in **Torah** terms is **steadiness**. For instance, in the battle against the predatory tribe of Amalek at the end of Parashat Beshallah, Moshe raises his hands to encourage and inspire the fighters of Am Yisrael, but the fight lasts a long time:

וידי משה כבדים ויקחו אבן וישימו תחתיו וישב עליה ואהרן וחור תמכו בידיו מזה אחד ומזה אחד ויהי ידיו אמונה עד
בא השמש: [שמות פרק יז פסוק יב]

"And the hands of Moshe became heavy, so they took a rock and placed it under him and he sat upon it and Aharon and Hur supported his hands, one on this side and one on this side, and the hands of Moshe were **Emunah** until the sun went down."

R. Avraham Ibn Ezra and the Rashbam both explain Emunah here as **steadiness, firmness** – Moshe’s hands were **steady** until the sun went down.

So Emunah means to stand steady and firm in the face of challenges and difficulties. As a verb, as in *אני מאמין באמונה שלימה*... it’s not “I believe” in the sense that I hope it’s so, but rather closer to “I affirm with full firmness.” In the Torah, in *Haazinu*, HaShem is also described as *Kel Emunah* – God of Emunah (Deut. 32:4), in the sense of maintaining His unshakable **steady commitment** to the welfare of all His creatures. For us, Emunah is grounded in an awareness of our connection with HaShem and a sense of trust in HaShem’s constant care for us. Emunah is based on real awareness and real experience, not wishful thinking. And it’s not just an intellectual position, it’s deeper heart-consciousness, too.

This meditation begins with Hashkatakah, quieting, to stabilize and expand attention – you can refer to our video on Hashkatakah for a review. This meditation takes us to the next level, to cognition – to **Meaningful** Awareness. Once our thinking quiets down and we can effortlessly sustain an open, stable and receptive awareness, unruffled by streams of thoughts, we’re ready to sense our meaningful context. In this meditation we are aiming for a direct awareness of our connection with HaShem and a direct sense of steady trust in HaShem’s care for us, direct Emunah.

We can use a passage from the *Sefer Beit Yaakov* of Rebbe Yaakov Leiner of Iszbicz to attune us to this awareness. In *Parashat Behar* he’s explaining the spiritual meaning of Shmittah and Yovel, the seventh and fiftieth years of the agricultural cycle. Shmittah translates as Release: on the halakhic level Shmittah mandates a release of ownership over fields and produce, and a release of ownership over financial loans. The Beit Yaakov then takes this to its existential root. I’ll translate the passage relatively literally:

“Shmittah, the Release year itself, comes after six years during which one seeds and plows and reaps and relies on one’s field and one’s actions. Afterwards one must make the seventh year a **Release**, that is, **deliver this power to God**: to recognize that without God, blessed be He, there is no existence to all one’s actions. “

The Beit Yaakov is explaining that the core meaning of Shmittah, literally Release, is a **realization** that **all** our actions, at **all** times, are empowered by HaShem. We **release** a **sense** of ownership over our actions.

Let's realize this experientially. We find ourselves here as ourselves. We have done nothing to bring ourselves here. We do very little to keep ourselves here – we breathe, which is semi-autonomic, and if we drink and eat, and we watch where we walk, we can stay here for a lifetime (we make it more complicated, but that's all it takes). And all our actions are empowered – not by us. We might direct our activity to this or that, but the ability to act is something granted to us. So we own nothing of ourselves. And yet we are held here and we are not doing the holding. We find ourselves here, precisely located right where we are, as embodied mind, refreshed moment to moment to moment, with our identity, that we did not construct but that we find and call ourselves, all this held in place, effortlessly. We are a gift to ourselves.

Then the Beit Yaakov takes it a step further. After seven cycles of seven years of this awareness comes the 50th year:

“Then it is the Yovel, the Jubilee year, to deliver even this power of service to God, blessed be He. This is to recognize that even one's will to serve is from God, blessed be He.”

The Rebbe's point is: not only are we a gift to ourselves, held in place as who we are at every moment, effortlessly – which is the lesson of Shmittah. But further: even our ability to direct action in service of God and the will to *recognize* that everything about us is a gift -- this itself is a gift we are granted. But this awareness of awareness takes a deeper release, the release of Yovel.

