

“.... I can’ t do anything without first
speaking to God”

Reb Noson Sternhartz (*Kokhavey Or*, p.76, #22).



HISBODEDUS

PERSONAL PRAYER

Hisbodedus: The ancient Jewish practice of
secluding one’ s self with the Creator of
the universe and pouring out one’ s soul
in heartfelt prayer |
A selection of essays

LIKUTEY MOHARAN II #25¹

Footnotes by CHAIM KRAMER, Breslov Research Institute

Hitbodedut² is the highest asset and greater than everything.³ That is, to set aside for oneself at least an hour or more⁴ for secluding oneself in some room or a field,⁵ and, using

¹ **Likutey Moharan II #25.** This lesson is a seminal one on the practice of hitbodedut. Rebbe Nachman addresses this devotional practice frequently in his teachings, and in his writings Reb Noson expounds on it at length. Many of the Rebbe's suggestions relating to hitbodedut will be touched on in the notes below. There is no information as to when the Rebbe gave this lesson.

² . **Hitbodedut.** This is the practice of personal, secluded prayer before God. Perhaps more than any other devotional practice, Rebbe Nachman exhorted his followers to set aside time each day for crying out one's heart to God in one's mother tongue, beseeching Him for everything one needs, physically, financially, emotionally and spiritually. The Rebbe discusses hitbodedut also in Likutey Moharan I, 52 and 54:9, *ibid.* II, 24, 93, and 95-104, as well as throughout Rabbi Nachman's *Wisdom and Tzaddik*. A more comprehensive discussion of this topic can be found in the following works: *Outpouring of the Soul*, a collection of teachings by Rebbe Nachman and Reb Noson on the great value of hitbodedut; *Where Earth and Heaven Kiss*, published by Breslov Research Institute, which discusses this practice in contemporary language; and *Crossing the Narrow Bridge*, Chapter 9.

³ **the highest asset and greater than everything.** In Likutey Moharan I, 52:3, Rebbe Nachman teaches: "To be encompassed in one's Source—i.e., to return and be encompassed in the oneness of God, Who is a necessary reality—is possible only through bitul (self-negation, transparency). A person has to make himself totally transparent, until he is encompassed in the oneness of God. And the only way to attain bitul is through hitbodedut. By secluding himself and speaking at length with his Master, through this a person merits negating all his physical desires and bad character traits to the point where he merits negating all his corporeality and is encompassed in his Source."

⁴ **an hour or more.** Practically speaking, it takes an hour or so to fully reach the stage where a person can speak to God about all the things that are on his mind and in his heart. The topics to address can include one's health and that of one's family, livelihood, emotional well-being and, of course, as Rebbe Nachman mentions shortly, one's spiritual needs and wants. For most beginners, however, even those with previous experience in meditation, a full hour might not be realistic. Therefore, when first starting out in this devotion a person might make do with a ten or fifteen minute regimen and gradually build up his time, until he reaches that hour of hitbodedut which the Rebbe recommends here.

⁵ **secluding oneself in some room or a field.** Rebbe Nachman addresses this in Likutey Moharan I, 52:3, where he teaches: "Hitbodedut should take place in a special place—i.e., away from the city, on a secluded road, in a place not frequented by people. For a place frequented during the day by people who chase after this world, even if at present they are not there, nonetheless disturbs the hitbodedut and he is unable to attain bitul and be encompassed in God." Similarly, Rebbe Nachman suggests in the above-mentioned lesson that one practice hitbodedut in the very early hours of the morning, while people are still sleeping and not engaged in material pursuit. See also Likutey Moharan II, 11, where the Rebbe lauds the greatness of praying in the fields, among the grasses, which give strength to one's prayers because they, too, sing God's praises and their prayers and energy are included in the person who prays among them! (see also Rabbi Nachman's *Wisdom #227*). Note 2 of that lesson cites the following story from Rabbi Nachman's *Wisdom #163*: A follower of Rebbe Nachman from Zlatipolia, where the Rebbe lived circa 1800-1801, related that one summer day the Rebbe sent his daughter Sarah to call for him. "When I came, he suggested that we take a stroll. We soon reached the outskirts of the town and were walking in a grassy meadow. 'If only you could hear the song of this grass,' the Rebbe said, 'how each blade sings to God without any ulterior motive, without any distracting thought,

claims and excuses, speak one's piece with one's Maker; using words that evoke favor, placate and conciliate in order to entreat and plead with God that He bring one closer to Him—to genuine Divine worship.⁶

This prayer and conversation should be in the language one normally uses, one's native tongue,⁷ because it is difficult for a person to say everything he wants to say in the Holy Tongue.⁸ Also, being unfamiliar with that language, one's heart is not moved by the words, as we are not accustomed to speaking Hebrew. But in our native tongue, in which we normally speak and converse, it is much easier and so more likely for one to feel contrition.⁹ This is because the heart is drawn to a person's native tongue and closer to it, on account of his familiarity with it.

And in one's native tongue one can express oneself fully. Everything that is in his heart he should express and tell to God: be it remorse and repentance for the past, or pleas to genuinely merit drawing closer to God from this day forward, or the like; each individual according to his level.¹⁰

without any expectation of reward. How wonderful it is to hear their song and serve God in their midst. It is very good to be religious among them.”

Rebbe Nachman himself would ride a horse deep into the forests in order to practice hitbodedut (Tzaddik #230). Other times, he would take a small rowboat out on a nearby lake and hide among the reeds where he would have hitbodedut the whole day (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #117). The Rebbe said that it is very good just to sit in a room dedicated for hitbodedut. The atmosphere itself is beneficial even if you sit there and do nothing else. Even if you do not have a special room, you can still seclude yourself and converse with God. You can create your own special room under your tallit. Just drape your tallit over your eyes and converse with God as you desire. You can also seclude yourself with God while in bed, under the covers. This was King David's custom, as it is written, “I converse every night on my bed” (Psalms 6:7). You can also converse with God while sitting before an open book. Let others think that you are simply studying (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #275; see ibid #68).

⁶ **evoke favor, placate and conciliate...genuine Divine worship.** Reb Noson suggests that the main way to begin one's daily hitbodedut is by offering thanks to God. Recalling the kindnesses of God which a person has already experienced gives credence to the fact that God is with that person and wants him to turn to Him. This strengthens a person's conviction that God is always with him, which, in turn, evokes greater intensity in that person's prayers and pleas (Torat Natan #2; see also Likutey Halakhot, Kila'ey Beheimah 4:6).

⁷ **one's native tongue.** Literally: “the Ashkenaz (Germanic vernacular) language,” referring to Yiddish, the language which the Jews of Eastern Europe generally spoke among themselves. The translation here, as “one's native tongue,” is based on the parenthetical addition to the text of “in our land.” People who think and speak in English should speak to God in English; those for whom Spanish is their mother tongue should speak to Him in Spanish. The reason is obvious: one's prayers will flow more easily—and be more heartfelt—in one's native tongue.

⁸ **the Holy Tongue.** This refers specifically to Hebrew, the language God spoke to create the world (Bereishit Rabbah 18:4; see also Rashi, Genesis 2:23).

⁹ **contrition.** In Hebrew, this is *lev nishbar*, “a broken heart.” It refers to one's feeling remorse for one's sins and distance from God.

¹⁰ **Everything that is in his heart....** Although, as mentioned above (n.2), a person can, and should, speak to God about everything in life, the primary focus of hitbodedut is one's spirituality and connection to God. In

One should be very careful to make this a daily practice, at a scheduled time. But the rest of the day one should be happy, as mentioned above.¹¹

The benefit of this practice is extraordinarily great. It is an extremely good path and guideline for drawing closer to God, because it is a universal guideline that encompasses everything.¹²

No matter what a person is lacking in worshipping God—even if he is totally and absolutely distant from God’s service—he should speak about it all and ask it of God, as mentioned above.¹³

Likutey Moharan II, 84, Rebbe Nachman teaches that the main connection and devekut (cleaving) to God is accomplished only through prayer. Prayers from his feelings and longings yield not a single word, so that all his attempts at hitbodedut result in frustration—even then, he must not see it as time and effort wasted. When this happens, the Rebbe says, let him make this—the frustration and failure—the very topic of his prayer. Let him beg God to take pity on him and open his mouth, so that he might express what is buried deep within his heart.

In speaking of the importance of not allowing one’s frustrations and failures get the better of one, Rebbe Nachman drew the following analogy: A warrior girded his loins to breach a solid wall. He came to the gate and found it blocked by a spider web. Is there anything more foolish than returning because of a spider web? The main thing is speech. With it, one can conquer every challenge and win every war. One can meditate in thought, but expressing it in speech is essential.” This parallel teaches a most important lesson. One may find it difficult to speak with God or to a genuine tzaddik. The cause is bashfulness and sluggishness, which stem from one’s lack of holy boldness (Beitzah 25b; Avot 5:20; Likutey Moharan I, 22:4, 147, 271; Likutey Halakhot, Matanah 5:11, *ibid.*, Maakeh 4:2). One is ready to use his speech to overcome the great battle against the evil within. He is on the verge of victory, about to break down walls with his words! The gates are ready to fly open! Should he hold back because of a minor barrier? Should he not speak, God forbid, because he feels discouraged or the like? That’s like a spider web compared to the walls he wants to breach! (Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom #232).

¹¹ **as mentioned above.** See Likutey Moharan II, 24, which appears in Volume 13 of this English translation. In that lesson Rebbe Nachman links hitbodedut with happiness and joy. Elsewhere, Rebbe Nachman teaches: It would be very good to be brokenhearted all day. But for the average person, this can easily degenerate into depression. You should therefore set aside some time each day for heartbreak. Isolate yourself with a broken heart before God for a given time. But the rest of the day, be joyful.” Reb Noson adds: The Rebbe emphasized this many times, telling us not to be brokenhearted except for a fixed time each day, during hitbodedut. Other than during that period, we should always be joyful and never depressed. The Rebbe explained that heartbreak is very different from sadness and depression: Contrition and depression are not at all the same. Contrition involves the heart, while depression results from melancholy and derives from the spleen. Depression is from the Other Side and is despised by God. And the Rebbe taught: Depression is like anger and rage. It is like a complaint against God for not fulfilling one’s wishes. But a broken heart is the emotion of a child pleading before his father. It is the feeling of a baby crying and complaining because his father has left him (Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom #41-#42).

¹² **a universal guideline that encompasses everything.** Hitbodedut is the service and devotion of the heart. The heart is the seat of one’s emotions as well as the epicenter of one’s thoughts, desires and imagination. Hitbodedut is therefore a universal devotion, one that anyone with a heart and mind can practice, and a person’s heartfelt prayers on any matter encompass everything.

¹³ **lacking...distant from God’s service...speak about it....** A person who recognizes a lack in his prayers or Torah study, or who wants to experience the delight of Shabbat or the joy of the Pesach seder or of sitting in the Sukkan or any other mitzvah—let him ask for God’s help. If he feels distant from God—he doesn’t feel the joy and pride of being a Jew and of fulfilling the mitzvot, or, on the contrary, he feels his Jewishness to be a

Even if occasionally a person's words are sealed and he cannot open his mouth to say anything at all to God, this itself is nonetheless very good. That is, his readiness and his presence before God, and his yearning and longing to speak despite his inability to do so—this in itself is also very good.¹⁴

Moreover, it is possible to make a conversation and prayer out of this itself. A person should cry out and plead to God about this very thing, that he has become so distant he is unable to even speak. He should beg God for compassion and grace, that He take pity on him and open his mouth so that he will be able to express himself before Him.¹⁵

And know! many, many renowned tzaddikim have related that they attained their high spiritual level only through this practice.¹⁶ The perceptive individual will understand by himself the great benefit of this practice, which rises higher and higher. Furthermore, it is a practice that is accessible to all people, from the least to the greatest. For anyone can make use of this practice and thereby come to a high level. Fortunate is the one who grabs holds of it.¹⁷

burden—let him express these feelings to God. If he feels overwhelmed with desires, driven by avarice or gluttony or immorality—let him speak to God about it all.

