

## Torah Thoughts – February 27, 2020

'Meditation' is a practice that is highly popular today, but many may at first see it as being antithetical to Judaism and Jewish practice. Meditation, however, can play an essential role in Judaism when utilized as a form of mindful prayer—a practice that our greatest Rabbis, thinkers, and teachers, engaged in.

When I pray, I meditate, specifically when I say the Shema or the Amidah. I am not mediating as a form of relaxation or resting during the service, rather, I meditate in order to turn inward. During this time of reflection I focus and attempt to become consciously aware of the presence of God in myself, and the moments I experience.

Within the overall framework of Judaism, meditative practices are intended to deepen an individual's engagement with all aspects of the religion. Meditation and techniques of concentration can:

- heighten our understanding of the Torah
- help us to develop an understanding of ritual and other religious observances
- give direction to our prayer
- and increase our awareness of the needs of others

More generally, Jewish meditation allows us to:

- grow closer in our relationship with God
- discipline our minds, so that we can have greater mental clarity
- and bring an awareness to aspects of our lives in which we have been “unconscious”

We have an opportunity to meditate on a regular basis during services in *shul*—and many of us attempt to do so—yet we continue to struggle. The problem is that our minds are not adjusted and used to the practice of being silent and still. With so many intrusive thoughts, phone notifications, and unnecessary information entering our mind, it is only natural that we would find meditating a difficult yet important practice.

When these challenges arise for me I focus on my breath, keep the body still, and allow my thoughts to drift anywhere they wish to go. This focus, paired with the spiritual and communal environment of the synagogue, allows my mind to become naturally calm, and open myself up to the opportunity of experiencing the love and presence of God.

How and what do you feel during the meditation part in our service? Do you meditate at other points? Do you have many thoughts during services or can you concentrate and pray with intention? Does this meditation allow for a deeper connection with God and your authentic self? What are some other practices we can engage in to connect with God during the service?

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Ron Koas