“And God, blessed be He, has set it up here that there is an interruption between the Shmittah years and the Yovel year... For the Shmittah year is just a path by which one can travel towards the Yovel, but nonetheless it is impossible that from the Release one can arrive at Yovel. For there is always some time between Shmittah and Yovel, like the ten days between Rosh HaShanah of the [50th] year, at which the seven Shmittah cycles are complete but even so it's not yet the Yovel, until Yom Kippur [of that 50th year]. If it were possible for a person through his service to arrive at the Yovel, then the Yovel should begin at Rosh HaShanah... For it is impossible for a person, through his [own acts of] clarification, that is, the Shmittah Release, to arrive directly to the goodness of God, blessed be He. So this moment [of inaction] is necessary, that there be a [complete] nullification of human action before God, blessed be He, opens this revelation, and then all human service is nullified...”

The Beit Yaakov is explaining that the full realization, that we are empowered through and through by HaShem at every moment, and that even our conscious realization of this and will to realize this

– is empowered by God. And the experience of this realization is not a thought we think or frame actively. It is a realization that comes to us, that is granted us and comes over us, that transforms our whole awareness of self and world, and only when we release ownership over ourselves, and release the release itself. This awareness can be approached through meditation, the silencing of thought and the release of action.

Once our thinking quiets down through Hashkatakah and we can effortlessly sustain an open, stable and receptive awareness, we're ready for this **second Step**. We are aiming for a direct awareness of our relationship with HaShem and a direct sense of trust in HaShem's care for us, direct **Emunah**. This means to experience directly that we have done nothing to bring ourselves here and do very little keep ourselves here, and yet we are held here, **very very securely**.

So after sitting quietly in comprehensive awareness for a while, as we maintain comprehensive awareness, we **appreciate** that our bodies, which we feel sitting on a chair or on the floor, are **held** in our form and our location – and we are not doing the holding, **it's effortless**. Our breathing is happening, we feel it from the nose to the diaphragm, front and back, and **it's effortless**. Our hearts are beating, **effortlessly**. The sounds around us and our ability to hear sound, **effortless**. Even with our eyes closed, seeing the lights flickering on our retina is effortless. All our sensations and our ability to sense – it's all **a gift**. And even our consciousness, mystery of mysteries, **a total gift**. As we realize that everything we are perceiving and our ability to perceive is a gift to us, that we are a gift to ourselves, it begins to dawn on us how intimate our connection with HaShem is. We are **held** here, and each of us is meant to be exactly **who we are**, constructed with such magnificent complexity and coherence, and held in existence by HaShem at every moment.

In Tehillim 100:3 it says:

(ג) דעו כי יקוק הוא אלהים הוא עשנו ולא [ולו] אנחנו עמו וצאן מרעיתו:

Know that HaShem is God, He made us and we did not, His nation and the flock of His shepherding.

Conceptually it may sound like a truism – “He made us and we did not,” but really and directly **experienced**, through and through, in every aspect of your being, it's profound. In the Tana"kh this verse has what's known as a *Ketiv u-Kri*, a word written one way and pronounced another way. But it's a unique *Ketiv u-Kri* – the two words are pronounced the same way:

So this phrase is understood two ways: “He made us and we **did not.**” And “He made us and we **are His.**” This is the point we have been exploring: when we actually realize that **we did not** make ourselves, through and through, we also realize that we do not own ourselves, through and through. And we realize that we **are owned, we are His**, very very securely. We realize that existence is a gift and we are held in it, effortlessly. We are very, very cared-for. This is the direct experience of Emunah.

So set aside 10 or 15 minutes, or more if you have the time. Begin with stabilizing and expanding your attention, just quieting down through comprehensive awareness. Then, when you feel relatively quiet, begin to be aware that everything you are aware of is persisting and enduring effortlessly. You can take a kind of inventory. Realize this in feeling your body, your breathing, your heartbeat, the lights flickering in your closed eyes, the sounds you hear, the taste you taste, the fragrance you smell, all your senses, all your thoughts arising and disappearing – existing and persisting without your effort. Feel how securely you are being held and you’re not doing the holding. Then put it all together in one comprehensive awareness. You can pace yourself by setting a gentle alarm for the end of the meditation, or just leave it open-ended. But I recommend meditating at least 10 to 15 minutes per sitting to really begin to get this, and practice over and over.

You can do this meditation on your own, and I recommend doing it this way. For those who prefer to have some guidance during the meditation, I am posting this meditation on our Tal Orot website separately in a guided form. It begins with 5 minutes of quieting, and then 5 or so minutes of guidance to give attention to all the processes that are going on effortlessly in us and around us. You can try this guided form, and then move on to the direct meditation on your own.

When you end the meditation it’s good to say a verse silently in your mind, such as Tehillim 100:5

(ה) כי טוב יקוק לעולם חסדו ועד דר ודר אמונתו:

For HaShem is good, His love is eternal, and His steady commitment for generation after generation.