¹⁴ **his readiness and his presence...also very good.** The Codes speak of the preparations one should make before his daily prayers (see Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim 92-98). The Ari writes that even just preparing oneself to pray elevates a person (see Shaar HaKavanot, Inyan Birkhot HaShachar, p.3; Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar HaTefilah 1, p.2). Approaching God through prayer requires that a person make every effort to concentrate on the words. Yet, even the best intentions do not ensure success. Distractions of every kind leave us absentmindedly reciting the words we've learned to mouth by rote, without the least bit of feeling. If this happens while praying the obligatory prayers, we can pause to regain our concentration, but ultimately have to carry on whether we have done so or not. In either case, the words are there to be recited. Hitbodedut, on the other hand, is freewill prayer. If, despite a genuine desire to communicate with God, a person simply cannot find the words—what then? Rebbe Nachman teaches here that even if one's attempts do not bring the desired result of speaking to God, just yearning and longing to do so "are also very good," as the acts of readying oneself and sitting in God's presence—waiting for the words to come—also have great value. One can use these and any other of such preparations as springboards to begin praying. The Rebbe once said that while on his way out to the fields he would already begin praying to be able to succeed in his hitbodedut! (Oral tradition).

¹⁵ **make a conversation and prayer out of this itself...that He take pity on him and open his mouth.** Rebbe Nachman adds that even those times when a person's efforts to formulate a further way to turn Torah into prayer is by incorporating into the words of one's hitbodedut verses of Scripture and concepts found in the Written and Oral Torahs. Even formulating one's prayers utilizing the modalities of reason and exegetical principles of interpretation found in the Talmud is turning Torah into prayer (Rabbi Gedaliah Fleer).

¹⁶ **many renowned tzaddikim...through this practice.** It is told of the Baal Shem Tov that he would spend many days alone in the forests of the Ukraine in meditation and hitbodedut (Shivchey Baal Shem Tov). Rebbe Nachman practiced hitbodedut even as a child, and persisted in this devotion to the end of his days (see Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom, His Praises, pp.10-13; *ibid*, His Conversations #162-#164).

¹⁷ **Fortunate is the one....** Reb Noson writes: The Sages teach that everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven (Berakhot 33b). Yet this seems to contradict the implication that God-fearingness is in the hands of Heaven. If it were solely given over into our hands, to be attained, or not, depending on our efforts and deeds, why did the Sages include in the daily prayers, which they composed, various supplications and

2. In addition, it is good to turn the Torah into prayer.¹⁸ That is, when one studies or hears some Torah discourse from the genuine tzaddik,¹⁹ he should make it into a prayer. He should beseech God and plead with Him concerning each point mentioned in the discourse: When will he, too, be worthy of all this? How distant he is from it! And he should ask God to make him worthy of achieving all that is mentioned in the discourse.²⁰

requests of God to draw us closer to Him? The Talmud, too, mentions the individual prayers offered by the Sages, asking to be spared from the evil inclination and to be able to serve Him (e.g., Berakhot 17a). If so, Reb Noson asks, since God wants us to exercise free will in choosing to serve Him, why practice hitbodedut and pray for God to draw us closer? Aren't such prayers in essence requesting that God remove our free choice? Reb Noson writes that when he raised this with Rebbe Nachman, the Rebbe made no attempt to challenge his point. Rather, he replied, "Still, this is the way." The important thing to understand is that the practice of hitbodedut is clearly rooted in the teachings of our Sages, and that we must have faith in them that the path of hitbodedut, which they all followed, will bring us closer to God (Torat Natan #1). Concerning the great value of hitbodedut see also Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #227-#234 and Tzaddik #436-#443. In Likutey Moharan I, 156, the Rebbe teaches that the words of appeasement and supplication which a person originates when addressing God in hitbodedut are themselves an aspect of holy spirit, ruach hakodesh! Fortunate is the one who merits this.

In review: A person should seclude himself for some time each day in order to pray to God and beg Him to bring him closer (Torat Natan #6).

¹⁸ **turn the Torah into prayer.** In addition to the topics for hitbodedut mentioned thus far, Rebbe Nachman now includes another area about which a person should speak to God: Torah. Reb Noson explains: Although each of the Rebbe's Torah lessons contains many profound counsels, putting them into practice is most difficult unless one engages in prayer. One has to therefore turn the Torah into prayer, praying to God that he merit following and fulfilling the counsels found in every lesson.

Lest a person think he cannot do this, Reb Noson writes in the Introduction to Likutey Tefilot: When Rebbe Nachman spoke about transforming one's studies into prayers, he illustrated this concept with the Sages' teaching that every person must say "The entire world was created only for my sake" (Sanhedrin 37a). And, because it was created for my sake, I must constantly look into and consider ways of making the world better; to provide what is missing in the world and pray on its behalf (Likutey Moharan I, 5:1). Those present protested that there was no value in their being taught this, because, at present they were still very distant from that level. The Rebbe replied, "Let your ears hear what you are saying! The lesson states that each person must say: 'The entire world was created only for my sake.' It follows, that every person has an obligation to pray accordingly. No one can exempt himself from this!" Thus, every person should do his best to transform Torah study into prayer. Every person can accomplish this.

¹⁹ **genuine tzaddik.** In Likutey Moharan I, 192:1, Rebbe Nachman teaches: Know! A true teaching from the mouth of the genuine tzaddik, even in worldly matters, is more precious than the Torah teachings of another tzaddik. This is because it is possible that in the Torah teachings of the other tzaddik there is an admixture [of untruth]. But the teaching uttered by the genuine tzaddik is nothing but truth. And, because it is only truth, without any admixture, there is nothing more precious. In Likutey Moharan I, 28:1, the Rebbe speaks of scholar-demons whose Torah teachings distance people from God. He contrasts this here by emphasizing the importance of hearing Torah "from the genuine tzaddik."

²⁰ **mentioned in the discourse.** The reason, Reb Noson notes, is that the precepts of the Torah are not always easy to fulfill. But by praying to fulfill these teachings and commandments, a person can more easily merit accomplishing his goals (Torat Natan #6). Elsewhere, Reb Noson underscores the importance of turning one's Torah into prayer. He writes: When a person sins, he destroys the Torah utterance's positive letter-combination and forms a negative one (see also Likutey Moharan I, 4:5). When, on the other hand, he formulates prayers in which he confesses his sins and expresses his desire to fulfill the Torah's teachings and commandments, his words transform the negative letter-combinations which he created. Thus, through such prayers, he can literally rectify his past and create a brighter future (Torat Natan #4).

The wise person who desires truth, God will lead on the path of truth. And, understanding on his own one thing from another, [he will know] how to put this into practice in such a way that his words will evoke favor and be well-argued, placating God so that He will draw him closer to genuine Divine worship.²¹

Reb Noson also points out that turning one's Torah into prayer is so important that, even if a person does not pray specifically about what he has just studied, his prayers powerfully impact upon his drawing closer to God. For example, someone who studied monetary law can then, right afterwards, pray to God to help him keep Shabbat. This is because "all the Torah a person studies for the purpose of observing and fulfilling—all these letters are sparks of souls, and they are clothed within one's prayers..." (Likutey Moharan I, 2:7). Whatever Torah one studies illumines his prayers. That said, the prayers one prays to attain the Torah precepts he has just finished studying are especially effective (Torat Natan #5).

²¹ **The wise person who desires truth....genuine Divine worship.** In Likutey Moharan I, 22:10, Rebbe Nachman explains that prayer reaches levels which are even greater than the Torah. Two crowns were bestowed on the Jewish people with the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, one called na'aseh ("we will do") and the other called nishma ("we will hear"). Na'aseh, which connotes "doing," signifies Torah. Nishma, which connotes "hearing" and perceiving, signifies prayer. The latter is the higher of the two for it relates to one's aspiring to levels beyond those already attained. As the Rebbe explains in that lesson, a person must attain the Torah on his level, and then pray to God that he attain a higher level. When he ascends to that higher level, he transforms his prayers (i.e., the greater level) into Torah—i.e., his nishma into na'aseh. On the surface this would seem to contradict the Rebbe's teaching here that one should turn his Torah into prayer. In fact, they are the same. When a person learns something and wishes to carry it out perfectly, in deed and thought, he yearns and prays to be able to do so. At this point, however, because he has not yet attained his goal, this precept which he desires to fulfill— though an aspect of Torah—is still above him. It is therefore in the category of nishma. By praying unceasingly he will eventually be worthy of reaching this higher level, at which point it is transformed into the category of na'aseh and he is able to perform that Torah precept. That is, the Torah which was actually prayer and on a level above him, has now become Torah which he is capable of fulfilling. We see, therefore, that turning one's Torah into prayer is actually the same as transforming the nishma into na'aseh (Torat Natan #3 and #7).

This manner of conversation²² rises to a very high place,²³ especially when one turns Torah into prayer, which results in very great delight on high.²⁴

²² **conversation.** This refers to hitbodedut, one's "conversation" with God, which Rebbe Nachman introduced in section 1.

²³ **to a very high place.** Reb Noson relates: There was news that anti-Semitic decrees were to be issued. The Rebbe then said, "How do we allow God to bring evil to the world? We must call God away from all His other tasks. We must draw Him away from sending evil decrees to the world. We must tell Him to put everything else aside and listen to us, to what we want to talk about—asking Him to draw us close. For when a Jew wishes to speak to God, He casts aside everything else. Evil decrees and everything else are set aside at this time. God puts aside everything to listen to the person seeking His presence" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #70). Thus, a person's personal conversation with God rises directly to the highest realms and forces God, as it were, to turn directly to him.

²⁴ **very great delight on high.** As explained in the previous note, a person's personal conversation with God rises directly to the highest realms (see also Likutey Tefilot, Introduction). Numbers 28:8 refers to the delight which God takes in the Jewish people's daily sacrificial offering as "a fire, a pleasurable fragrance to God." Rashi (loc. cit.) explains: God says, "I take pleasure in the fact that I commanded and My Will was done." It is God's Will that human beings serve Him, and for this He created the world. Today, with the Holy Temple no longer extant, our prayers are in place of the sacrifices (Yad HaChazakah, Hilkhos Tefilah u'Nesiat Kapayim 1:5; Arbaah Turim, Orach Chaim 98). When a person sets aside time to sit in the presence of God and pray to Him, and especially to merit fulfilling His Torah teachings, this person fulfills the entire purpose of Creation.

It was this teaching which directly led to Reb Noson compiling his Likutey Tefilot (translated into English by Breslov Research Institute as The Fiftieth Gate). Once, Reb Noson remarked, "Our opponents ask if there is ruach hakodesh (holy spirit) in the prayers [of the Likutey Tefilot]. The truth is that these prayers are far greater than ruach hakodesh. [Whereas ruach hakodesh implies a certain measure of prophecy,] these prayers are drawn from a much higher level, from the fiftieth level, the Fiftieth Gate of Holiness!" (Kokhavey Or, p.77, #25). Reb Noson once remarked that many have merited Gan Eden because of the Likutey Tefilot, and that in the Future there will be a nation that will praise God with these prayers (ibid. #24)

In review: A person should seclude himself for some time each day in order to pray to God and beg Him to bring him closer (§1). It is very important to turn one's Torah study into prayer (§2).

WE ARE NOT ALONE.¹

BY EREZ MOSHE DORON

HOW MANY TIMES THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE HAVE YOU FOUND YOURSELF ALONE? COMPLETELY ALONE?

...Maybe late at night, when you have found yourself surrounded by the quiet world.

At those times, what were you thinking about?

At first, presumably, you were having thoughts and feelings deriving from the goings on of your day to day life, or possibly topics you read about that have been occupying your thoughts, or about people who are close to you and their lives. What then? Perhaps deeper thoughts relating to the essence of your life, or else maybe just boredom and emptiness...

Most people do not like the reality of loneliness and naturally distance themselves from it.

Throughout the day, people usually meet their co-workers, family members or acquaintances. Even the people we pass in the street form a type of 'social' connection. People usually fill their spare time with newspapers, radios and so on. Even then, they are surrounded by words, sounds and sights, which are describing what is going on in other people's lives...

Amazingly enough, even when one is aware of his inner desires and need for quiet and solitude, when he is closed up in his room or goes out for a walk in nature, most of the time, he takes along with him the "infusion" of other people's company, music or a book, etc.

It would seem, then, that people are running away from something.

Why? Because people do not want to experience the feeling of emptiness.

While being on his own, disconnected from all of the endless external stimulants, a person can discover many truths about himself. Some of them may be frightening, some full of beauty, but none of them are known as long as the person is running his daily routine of life. And yet, it is these truths that have the power to lead him to true happiness.

For the happiness we usually desire is not real, unless it comes from within. 'Happiness' that is dependent upon a good meal or any other type of external recreation – disappears as soon as the external factor is gone. This kind of false happiness does not affect a person internally, whatsoever.

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However, that same person, whose joy derives from true values and faith that spurt forth as though from an internal spring hidden inside of him, does not need external stimulus. He is capable of persevering his happiness – and even passing it on to others, through the good times as well as the bad because he always has his happiness to hold on to. *This* is called ‘true happiness’.

People, whose souls have thirsted for this kind of happiness that is dependent upon nothing, have come to the realization that it cannot be found among human-populated areas and therefore went out into the deserts and the forests, to be secluded and meditate with themselves in order to try and find their own completeness.

This is what our forefathers did, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, which is the reason they preferred to be shepherds. In this manner were Moshe Rabbenu in the deserts of Midyan, King David, Elijah the Prophet and all the other prophets after them. So followed the *Tana*, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in the cave in *Pakiin*, the AR”I z”l as he sat for years by the shore of the Nile as well as the originator of the Chassidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov and his great grandson who followed in his footsteps, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, who filled the green forests of the Ukraine with their heartfelt prayers.

For a ‘city-person’, the idea of disconnecting for a while from the daily life and all of its tumults may sound totally strange and inconceivable. He may think this is only for unique people, different from the ordinary city-folk.

Indeed, Judaism does not preach complete abstinence from the world, in any way, whatsoever. On the contrary, all of its rules guide a person on how to lead a proper and conscious social life. However, as King Solomon said in *Kohelet* (chapter 3) “There is a time to embrace – and a time to be distant”.

In the same way as one truly needs a social life, so does he need time to be with himself, to examine his deeds and actions, to sense his internal self and accumulate ‘spiritual fuel’ in order to return to the tumults of life with a fresh and more mature outlook.

This idea is spoken about widely and emphasized greatly in the Breslov Chssidus and is called: ***hitbodedut***.

Find yourself some time, everyday, says Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, preferably in the late hours of the night and go out into the woods and the fields or close yourself alone in a room.

There – you will meet the “alone”.

There – you can listen, maybe for the first time, to the rustle of the wind or the sound of a bird. You can observe the incredible flow of nature and of yourself within nature. Try and discern what is going wrong in your life and ask for guidance on how you can return yourself once more to the flow, to the true harmonious relationship with the world and its Creator.

In the first meetings with the 'alone', many new sensations and feelings will come and overwhelm the person. He is liable to feel very small in comparison with the great powers and beauty that surround him and fill the universe. He may feel a hazy sense of lacking, a longing for something unknown. Little slits are revealed within the "clear" picture of his world from which many questions begin to erupt regarding the true meaning and essence of his whole life.

Why am I alive?

What is life, really? Where does it lead?

Who is G-D? How real is my connection with Him?

Then, the person wants to run away.

He wants to go back and hide under his comforting blanket, or the delusional sense of security he has from his relationship with a close friend, someone he loves, a smiling face, good food, chatting and laughter – everything that is familiar to him. The main thing is – to forget.

The runner – runs. He is apparently not one of the brave people.

Yet, the one who remains, thirsting to learn the secrets of the silence and is allowing the overwhelming questions to peel away from his face several layers of makeup will discover something.

A hint of an inner voice, the echo of the world is deeper beyond measure than that of the meager exterior.

This is how one can begin.

The continuation consists of many gates to enter and many variations.

Their essence is - knowing how to expose this interior before G-D.

For there is an ear that listens to the deepest expressions of the heart and it understands the meaning of doubts and knows you, from top to bottom.

This is the ear of G-D.

In the tiring cycle of the day-to-day life, this may sound too unrealistic.

However, speaking to the Creator of the World, praying to Him in my own words and with the variations of *my* soul – this is an internal necessity of every living being.

Without it – the heart would constantly endure an unexplainable burden while the soul – shall lay hidden in the dark, weeping bitter tears. With it – you will find comfort and clarification.

BRESLOV CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES, PAST AND PRESENT: HISBODEDUS ¹

COMPILED BY DOVID ZEITLIN AND DOVID SEARS.

Rebbe Nachman urged his followers to seclude themselves, preferably in the fields or forests, for at least one hour a day in order to meditate and express themselves in their native tongue before HaShem. The best time for this is at night, while most people are sleeping. ²

However, if one finds it impossible to practice *hisbodedus* for a full hour, one should do so even for a shorter time—even in a private corner of one's home or under one's *talis*—rather than let a day pass without *hisbodedus*.³

Reb Levi Yitzchok Bender⁴ stated that one should not practice *hisbodedus* in the fields or forests at night without a companion within audible range.⁵

However, Reb Elazar Kenig took issue with the reason printed in *Si'ach Sarfey Kodesh*. There is a tradition that the Rebbe once said that if he had a young son, he would allow him to practice *hisbodedus* alone. The reason why one should have a companion is not because of any ordinary danger, but rather because of a terrible incident perpetrated on a follower of Reb Noson by certain opponents of Breslov in Reb Noson's day.⁶

A Breslover woman has no obligation to practice *hisbodedus* for a full hour on a regular basis. Rather, her *hisbodedus* may consist of speaking to HaShem in the midst of household and other daily activities, or when she finds some spare time. As a rule, women should not practice *hisbodedus* in the fields or forests at night, but in their own homes, backyards, or in another safe, private place.⁷

¹ © Copyright 2013 D.Sears <http://breslovcenter.blogspot.co.il/>

² Likutey Moharan I, 52; *ibid.* II, 25, 95-101, et al.

³ Sichos ha-Ran 274, 275,

⁴ Rav Bender (1897–1989) learnt under Rabbi Avraham Chazan, the son of Rabbi Nachman of Tulchin, who was the closest disciple of Nathan of Breslov (Reb Noson) -- who was in turn the closest disciple of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov.

⁵ See *Si'ach Sarfey Kodesh* IV, 186.

⁶ Heard from Rabbi Elazar Mordechai Kenig, Rabbi of the Tzfas community and son of Rav Gedalia Kenig.

⁷ Heard from various Breslov teachers

Reb Gedaliah Kenig⁸ taught that one should always begin *hisbodedus* with praises and expressions of gratitude to HaShem, and only then engage in rigorous self-examination, *vidui devorim*, appealing for divine assistance, etc. One should always conclude on a positive note, confident that HaShem will surely help.⁹

Before *hisbodedus*, Reb Gedaliah was accustomed to say "*Hareini mekasher...*" (see elsewhere in this compilation under "*Hiskashrus / Binding Oneself to the Tzaddik and to Klal Yisrael*") and "*Le-shem yichud Kud'sha Berikh Hu u-Shechinteh, bi-dechilu u-rechimu, le-yached Shem 'Yud-Heh' be-'Vav-Heh' be-yichuda shelim be-shem kol Yisrael . . .* For the sake of the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Presence, in fear and in love, to unite the Name *Yud-Heh* with *Vav-Heh* in perfect unity, in the name of all Israel." He made both declarations before performing many *mitzvos* and *avodos*.

Reb Elazar Mordechai Kenig once defined improper *hisbodedus* as when one focuses on asking HaShem for things. This leads to anger, as stated in *Sefer Alef-Beis* A 35 ("Improper *hisbodedus* leads to anger").

When several Breslovers go to *hisbodedus* together, it is customary to dance afterward. This reflects the Rebbe's statement that one knows that he has achieved a *lev nishbar* (a "broken heart" in the positive sense) if he subsequently experiences *simchah*.¹⁰

⁸ R' Gedaliah Aharon Kenig (1921 – 7 July 1980) born in Jerusalem and a student of Rav Avraham Sternhartz the great grandson of Reb Noson, who was the main student of Rebbe Nachman and a grandson of Rabbi Nachman Goldstein, known as the Tcheriner Rav, who was one of Reb Noson's leading disciples

⁹ Cf. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Tefillah 1:4, re. the structure of the daily prayer service

¹⁰ Sichos ha-Ran 20

FIND THE ALONE¹

Rav Itamar Schwartz, shlita, author of the Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh series

Are you a body with a soul or a soul with a body? Lest you think this is merely a matter of semantics, the answer to this question either imprisons or transforms a person. While it is common to identify oneself as essentially a body with a soul, the truth is the soul is one's primary identity with the body serving as its external "garment". This is significant when attempting to understand what drives emotions, particularly in relation to fellow human beings.

Everyone possesses a world of emotions, each individual with a different level of sensitivity. The ability to deal properly with this world depends on understanding the elements from which it is comprised, and how to separate positive and negative feelings. While positive emotions are part of our essential self—the essence of the soul—negative emotions are external to a person and part of the body force.

Emotions can be divided into two categories: 1) emotions felt in relation to others; and 2) emotions felt in relation to oneself. The first category includes feelings such as love and compassion as well as negative emotions of hate and jealousy, etc. There are times when negative emotions against others drive a person to destruction. For instance, this can be the case when someone is hurt by another and is unwilling to forgive the offender. They invest enormous time, money, and energy ensuring the other side emerges the loser and pays dearly for what they did. In their quest to cause suffering to the other party they are willing to lose property, work-time, and a fortune in legal fees. Their thoughts are consumed by anger and hate, with nowhere to flee.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Is there any way to escape the trap of negative emotions that drive one's actions? The path begins with a deeper conceptualization of the emotional world of a human being as well as the ability to correctly identify and categorize emotions in the right way.

The first human being, Adam, was created alone. Only afterwards, Eve was created, and then Cain and Abel were born. However, the first human structure was a single being, not more—a fact holding tremendous depth and significance. While it is beneficial that there are others in the world, however, a human being possesses an inherent inner power to live alone, in a world where no one else exists.

There are two different powers in the soul. One power is the ability to live in a world with others. This was only revealed after Eve was created and the subsequent birth of ensuing generations. However, there is an earlier power created deep within the soul of a person called "alone." It came into being during a time when there was no one else to love or hate.

¹ Translated and adapted with special permission from the author. Tzaddik Magazine is solely responsible for the translation.

When does the power of “alone” become relevant? When you live among others and develop negative feelings against them for whatever reason, this is the time to reveal the internal force called “alone”. Disconnect from the situation even when someone does something against you and you may feel it is an obligation to hate them for what they did. It is here where you should access the world called “alone.” It is a pre-existing inner force implanted in the human soul from the first moment of creation, remaining even after free choice came into play. Only then, it became hidden deep within the inner recesses of the heart. The challenge is to know when to use it appropriately and under the right circumstances.

In and of itself, the power of “alone” is positive, but depending upon how it is used, it can be negative. For example, living only for oneself when it is proper to relate to others is obviously incorrect. However, used correctly, the power of “alone” makes it possible to disconnect from negative feelings towards other people. This is not to say that the main goal is to be cut off from our emotions, but rather to know when to disengage our essential self from detrimental feelings.

TIME OUT TECHNIQUE

It is normal and healthy to seek connection to others. Yet there is another power within us, called “alone.” Both powers are needed to live. Although the desire to connect is good, it is only positive within certain boundaries, which build a person. Used in the wrong place, it destroys. Most of us are surrounded by other people most of the day. Even when alone we are besieged twenty-four hours a day by the gamut of communication devices. You might have two cellphones and answer both simultaneously while typing before a computer screen. Cellphones are left on the entire night next to our ear since who knows who may call?

The desire to connect to others should not consume one’s entire life. It is important to start habituating oneself to the fact that there is an inner world called “alone.” For example, while calculating your bank statement, the phone rings. If you answer, you lose your place and are forced to start over. A new routine, using the power of “alone,” would be to finish your calculations and return the call a few minutes later, resisting the urge to be on call every moment. “What does it matter, I can just begin again,” you think. While this may be true, you are exhibiting an inability to spend even a moment alone with yourself. We are not talking about anything spiritual here, rather about practical behavior in the physical world. While performing a task alone, you are training yourself to do nothing else other than what is before you at the moment. You gain not only the two minutes of computing that would have been lost by answering the phone, but you are sensitizing yourself to something of major personal significance.

It is bedtime and you are reading the children a story. The phone rings in the middle and you jump up to answer. Do you really think the telephone is more important than your children? Of course not, but this is an ingrained habit. Unless you are expecting an urgent call, tell yourself that you are now busy with the children and there is no reason good enough to be disturbed in the middle. If the sound of a ringing phone is irresistible then unplug it temporarily. Our lives brim with scenarios where it is possible to ask ourselves if this

telephone call is really more important than what we are doing at the moment. What exactly is at stake? You are losing the innermost power in the soul, called “alone.”

We live in a world of activity and noise. Once, life was much simpler. People would awake early in the morning to go out to the field. They might meet someone on the way before continuing on to work where they would be alone from morning until evening. Or thirty years ago, for example, if one went into overdraft at the bank there was no way to immediately inform them. Here in Israel, not every home had a phone and in some areas when a phone line was ordered it took 10 years before it was installed. This is not ancient history. Today, we have instant notification and are on call around the clock. We have lost the life called “alone.” Again, we are not speaking about spirituality here, or even when someone takes a call in the middle of prayer services and says, “Nu nu nu...” which is of course understood by everyone to mean he cannot be disturbed during prayer. Rather, we are talking about living in a physical world and being fully present in the practical moment.

Yet another example: After a long workday (and talking on your cellphone the entire way home) you return to an empty house. Your wife went out somewhere with the kids and everything is completely silent. You are suddenly faced with an unexpected half hour of silence. What do you do? You immediately pick up a newspaper and no sooner than that the phone starts to ring. You may say, “Is there a problem with reading the newspaper or answering the phone?” Yet, you simply haven’t given yourself a single moment to sit alone in quietude. Granted, usually there are not many opportunities for this in the course of a day, but every so often, we are given a few quiet moments from which to take advantage. No deep thought is required here, only to give the mind a small break. This can be accomplished even through sitting alone in silence for five minutes without news, distractions, or business. In the beginning it seems very strange and a waste of time. A more spiritually-minded individual may say, “I could be sitting and learning Torah these five minutes!” While true on one hand, on the other, without **yishuv hadaat**, a settled mind, one cannot learn or pray properly. Work isn’t as it should be and neither is **shalom bayit**, peace in the home between husband and wife. The **yishuv hadaat** acquired by a person imbues a calming effect on their entire life. It doesn’t hinge upon getting away on vacation, rather on those few moments during the day where there is focus on the task at hand without doing something else at the same time—or simply sitting alone doing nothing for a few quiet moments.

DISCOVERING YOUR TRUE SELF

It is impossible to understand the experience if you haven’t tried this. One who has, suddenly discovers, “I am new!” This occurs because a person’s “I” has two components, one related to others and the other to oneself. If you are accustomed only to the component of living with others, you are acquainted with only half of yourself. Upon deeper examination, it could be said that it is even less than half, since the world called “alone” is the essence of a person. Not many are familiar with this world because of the distractions in the world, as well as the lack of awareness that it even exists, yet it is something that must be striven for. The essence of your “I” can only be discovered through sitting by yourself during a normal time when you are in control of your emotions. There are no additional conditions attached to this besides calm and quiet. If it helps, listen to a calming melody.

Inner quiet is the largest treasure one has since it is where the Creator of the world exists. We are not yet talking about *olam haba*, rather the ability to live a settled, balanced, and measured life in this world. The revelation of “I” in the dimension of “alone” is only attained by entering a world of silence and focus.

OUR FOREFATHERS

The special inner world of “alone” is where our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob live, as well as Moses and King David.² They all went into the desert as shepherds searching for this world of quiet. We can tread upon the path of our forefathers who are the shepherds of the Jewish people. This world of “alone” is not an innovation, or a product of eastern religions, rather it is our ancestral heritage. Moses specifically requested from Jethro, his father-in-law, to work as a shepherd because it provided him with a quiet setting. It was here where Moses encountered the burning bush, as well as the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. During this time, the creation was utterly silent; there was not a sound from bird or beast.

Moses was able to stand and receive the Torah directly from G-d only because of the **yishuv hadaat** he attained while working as a shepherd in an isolated world of quiet and serenity. It was not isolation for the sake of itself, rather for the sake of disconnecting from the evil in the world and connecting to the living G-d. The world of “alone” for the soul is like bread and water for the body. It is built into the basic structure of the soul. If a person is unable to feel this need, it is a sign that their soul is buried so deeply inside materiality that they are unable to feel or hear its inner voice. This is similar to a person with cancer, G-d forbid, who loses their sense of taste and desire to eat.

TWO ROOMS

A man is sitting in his office on the phone, when suddenly he becomes embroiled in a heated argument, and begins to scream at the person on the other end of the call. Everyone in the vicinity hears the commotion. He slams down the phone in rage. No one can speak to him and he is unable to function the rest of the day. That night at home, he can't sleep as his thoughts churn over the events of the day. He tries to calm himself down, but is dragged back again and again to the same cycle of negative thoughts. The more he thinks, the deeper he is drawn in. However, it is different for the one who begins accustoming themselves to the world of “alone,” since they discover a place in the soul where they can go. It is as if there are two rooms where you can leave one to enter the other. Likewise, there are two rooms in the heart—one for others and one for yourself.

This is like an individual sitting in a room with a friend, equipped with a camera that sees their every move. The person then exits this room to another one, and is able to sit alone unseen. You also have two rooms that exist deep within your soul—one for others, and another silent one which exists only for you. If you accustom yourself during times of

² R' Avraham ben HaRambam

balanced emotions to spend a few minutes in this room, an inner world of quiet, you discover, “I am new—I am not the person you knew a moment ago!” When this “I” is uncovered, you have found the room in your soul where there is no one else but you. It is a place to where you can flee in times of anger or other harmful emotions. If there is no one else around, who can be the subject of your anger or jealousy? If you are not familiar with this place, then where can you go? The anger pursues you and there is no place to escape.

IDENTIFYING YOUR THOUGHTS

Even during those times you find yourself alone and decide to take advantage of the opportunity, there is another challenge. Your very thoughts can transport you far away from your inner world of “alone.” Even if you unplug the phone, put the newspaper aside and turn off the computer, you could be carrying all of New York City in your mind. Your thoughts could be on everything going on in the country, or flying throughout the entire world. Thus, even though you may be technically alone, in reality, the entire world is buzzing inside your head. In this case, it is worse than a cell phone, which is only next to your ear.

The first step is to identify where your thoughts are. Say you are sitting alone at home during a quiet moment and the first thought that falls into your mind is about work. Take a few steps back and note that your thoughts are about work. The next step is to evaluate if you are experiencing your “I” or in a place far from your “I”. Ask yourself, “Is my work ‘me’?” You realize that it isn't, but while your body is sitting at home, your thoughts are at work, with all the noise and pressure. At this stage, it is not an issue of even distinguishing positive from negative thoughts, rather it is the effort to quiet down your thoughts in stages, little by little.

You can know whether or not you have entered the world of “alone” by identifying the nature of your thoughts, with what they are occupied and where they are connecting you. Are you within the confines of “alone” or far away in a distant place?

It should be relatively easy to pinpoint your thoughts and guide them to a quiet inner place if this exercise is done during times of no pressure, and you are dealing with the thoughts that normally drift through the mind. Say to yourself, “I have decided to take two minutes to myself, and there is no need to think these thoughts.” In the next few seconds, check again where your thoughts are. You now notice they have drifted to the bank. Ask yourself another time, “Where am I—at home or at the bank?” Contemplate again how far your thoughts are from the world of “alone.” Are they a part of your “I” or are they far away, connected to the distant outer garments of the soul, called the body. In this way, you become equipped to correctly identify and separate negative thoughts and emotions from your essential self.

This entire subject is vast and requires much more study. However, the basic premise is that a powerful inner world of “alone” exists in each one of us. It is a force that enables us to disconnect from negative and detrimental emotions toward others..

PREPARATION FOR HITBODEDUT

However, this is just the first step in the amazing process of connecting to the divine, since accessing the world of “alone” is the fundamental preparation for **hitbodedut**, speaking to God in your own words. Only after discovering the world of “alone,” can you truly connect to God. Just as it is impossible to have two conversations at once, it is not possible to connect to HaShem while your thoughts are caught up in another place. You are speaking to G-d, but your soul is connected elsewhere. The ability to disconnect from the other places in order to access the world of “alone” will release you from the constriction of materiality and transform the quality of your life.

LIKUTEY MOHARAN #52 ¹

Footnotes by CHAIM KRAMER, Breslov Research Institute

RABBI CHANINA THE SON OF CHACHINAI SAID: HANEIOR BALAYLAH² (HE WHO STAYS AWAKE AT NIGHT) AND WHO GOES ON HIS WAY ALONE AND MAKES ROOM IN HIS HEART FOR EMPTY THOUGHTS—HE IS LIABLE FOR HIS OWN SOUL. (Avot 3:4)

There are heretics³ who say that the world is a necessary reality⁴. Based on their evil and erroneous opinion it seems to them that they have proofs and examples of this, God

¹ **Likutey Moharan #52.** This lesson was given sometime in early 5563 (fall of 1802), shortly after Reb Noson joined Rebbe Nachman's following. Its main theme is hitbodedut, a fundamental teaching of Breslover Chassidut whose importance the Rebbe stressed on numerous occasions. Hitbodedut, which literally means "seclusion" or "solitude," is the secluded, private prayer in which a person expresses whatever is in his heart, sometimes turning his words into a prepared prayer, other times spontaneously expressing his wants and needs before God, preferably in his mother tongue.

Reb Noson was with Rebbe Nachman in Breslov for Rosh HaShanah 5563, and stayed until after Yom Kippur. During that time the Rebbe revealed to him the practice of hitbodedut, explaining the great value of daily setting aside time to speak to God, as one would to a good friend. Reb Noson was so excited by this new means for drawing closer to God, he wanted to run into the streets to tell everyone about it. Rebbe Nachman had to literally grab Reb Noson to restrain him (Kochavey Or, p.19). After Yom Kippur Reb Noson returned home and began practicing hitbodedut as the Rebbe had advised. Yet he soon realized that his home and the study hall lacked privacy, and that the daytime was filled with too many disturbances. Reb Noson's solution was to engage in hitbodedut after midnight, in the solitude of the fields surrounding Nemirov where he lived. Some time after Sukkot he returned to the Rebbe, who gave over this lesson which discusses the advantages of practicing hitbodedut after midnight in the fields (Parparaot LeChokmah; Until the Mashiach, p.89; see Through Fire and Water, Chapter 5-9).

² **HaNeior Balaylah...** In its simple sense, Rabbi Chanina's teaching speaks of the danger of travelling alone at night and not studying Torah along the way. Rabbeinu Yonah (ad loc.) relates this Mishnah from Avot to the advantage of the nighttime hours for Torah study, which if squandered on empty thoughts endangers the soul. Rebbe Nachman, while agreeing that Rabbi Chanina extols the great value of the nighttime for serving God, reads the Mishnah's conclusion very differently--as praise of the one who goes out alone in the dead of night to engage in hitbodedut.

³ **heretics.** Rebbe Nachman refers to the proponents of the Haskalah, the Enlightenment movement, who in their attack on traditional Torah Judaism took issue with the very foundations of the Jewish faith. These Jewish intellectuals, some of whom possessed extensive Torah knowledge, saw the pursuit of secular culture and knowledge as a supreme value. They sought to represent their own approach as one which expressed authentic Jewish values more truly than that of the Torah-observant community, whose beliefs and lifestyle they considered to be archaic and outmoded (see Until the Mashiach, Historical Overview, p.xxiv).

In this lesson Rebbe Nachman relates to the most fundamental of the mitzvot: faith in God, and believing that He created the universe out of nothingness. Of all the 613 commandments, Rambam (Maimonides) begins his monumental work, Yad HaChazakah, with this mitzvah: The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a First Cause, God. He brought about everything that exists; and whatever exists in the heavens and on the earth...derives only from the truth of His Existence (Yad HaChazakah, Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah 1:1). The commentators learn from this four basic articles of faith: 1) that God is eternal; 2)

forbid, from the way the world functions⁵. But in fact their mouths spew foolishness. For the truth is that the world and all it contains are a contingent reality.

Only the Holy One must necessarily exist. However, all the worlds and all they contain need not necessarily exist⁶. God created them creatio ex nihilo⁷. For God had the ability, the power and the alternative to create them or to not create them. Therefore the world and all it contains are certainly a contingent reality.

Yet what is the basis of this mistake⁸ that makes it possible for people to incorrectly conclude that the world is a necessary reality, God forbid? Know, this stems from the fact

that He is One; 3) that He is completely devoid of matter and form; 4) that God created the world new, creatio ex nihilo (Peirush, ad loc.). It is this last point that the Rebbe addresses in the lesson: God, Who always existed, brought the entire creation into existence from non-existence and nothingness. That Rebbe Nachman cites at the lesson's outset the heretics who call into question this article of Jewish faith, is an indication of how strongly he felt regarding this topic; for even in other lessons where the Rebbe addresses the spurious issues raised by heretics and atheists, he works this into the lesson only as it applies in context to the points he has already established. (See also below, @2 and n.22.)

⁴ **a necessary reality.** In Hebrew, mechuyav hametziut. This concept traces back to Aristotelian philosophy, which views the universe as a necessary effect of the First Cause. Believing in the doctrine of the eternity of matter, it also taught that the universe is as eternal as the First Cause. This is in direct opposition to the Bible's account of the Act of Creation, which maintains that God created the temporal universe from nothingness, creatio ex nihilo. As explained, it is a basic tenet of Jewish belief that God alone is mechuyav hametziut, and that everything else in creation is an aspect of contingent reality, a contingent effect of the First Cause (see also below, nn.6 and 7).

⁵ **from the way the world functions.** I.e., the laws of nature. The proponents of the Haskalah, known as maskilim ("enlightened one"), argued that physics and the laws of nature provided incontrovertible proof for the universe being eternal, and hence a mechuyav hametziut. However, as Rebbe Nachman often pointed out, the laws of nature were determined by God, and He Himself transcends them (cf. Lesson #51, concerning God's oneness and the duality of creation). Therefore the laws of nature, too, are a creation, and so a contingent reality.

⁶ **all the worlds...need not necessarily exist.** This is true of all the worlds--from this lowly material universe, to the highest of the supernal worlds discussed in the Kabbalah--they are all contingent and need not necessarily exist. This is an important point, because Rebbe Nachman will soon explain that all the elements of creation return and become encompassed in their Source by means of another creation, one that transcends even the most lofty worlds--i.e., the souls of Israel.

⁷ **creatio ex nihilo.** As we have seen (n.3), basic to Jewish belief is that God created the universe out of nothingness, yesh me'ayin (something from nothing). This is the meaning of creatio ex nihilo. And since God alone existed when nothing else did, He alone is mechuyav hametziut, a necessary reality. God must necessarily exist; the universe, on the other hand, came into existence as the expression of His will, making all of creation a contingent reality.

⁸ **Yet what is the basis of this mistake....** God, though He is Omnipotent and so certainly could have done otherwise, created the world in a manner that leaves room for man to question its fundamental truths, including even the very existence of God Himself. This hiddenness also leaves room for man to draw wrong conclusions from what appears to him to be unconditional fact. In our context, this relates to the mistaken assumption that the laws of nature prove the eternity of matter, and hence that the universe is a mechuyav hametziut. Recognizing that this conclusion has its basis in the reality of this world--i.e., that the nature of creation itself facilitates such a mistake--Rebbe Nachman seeks to discover what that basis might be.

that now, after the souls of Israel have already been emanated and brought down—now the world is certainly in the aspect of necessary reality. For the world and all it contains were created only for Israel⁹, as is known. And Israel rules the world¹⁰. So certainly now, after the souls of Israel¹¹ have been emanated and created, God is obliged, so to speak, to create and maintain the world. It was on account of this that He emanated the souls of Israel, in order to create for them all the worlds. But the souls of Israel themselves, when they were emanated, they and all the worlds that are dependent upon them were all a

⁹ **created only for Israel, as is known.** Rebbe Nachman relates to the exaltedness of the souls of Israel a number of times in his lessons and teachings. This prominence manifests in several ways, some of which are discussed in the ensuing notes.

The world was created for Israel. Commenting on the word bereishit (Genesis 1:1), Rashi teaches that the letter bet of bereishit connotes the Hebrew word bishvil (for the sake of); and that reishit ("beginning" or "first") is Israel, as in (Jeremiah 2:3), "Israel is holy to God, reishit of His yield" Thus the first two words of the Torah, "Bereishit bara (In the beginning God created)," translate as: "For the sake of Israel, God created..." (see VaYikra Rabbah 36:4, Otiyot Rabbi Akiva 1:2). Prior to any action is the thought that motivates the action. Prior to the Act of Creation, too, there was the thought that motivated God to create the world. That first, motivating thought was of Israel (cf. Bereishit Rabbah 1:4).

This can be better understood from the following example. Say a person wants to build a house so that he and his family have a place to live. To build this house he has to make many plans, hire an architect, a contractor, and so on.

In designing the house he will no doubt take into account numerous considerations, everything from where to buy property to how many rooms he will need and what kind of doorknobs to order. Ultimately, no matter how numerous the details are that have to be worked out, they all relate back to and are determined by the person's original thought: that he and his family have a place to live. The same process took place in the creation of the universe. God's original thought, the one that motivated everything that came afterwards, was of Israel; the entire creation relates back to and is determined by this thought.

¹⁰ **Israel rules the world.** This "rule" can be understood in several ways. Elsewhere (Likutey Moharan I, 17), Rebbe Nachman teaches that God created the souls of Israel in anticipation of the pride and joy He would have from them, as in (Isaiah 49:3), "Israel, I take pride in you." He then created everything that exists in the world to assist and quicken Israel in doing His will and becoming His "pride and joy." This is why Adam was created only at the conclusion of the Six Days of Creation, so that all other creations would be available to him and enable him to fulfill his destiny. Had Adam not sinned, this would have been effected soon after his creation. Even so, whether by their own efforts or through Mashiach, Israel will ultimately complete its purpose by ruling over the all the elements in creation and employing them in fulfilling His will. A second way of understanding this rule is that since the entire world was created for the sake of Israel, therefore even presently whatever takes place in the world is because of and due to Israel. A third way to understand Israel's rule of the world has to do with this lesson's theme, hitbodedut. As Rebbe Nachman teaches elsewhere (Likutey Moharan I, 44): Israel, through its prayers, can perform miracles, and so rules over the laws of nature, the contingent reality.

¹¹ **the souls of Israel...to create for them all the worlds.** Since God's first thought concerning the creation was of the souls of Israel, Israel is in effect the mean between God and His creation (Biur HaLikutim #4; cf. Lesson #51:3 and nn.36, 38). In this sense the souls of Israel are "in close proximity" to God. Thus, when they become encompassed in Him, as will be explained, they take on the Godly characteristic of mechuyav hametziut. This is the meaning of Rebbe Nachman's words: "So certainly now, after the souls of Israel have been emanated and created, God is obliged, so to speak, to create and maintain the world...." As Rebbe Nachman elaborates, the existence of the souls of Israel necessitates that there be a physical creation. This necessariness is the basis for the mistaken conclusion of Aristotelian teaching embraced by the maskilim, that the world, too, is a mechuyav hametziut.

contingent reality. This is because He had the alternative to emanate and create them or to not create them.

Yet as soon as the Holy One resolved to emanate the souls of Israel, then the entire world took on the aspect of necessary reality. For after the souls of Israel were emanated, He was then obliged, so to speak, to bring the world into being. It was on account of this that their souls were created, so that all the worlds would be created for them and they would rule over everything. Understand this well.

And from this evolves and develops the mistake of the heretics who say that the world is a necessary reality, God forbid. But in truth only God alone is a necessary reality, whereas all things are a contingent reality, as explained above¹²

2. Now the main intention behind His creating the entire world for Israel was so that Israel should carry out¹³ His will, and so that they should return and cleave to their Source¹⁴— i.e., that they should return and be encompassed in God, Who is a necessary reality. It was for this that everything was created.

We see then that whenever Israel does the will of the Omnipresent and is enveloped in its Source, Who is a necessary reality, through this the entire world, which was created for them, is encompassed in necessary reality. This is the primary purpose for which the world was created. And only because of this is God obligated, so to speak, to create and maintain all the worlds for Israel¹⁵; so that they should carry out His will, as explained above.

¹² **as explained above.** The Biur Halikutim adds that the aspect of mechuyav hametziut which the souls of Israel acquire when they become encompassed in God, Who is the true mechuyav hametziut, gives these souls another Divine quality: eternity. Just as God is eternal, the souls of Israel will exist eternally and never be destroyed (Biur Halikutim #1).

In review: Everything in creation is a contingent reality. The creation took place for the sake of the souls of Israel, which, when encompassed in God, acquire the aspect of necessary reality.

¹³ **Israel should carry out His will.** The world of corporeality is the means whereby Israel carries out the will of God. This will has been set out as the mitzvot in God's Torah; the commandments which Israel observes using the multifarious elements in creation—from the horn of a ram for sounding the shofar's blast on Rosh HaShanah, to the latest in computer technology for advancing the study of Torah and spreading its message to the farthest reaches on earth.

¹⁴ **cleave to their Source...and be encompassed in God....** This notion of carrying out God's will and thereby being encompassed in Him is similar to what Rebbe Nachman discussed in the previous lesson: attaining truth and thereby incorporating the world of "after the creation" with God's oneness of "before the creation" (see Lesson #51:end).

¹⁵ **create and maintain all the worlds for Israel....** The entire creation was for the sake of Israel, that through the world of corporeality they carry out His will. Moreover, the more they perform the mitzvot, carrying out God's will, the more God is obliged, as it were, to maintain the world.

And so it is specifically then, when they carry out His will, that the world is encompassed in the aspect of necessary reality¹⁶. For the more they carry out His will, the more they are encompassed, together with all the worlds that are dependent upon them, in necessary reality. For by doing His will they return and are encompassed in Him, He being a necessary reality, and so all the worlds that are dependent upon their souls are encompassed together with them in necessary reality, as explained above.

3. However to merit this, to be encompassed in one's Source—i.e., to return and be encompassed in the oneness of God, Who is a necessary reality—is possible only through bitul¹⁷ (self-negation, transparency). A person has to make himself totally transparent, until he is encompassed in the oneness of God.

And the only way to attain bitul is through hitbodedut¹⁸. By secluding himself and speaking at length with his Master, through this a person merits negating all his physical desires and bad character traits to the point where he merits negating all his corporeality and is encompassed in his Source.

But the main [time] for hitbodedut is at night¹⁹, when people are free of the preoccupations of this world. For during the day, because people chase after the things of

¹⁶ **encompassed together with them in necessary reality....** When the souls of Israel fulfill their purpose by performing the mitzvot, they are encompassed in God, the mechuyav hametziut, as is the entire world that was created for Israel. This is the basis for the heretical claim that the world is a necessary reality; the world of corporeality, having taken on the aspect of mechuyav hametziut as a result of its role in assisting Israel in doing God's will, appears as if it must necessarily exist—a necessary effect of the First Cause.

In review: Everything in creation is a contingent reality. The creation took place for the sake of the souls of Israel, which, when encompassed in God, acquire the aspect of necessary reality (@1). When Israel carries out God's will, then they, and through them the entire world, are encompassed in mechuyav hametziut (@2).

¹⁷ **bitul...**until he is encompassed in the oneness of God. Literally, the term bitul means "annulment" or "cancellation." In the realm of spirituality and the worship of God it implies a negation of self, and an emptying of worldly attachments from the self. Another translation of bitul is "transparency." When a person gives himself wholly to God, he makes himself transparent before God's Infinite Light. This transparency enables God's Light to filter through him without being distorted or diminished by the barriers and shadows of the corporeality of his being (see also Likutey Moharan I, 172). Only by reaching this state of bitul can a person become encompassed in his Source and so acquire the aspect of necessary reality, as Rebbe Nachman will explain.

¹⁸ **hitbodedut.** This is the main focus of the lesson. As explained (n.1), hitbodedut is a person's private prayers and meditations about those things that are closest to his heart. Rebbe Nachman will now explain that each bad characteristic a person wishes to overcome, or good characteristic he wishes to develop, requires that he articulate his desire in prayer before God, asking for God's help in attaining his goal. The same applies for one's physical needs and the like. Elsewhere (Likutey Moharan II, 84), Rebbe Nachman teaches that prayer is the main path to God; prayer—i.e., hitbodedut—is the path through which a person can attain bitul and bind himself to the Almighty.

¹⁹ **the main time for hitbodedut is at night...** Rebbe Nachman teaches that each breath a person breathes contains his innermost thoughts and desires (Likutey Moharan I, 31:8). Thus during the day, when people engage in their worldly pursuits and chase after their desires, the air they exhale inhibits the quest for Godliness. This has the power to adversely affect a person's hitbodedut. The most propitious time for hitbodedut is therefore in the wee hours of the morning, when most people are asleep.

this world, this disturbs a person and prevents him from cleaving and being encompassed in God. Even if he himself is not preoccupied, still, since most people are preoccupied then and are chasing after the vanities of this world, as a result it is difficult to attain bitul then.

In addition, the hitbodedut should take place in a special place—i.e., away from the city, on a secluded road²⁰, in a place not frequented by people. For a place frequented during the day by people who chase after this world, even if at present they are not there, nonetheless disturbs the hitbodedut and he is unable to attain bitul and be encompassed in God. Therefore a person has to go alone at night on a secluded road, in a place where no one else is, and there engage in hitbodedut, emptying his heart and mind of all worldly matters. He should negate everything, until he truly merits the aspect of bitul.

In other words, at the outset he should pray and speak a great deal in hitbodedut at night on a secluded road, as explained above, until he merits negating one thing—i.e., negating a particular trait or desire²¹. Then he should again engage a great deal in the hitbodedut mentioned above until he negates a different trait or desire. And he should continue practicing hitbodedut for a long time, at the time mentioned above and in the place mentioned above, until he negates everything. After this, there is still something of him left...and afterwards he negates this as well, until there is nothing of him left.

{The explanation is²²: It is possible that after a person has negated all the physical desires and bad traits, there is still his "nothing" left—i.e., he has still not completely negated the egotism and pride, so that he considers himself to be something. A person therefore has to labor at and engage extensively in the above mentioned hitbodedut, until there is

The general custom amongst the Breslover Chassidim is to rise to recite Tikkun Chatzot (the Midnight Lament for the Temple), and afterwards engage in hitbodedut. Rebbe Nachman suggests setting aside an hour for this intimate communion with God.

²⁰ **on a secluded road**, in a place where no one else is. Rebbe Nachman recommended the fields and forests outside the city as the most ideal locations for hitbodedut.

²¹ **negating a particular trait or desire**. Rebbe Nachman suggests that a person work on one issue at a time. Too often people try to focus on several things all at once, but as the Rebbe teaches here, the most effective hitbodedut is when a person concentrates exclusively on the thing affecting him at that moment (see Likutey Moharan I, 34). A person can, and perhaps should, pray for all his needs, even if they are numerous. Yet his major focus while praying should be on one particular desire, lack or need.

²² **The explanation is...** This paragraph was inserted by Reb Noson to clarify Rebbe Nachman's concluding, subtle point about negating every last bad trait and desire. Rebbe Nachman has taught that a person who progresses gradually, concentrating on one bad trait at a time, will eventually achieve bitul before God. Notwithstanding, explains Reb Noson, a person who has negated all his existing bad traits and desires may acquire a new one: pride in his great accomplishment. This self-esteem, too, must be eradicated if he is to become truly transparent before God. The Biur HaLikutim notes that of all the traits, pride is singled out because the only way to become truly encompassed in one's Source and acquire the aspect of mechuyav hametziut (see n.17 above) is by emptying oneself of all pride and attaining the highest level of humility. This, he suggests, is the reason Rebbe Nachman speaks so harshly of the heretics (see n.3), whose egos are so inflated that they consider themselves a necessary reality. In truth, an egotistical person is the very opposite of a mechuyav hametziut, whereas the person who has faith in God and realizes that he himself has no existence other than by the grace of God--he acquires the aspect of mechuyav hametziut (Biur HaLikutim #2 and #9).

nothing of him left, so that he is truly in the aspect of naught—until he truly merits the aspect of bitul.}

And then, when he truly merits the aspect of bitul, his soul is encompassed in his Source—i.e., in God, Who is a necessary reality. Then together with his soul²³, the entire world is encompassed in his Source, for he is a necessary reality because everything is dependent upon him, as explained above. And so through him, the entire world is in the aspect of necessary reality, as explained above.

4. Now you will see something very amazing, how all this is now clearly elucidated in the Mishnah brought above. This is:

RABBI CHANINA THE SON OF CHACHINAI SAID: HANEIOR BALAYLAH (HE WHO STAYS AWAKE AT NIGHT) AND WHO GOES ON HIS WAY ALONE AND MAKES ROOM IN HIS HEART FOR BATALAH (EMPTY THOUGHTS)—HE IS MITCHAYEV (LIABLE FOR) HIS OWN SOUL.

HE WHO STAYS AWAKE AT NIGHT — This follows its simple meaning. In other words, he stays awake at night and secludes himself and speaks at length with His Master.

AND WHO GOES ON HIS WAY ALONE — In other words, as explained above, he goes specifically on a secluded road, in a place which people do not frequent. For this is the essence of ideal hitbodedut: at night and specifically on a secluded road, because especially then one can attain the aspect of bitul, as explained above. And this is:

AND MAKES ROOM IN HIS HEART FOR BATALAH — In other words, he empties his heart of all the matters of this world—for BaTaLah, in order to merit the aspect of BiTuL²⁴. Then he

²³ **together with his soul, the entire world...**as explained above. Having attained such a complete bitul before God that he becomes encompassed in God's oneness and acquires the aspect of mechuyav hametziut, this person also brings everything that depends on him, all the worlds that God created because of him, into the aspect of mechuyav hametziut. As explained above (@2 and n.16), therein lies the root of the erroneous notion that the world is a necessary effect and that matter is eternal.

It should be understood that attaining this very exalted state of bitul is not as easy as it may appear from the lesson. Still, as with all the different spiritual aspirations of which Rebbe Nachman speaks, each expenditure of effort a person makes brings him that much closer to his goal. In our context, each advance a person makes in practicing hitbodedut and attaining bitul before God causes his world to be that much more encompassed in God; each person according to his level. This is why it is important that a person find the time to engage in hitbodedut every day, without fail.

In review: Everything in creation is a contingent reality. The creation took place for the sake of the souls of Israel, which, when encompassed in God, acquire the aspect of necessary reality (@1). When Israel carries out God's will, then they, and through them the entire world, are encompassed in mechuyav hametziut (@2). To be encompassed in mechuyav hametziut one must attain a state of bitul before God. This is accomplished through the practice of hitbodedut (@3).

²⁴ **BaTaLah...BiTuL.** As mentioned in note 2 above, Rebbe Nachman's reading of this Mishnah is a radical inversion of its simple interpretation such that "goes on his way alone" alludes to hitbodedut, and the

merits having his soul encompassed in necessary reality. And then together with his soul, all the worlds are encompassed in necessary reality, as explained above²⁵. And this is:

HE IS MITCHAYEV HIS OWN SOUL²⁶ — The entire world is encompassed together with his soul in the aspect of necessary reality. For through the hitbodedut mentioned above, he merits the aspect of bitul, until his soul becomes encompassed in necessary reality, and through this the entire world becomes encompassed together with his soul in necessary reality. Thus his soul and the entire world are in the aspect of meChuYaV reality, as explained above. And this is the explanation of "he is mitChaYeV his own soul."

5. Here you have leshon Rabbeinu z'l²⁷ of this lesson, which he composed with extreme brevity:

Who goes on his way alone. He who stays awake at night...

Know, the essence of bitul—that a person negates his corporeality and becomes ayin²⁸ (nothingness), becoming encompassed in the oneness of God—is achieved only through hitbodedut.

negative implication of "empty thoughts," BaTaLah, is now the emptying of self to attain the exalted state of BiTuL. See also note 26.

²⁵ **as explained above.** See sections 1 and 2, that when a Jew attains the state of bitul and becomes encompassed in mechuyav hametziut, then all the worlds, having been created for the sake of Israel, also become encompassed in that necessary reality.

²⁶ **meChuYaV...mitChaYeV his own soul.** As mentioned in note 24, in showing how the concepts of our lesson are alluded to in this Mishnah, Rebbe Nachman reads the Mishnah very differently from the way it is generally understood. Here again we have an example of this inversion, with the word mitChaYeV switching in meaning from "liable for" endangering one's soul, to one's soul being a "necessary reality," meChuYaV hametziut.

Bearing in mind that the Hebrew word chanina connotes "supplication"—i.e., hitbodedut—the Mishnah of Rabbi Chanina translates in our text as follows: He who stays awake at night and who goes on his way alone -- A person who practices hitbodedut at night and in a secluded place; and makes room in his heart for batalah -- and strives to attain bitul before God; he is mitchayev his own soul -- his soul [and all the worlds which are dependent upon him] are encompassed in mechuyav hametziut.

Reb Nachman Tulchiner once remarked that the steady practice of hitbodedut alone in the forest has the power to turn the sincere practitioner into a truly devoted Jew, but the insincere individual who does not use his time wisely into a reckless, irresponsible person (see Magid Sichot, p. 39). Both possibilities appear in the Mishnah. The simple meaning of "who goes on his way alone" relates to a person who does not utilize his time and abilities wisely, and so becomes liable for his own soul. In contrast, a person "who goes on his way alone" in the proper practice of hitbodedut will attain the exalted state of bitul to God and have his soul encompassed in mechuyav hametziut.

²⁷ **leshon Rabbeinu z'l...composed with extreme brevity.** Any lesson designated as such was copied verbatim from Rebbe Nachman's manuscripts, which Reb Noson had in his possession (see Lesson #49, n.1). In the few instances where Reb Noson published both the Rebbe's manuscript of the lesson and the version he, Reb Noson, had initially recorded for himself (Likutey Moharan I, 46, 47, 53), the lesson begins with the Rebbe's version. The exception to this is our lesson, in which Reb Noson's version appears first. This may be because, as Reb Noson notes here, the Rebbe composed this lesson with extreme brevity, such that placing it first presumably would have required inserting copious commentary in order for it to be understood.

Now the hitbodedut requires²⁹ a special place and time so that he is not disturbed by distractions. The time is at night—i.e., He who stays awake at night—for then everyone is asleep. The place is on a secluded road, and not a public road, so that he is not interrupted by people passing by.

Rather, it should be specifically a road not frequently traveled—he should go there and seclude himself. This is: Who goes on his way alone. Then he will be able to empty his heart of all <dross and waste>, and be able to attain a bitul of all <his> corporeality <and become naught and nothing>. This is: and makes room in his heart for batalah. And then, when he is entirely transparent, he is encompassed in the oneness of God. He then attains the aspect of mechuyav ("necessary"), for the Holy One is a necessary reality, whereas all things are a contingent reality. Thus when a person is transparent and is encompassed in His oneness, he then leaves the aspect of contingent <reality> and is encompassed in meChuYaV <reality>. And this is the aspect of he is mitChaYeV his own soul.

²⁸ **ayin**, becoming encompassed in the oneness of God. Rebbe Nachman associates the state of bitul with the concept of ayin—i.e., the nothingness attained by a person who has negated all his worldly desires and bad traits, and has attained transparency before God (see nn.17, 22). The term Ayin also refers to God, the Ein Sof (Infinite One), Who in His ineffableness can be related to only as Absolute Nothingness. The Rebbe's mention of ayin here carries both connotations: A person who attains ayin becomes encompassed in Ayin, Who is mechuyav hametziut.

²⁹ **Now the hitbodedut requires....** Rebbe Nachman's teachings, as well as Reb Noson's, contain many references to hitbodedut. Most are collected in the work Hishtaphkhut HaNefesh, translated into English by the Breslov Research Institute as "Outpouring of the Soul." For more on hitbodedut, including methodology and examples, see "Under the Table" (Chapter 6) and "Crossing the Narrow Bridge" (Chapter 9), also published by the Breslov Research Institute.

“WITH MY SWORD AND WITH MY BOW”¹

By Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Kletzky shlit”a

QUESTION:

Why does one need specifically to set aside a special time to speak with Hashem with mental composure in a quiet designated place? Isn't it enough to make one's requests during the Shema Koleinu in the Amidah prayer?

ANSWER:

It's not possible to cover all the issues on *Hitbodedus* over here, but let's try and identify and explain one point:

Hitbodedus is not “only” advice to find time to make requests, because one can also make such entreaties during *Shema Koleinu* or at any time for that matter during the day, at any moment that there is some issue or mental anguish etc.

Hitbodedus is a totally different concept. **Hitbodedus is the place and the time in which we can form a strong bond with Hashem.** *Hitbodedus* is the activity of “composure” or “mental calmness”. One does need composure in order to do *Hitbodedus*, on the contrary one goes into *Hitbodedus* without mental composure and it is *there* that one calms the mind. And we are not talking about “self-composure” either, rather during *Hitbodedus* one reaches composure **together** with Hashem – this is the great *chiddush* or novelty.

One should try to find a place in which one can sit alone, be it a forest or grove, closed room or under the blanket like King David who said: “every night I drench my bed ...” [with tears]. But if it's not possible to find a quiet place, then one can even open a book in the *Beit Hamidrash* and speak with Hashem. In this way, one pours out the heart telling Hashem all one's feelings, pains, weaknesses, stresses and worries, etc.

As it says in *Proverbs 12:25*: “Concern in the heart of a man weighs it down; but a good word makes it glad” (proverb 12:25) - Speak to Hashem like one confides in a friend, relating one's inner feelings to him – a dear and close friend who wants to listen to him and to

¹ Courtesy of the Gates of Emunah Weekly Publication <http://gatesofemunah.wordpress.com/>

whom one can speak truthfully, one who is prepared to accept him for what he is without being worried that he will think badly of him even if it is directed towards him.

In truth, it is hard to find such a friend in this world. We move amongst people, speaking and conversing but in practice, we lead a life without “isolation”. There is no one that understands his friend in depth. Perhaps there are strong individuals that are able to overcome what happens to them and don’t feel the need to share and talk with others, but in truth this is not because everything is in order but rather because they have the power to avoid their issues instead of dealing with them.

This is the way it relates to spiritual struggles too, whereby the *Yetzer Harah* wants so much to make a person fall – to break, confuse, infuse doubts or questions and in essence weakens the heart to such an extent that we don’t know our own strength. So who can truly understand his friend when each one’s *Yetzer Harah* is enfolded in a different way, coupled with the fact that the advice one needs each day is so different.

So what is the solution? To run to Hashem. Hashem understands us – with Him it is possible to pour out one’s heart and tell him everything – all one’s feelings, difficulties and thoughts. His is our mainstay. If only we would connect ourselves to him with Emunah - He hears and listens to every word that leaves our mouth.

Hitbodedus is the time in which we stop to live a life of solitude and start connecting ourselves to Hashem in actuality, not searching for honor or appreciation and not being dependent on the respect of others. Through *Hitbodedus*, Emunah starts to be a practical, tangible thing and not simply theoretical ideas or allegories about faith and trust.

And here-in lies the great innovation. Because for each problem that we encounter in this world, whether physical or spiritual, there is an advice - if we would only recognize and understand the essence of the problem, it would be solved. What we lack is this advice. When we do *hitbodedus* and speak with Hashem, He sends us thoughts that are correct and orderly.

Sometimes in the middle of pouring out the heart, the mind becomes clear and one receives a greater clarity and composure on the situation with a renewed strength to tackle the problem. Or sometimes, Hashem will infuse one with a new idea or solution.

For example, a person is unable to come to terms with a friend or family member. Now there is no question that Hashem is able to perform an open miracle and smooth things out. However, generally speaking Hashem guises the salvation in nature and if one would outline the problem exactly and how the two parties became alienated, shouting out: “give me the advice, give me the knowledge on what I should do in this situation” (even if one has a strong feeling that there is nothing one can do), Hashem helps and the person understands already how to deal with the other person in the correct way – what are the correct words

to use, or that he should understand those points that caused them to become irritated with each other, or perhaps to arrive at the understanding how to be careful not to be drawn into such situations, and so on and so forth - an array of ideas and advice on how to extricate a person from his issue.

Also as it relates to topics which require salvation such as health or earning a living etc, one should request from Hashem (in addition to the basic prayer that Hashem should give one health or livelihood) that He gives one the advice and knowledge what to do with the issue at hand and where to turn etc.

Furthermore, with regards to those things in which a one is in doubt about like making a certain decision, here too, one should consult with Hashem and tell him the two sides, explaining the advantages and disadvantages to each side. And with this, Hashem helps one clarify the suitable piece of advice.

So too, as it relates to the maladies and troubles of the soul such as sadness, laziness, anger, worries and fears etc, here as well, one should tell Hashem day after day that which disturbs one, and plead with Him to give one the advice on what to do, how to deal with the situation at hand, what is causing the difficulty etc. It is a proven fact that when a person asks Hashem for advice, He helps the person achieve mental composure, an understanding how to strengthen himself or which step to take.

Sometimes we know the advice but it is hard to accept. There one should ask Hashem to understand the advice or to find an alternative piece of advice that he would be more readily able to fulfill.

And so it is with all things in the pursuit of holiness, as long as one does not despair and focuses on seeking advice on the given topic, Hashem helps and illuminates the mind to understand what the root or essence of the difficulty is and regardless to find the advice on what to do - It can be that there is something insignificant and nonsensical that one is not even unaware that is the aggravating factor in a particular predicament and suddenly one's spirit becomes aware of how to extricate himself from the problem, or alternatively find the inner strength on how to tackle the issue.

And this will be the work of *Moshiach* who will give each person the weapon of prayer and supplication as it is written: "With my Sword (*Chervi*) and with my Bow (*Bakashti*)" (*Bereishis* 48, 22), as Rashi explains: "With my Wisdom (*Chochmati*) and with my Tefillos (*Bakashti*)" – since this is a type of prayer that illuminates the one who is praying with a spirit of wisdom (*chochma*) and understanding (*binah*), a spirit of advice and strength (*gevurah*), a spirit of knowledge (*daas*) and fear of Hashem (*Yiras Hashem*).

WITH EACH BEAT OF MY HEART

DOV BEN AVRAHAM¹

Hisbodedus – a practice simple to perform but difficult for me sustain for any significant period of time. Time after time, I renew my efforts to make time to incorporate it into my schedule, and time after time I end up back where I began; and the years pass with much the same result.

I have read and re-read numerous books on the topic and understood that there was indeed great value in just sitting and saying the words “Ribbono shel Olam”, yet I still found it difficult to devote any significant amount of time to hisbodedus.

Earlier this year, I read the following words in Shevachay HaRan #14, “He [Rebbe Nachman of Breslov] initially found it very difficult to sit alone in a special room for several hours, devoting himself to Hashem. At first this was next to impossible for him. But instead of merely giving up, he forced himself, overcoming his basic nature by spending many hours meditating in his special room.”

Inspired, I retreated to a locked file room at work and began to dedicate a few lunch breaks each week to sitting quietly in the dark and occasionally asking Hashem to give me words to speak to Him. I reasoned that over time this practice would lead to me practicing hisbodedus in earnest.

I was able to maintain this practice for a few weeks without difficulty before I was suddenly besieged with months of unrelenting high priority and urgent taskings at work. Almost overnight I found it close to impossible to escape to the file room. The time I devoted to hisbodedus once again slipped through my fingers.

With the increased workload, my stress level increased exponentially. I began to suffer headaches, tension in my shoulder muscles, and back pains that would last the entire work week and relenting only on Shabbos. Earlier this month, I went out running and very quickly began experiencing pains in my chest. After a mile and half, I could no longer breathe and was forced to stop and walked home. This had never happened to me before in all the years I had been running routinely.

“You really should go see a cardiologist if it happens again,” my father advised. Two days later, it happened again. I had to stop running after running only half a block because the

¹ Author of Bnei Avraham Ahuvecha: Gerim in Chassidic Thought.

pressure in my chest inhibited my breathing. I then called a cardiologist and went in for an appointment. The doctor assured me that he was 95% sure that it was nothing serious, however, he wanted me to come back for another visit for the treadmill stress test and echo cardiogram in order to cover all the bases.

I returned to the cardiologist's office earlier this week and was given a clean bill of health after both of these tests. The echo cardiogram, however, did wonders for my emuna. It literally changed the way I looked at the world. In utter amazement, I stared at the screen and watched what was occurring within my chest. Although I already knew that Hashem caused my heart to beat and was familiar with how the heart functions, I had never seen my own heart. I never knew that Hashem was this close to me! He was not overseeing the world from afar, He was right here orchestrating every beat of my heart! Wherever I am, wherever I go, He is there keeping me alive each and every second. I left the doctor's office and cried; overwhelmed with this new realization – inspired to spend time in hisbodedus again.

And I returned to the file room the next day. Sitting in the darkness, I first concentrated on the beating of my heart and immediately I felt Hashem's closeness. Opening up my mouth, I was finally able to speak to him longer than I had done in the past. This time it did not feel labored and the time flew by. Hashem was right here in the darkness of the file room with me, right now with each beat of my heart.

THE VAST DESERT OF SOLITUDE¹

SEND THE CROWDS AWAY

YOSEF PERETZ

When Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman - later known as the Ponivezher Rav, who raised the banner of Torah in Israel, was returning home to his parents he passed by the town of Radin (in Poland pre-WWII). He later recounted:

"As I was passing by Radin, I asked myself how could I pass by the "holy sanctuary" of the Chafetz Chaim without stopping there? I took a shortcut and arrived in Radin late in the afternoon. The Chafetz Chaim's house was dark.

I entered and found no one there. I sat down on a bench and wondered what the Chafetz Chaim looked like and whether I would merit to see him. As I meditated, the Rebetzin entered and asked me what I wanted. I told her that I wished to see the Chafetz Chaim. She told me to wait awhile until he arrives. While waiting for the Chafetz Chaim, I heard a piercing cry from the upper floor, a cry that bespoke terrible pain. Seeing that I had become frightened, the Rebbetzin approached me and said: "Sir don't be frightened. That's my husband praying for a woman in labor who is giving birth right now." I immediately said to myself: "Yoshe, how can you leave such a place in which dwells a man who is capable of such heartrending crying on behalf of others?!" So I decided to stay in Radin and study under him."

Compared to the previous generations, the service of prayer has almost completely disappeared. Many of the gedolim (leaders) of previous generations would regularly spend time in solitude and pour out their hearts to G-d.

The technological revolution has disconnected us with nature, and as a result, with ourselves and with G-d. The constant chatter of crowds of people, the endless noise of machines and electronic gadgets has barraged and cluttered our minds. Technology has also brought with it long work weeks at meaningless jobs, doing meaningless work resulting in millions of people with unprecedented dissatisfaction and mental illnesses.

To develop a proper awareness of G-d's presence (yiras shamayim), a person needs to spend time alone. As long as he is with other people, or involved in activities, he can put the reality of G-d's presence aside so to speak. But when he finds himself alone, especially in raw nature, untouched by the hands of man, "the awesome presence of the King falls on him and his heart breaks (Talmud Berachos 34b Rashi-'dmatzli') ". This is why the Talmud says

¹ Reprinted with the kind permission of <http://www.dafyomireview.com>

(Berachos 5b) one should try to pray at the front of the synagogue with no separation between oneself and the wall. As long as there are other people in front of you who can see your face, you're not mentally alone and cannot turn to G-d properly (covering one's face with a tallis helps in this regard).

Of course, G-d is here with you always. He's here in this room right now. And one should pause and think for a moment about this. My teacher, Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, shlita (a Rosh Yeshiva and close student of Avigdor Miller zt"l), taught us that it is crucial to spend 10 minutes a day in seclusion and privacy in order to talk to Hashem. He used to tell us (to the effect of) "I don't know how you can daven (pray) or be religious for that matter, without having a personal relationship with Hashem. Who are you praying to? A concept? I empathize with you. Without a relationship with Him, prayer must be torture. Doing this makes Him real. G-d becomes real. The Torah becomes real, it comes alive. The Avos are suddenly real people that lived and not just stories. They're your relatives, your great-grandparents."

By the way, the procedure he recommended for this, is to lock yourself in a room every day for 5 or 10 minutes and talk to Him (no phones, etc., if possible put a "do not disturb" sign). As you talk to Him, imagine what you think He would say to you.

For example, thank Him for what you are grateful for, like health, food, good parents, etc. Then tell Him what you think He owes you...

Basically, to develop a personal relationship with Him in the tradition of the great baalei mussar.

If you're the deeply spiritual type, I would also suggest, return to nature once a month for a few hours. Send the crowds away, go to the forests or to the mountains, and seek Him in receptive silence. Many of the great baalei mussar did this on a daily basis (the really great ones hid away for years). Observe the trees and flowers and animals and birds, the sea and clouds and sky and stars. It's a tremendous way to reconnect with Him. Hopefully, the barriers will drop, and you will see, you will make contact. You will feel the King's awesome presence and the infinite wisdom in His creation. That is the cure for loneliness. Generally, we seek to cure our loneliness through emotional dependence on people, through gregariousness and noise. That is no cure. Get back to things, get back to reality. Then you will know that your heart has brought you to the vast desert of solitude, there is no one there at your side, absolutely no one.

The truth is eventually you will lose every single person in your life, never to see them again. You will lose your parents, your wife, your siblings, your children, your friends - everybody. And you will be utterly alone.

Alone that is, except for the Almighty. Now's the time to build the relationship with Him. (Just don't get me wrong. I don't advocate being a loner. A person should be "mixed" with others and try to help them, whether emotionally or physically. Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l said that you should make efforts to do things so that people will like you. The main point, though is not to lose the most important relationship.)

The Chafetz Chaim once saw a very happy student in his yeshiva come to bid him farewell before returning to his parents for the festivals. The Chafetz Chaim turned to his disciples around him and said "See how happy this talmid is to be going back to his father's house. Is this not the way a Jew should feel when he is about to die and return to his Father in Heaven?". - Sparks of Mussar pg.218

Rav Miller zt"l also gave a practical method for developing a relationship with Hashem: (tape shaar habitachon - chovos halevavos).

1. Constantly ask G-d for help.

Before you proceed on anything, ask Him for help.

Example: Salesman in waiting room. "Ribono Shel Olam, give me success with this customer."

Or if you want to learn a sugya in shas, say "Hashem, give me success in learning this subject in the gemora."

Or if you're going for a walk, ask Hashem to give you success in crossing all the streets safely.

2. Thank Hashem no matter the outcome.

If it happens that you are successful, thank Hashem profusely, at length afterwards and always consider what he did for you.

Even if you were not successful, you should still thank Hashem because whatever happens is certainly for your benefit.

Rav Miller advised that in using this method, a person will learn to attribute everything that happens to him to Hashem and build the precious fundamental, trait of bitachon (trust in G-d). People generally have an incorrect and simplistic understanding of Bitachon. They believe, if you ask hard enough Hashem will do what you want. This is really the opposite of 'bitachon'. The Chazon Ish explains bitachon as - trusting that whatever Hashem does is for the best and that He KNOWS what He is doing! (heard from Rabbi Lazerus)

I'll end off with this incredible statement by Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm (one of the great mussar giants of pre-WWII Europe) zt"l wrote:

"A great principle in joy of the heart and health of the body, and more for the service of G-d is to search for closeness (kirva) to G-d and not closeness to human beings. Besides being a big headache in many ways, there's no greater burden on a person than seeking closeness from other human beings. And what is a man that you want to search for closeness to him? He seems like a friend when it is to his benefit, or when he wants to, but they don't stand by a person in his difficult time (pirkei avos 2:3) But closeness to G-d, although He's not visible, there is no time that He doesn't want. Know my precious son, that the main wealth of a person is that which is in a person's hand and noone else can touch. All the more so, it should not depend on other people's whims. And one who seeks closeness to human beings, he is in need of gifts from flesh and blood. There's no difference between seeking physical gifts from others and seeking closeness (emotional gifts) from them. It's all the same. And therefore, there is no greater poor man than one who seeks closeness and love from others, and there is no greater wealth than he who has removed from himself the desire to be loved by other human beings." - (Sefer Zikaron Beis Kelm pg.265)

In summation, the best way to get the best perspective is to begin by taking those 10 minutes a day to develop a relationship with or reconnect to Hashem.

THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE

Rav Shalom Arush Shlita

Gratitude is also an important part of one's daily personal prayer agenda. A person who fails to thank Hashem for his myriad of blessings every day both fails to recognize those blessings and takes them for granted. But, with daily thanks to Hashem, we observe the wonderful favors that Hashem does for us every day and we don't fall into the pitfalls of ingratitude.

No one likes an ingrate. Yet, if we're not perseverant about designating daily time for thanking Hashem, we either fail to recognize all the gifts that Hashem gave us that day (every heartbeat, every breath, shelter, clothing – think about it, the list is endless!) or we forget to thank Him altogether.

The barometer of emuna is satisfaction with one's lot in life. When we ponder our blessings, we appreciate them much more and express our gratitude. In that respect, perseverant personal prayer enhances one's satisfaction with his lot in life, and is therefore conducive to emuna. Reinforced emuna enables us to be closer to Hashem.

The three elements of daily gratitude, self-evaluation, and teshuva that are all incorporated in our personal prayer are marvelous for emotional and spiritual health.

A DAILY REQUIREMENT

Rebbe Nachman of Breslev regards daily personal prayer as an absolute requirement for every person. He says (Likutei Moharan, I:100), "From young to old [literally, from "small to big"], one cannot be a truly upright [literally, a kosher] person without hitbodedut."

Why an hour a day? Many of our sages instructed the general populace to do at least an hour or more every day of personal prayer and soul-searching. Rebbe Nachman writes (ibid, II:25), "Hitbodedut is a lofty virtue and greater than anything, in other words, to designate an hour or more for secluded personal prayer in a room or out in the field and to converse with his Creator...this form of praying and speaking should be in his own spoken jargon." This daily hour is not only the key to a person's self composure, but a key to his emotional health and spiritual success. Without it, a person is liable to forget what he's really supposed to be doing in this world.

SELF EVALUATION

At the end of each day, a person has to ask himself what he's gained by transgressing the Torah, G-d forbid, and compare that with what he stands to lose by going against Hashem's will. On the other hand, he should ask himself what he's lost by doing a mitzvah, and compare that with what he stands to gain by doing Hashem's will (see Pirkei Avot, 2:1).

Anyone that engages in self evaluation is guaranteed to see the benefits of doing Hashem's will. He doesn't even have to wait until the world to come to reap his rewards, for in this world, he will already experience a sense of gratification, joy, and satisfaction. As for the next world, unfathomable rewards await him. Compare this to material amenities; we all know that they never satisfy us. Even when we dream of some material goal, once we reach it, we're not satisfied, especially since the neighbor has something better than we do. The jealousy and competition of this world leave us with a terrible bitter taste in our mouths.

Rebbe Nachman described the evil inclination as someone running in the marketplace with a closed fist. Everybody runs after him, because they think he has some rare treasure in his hand. After they've spent an entire day chasing him, he opens his hand and waves his empty palm at them, laughing at their gullibility. They wasted an entire day for nothing.

The same goes for bodily lusts. One would think that a person would be happy once he attains whatever he desires, but the opposite is true. Take for example the meal that a glutton eats in a fancy restaurant; after the meal, he has a guilty conscience about over-eating and breaking his diet. What's worse, he has to pay an exorbitant price for food that he now regrets eating. His body suffers, his conscience suffers, and his wallet suffers. Such is the outcome of bodily lusts.

On the other hand, mitzvahs impart a glowing illumination on the soul. Sure, maybe he didn't have the money to help a person in need, but once he strengthens himself and performs the mitzvah, his soul glows with gratification. With true self evaluation, when a person takes inventory of his day's deeds, he'll discover that a ten-dollar mitzvah is worth more to him than millions, for more than anything, the mitzvah brings a person closer to Hashem. Proximity to Hashem is a priceless commodity for the soul.

Daily self-evaluation helps us to keep our lives and goals in proper perspective. We can therefore conclude that a person who is close to self-evaluation is close to Hashem. By the same token, one who is far from self-evaluation is far from Hashem.

The way of the Torah is the way to a good life, marital bliss, successful children, adequate income and a myriad of other blessings. A Torah lifestyle is interesting, for one who learns Torah on a daily basis always has fresh challenges and intellectual stimulation. Compare this to a life of lust, bodily appetites, and pursuit of material amenities. They are all a mirage, a fantasy bubble that bursts and leaves a person with nothing. In fact, at the time of this writing, the world has entered a major financial recession, characterized by a crash of the stock exchange, bankruptcy of financial institutions and major corporations, and widespread unemployment. Millions who have devoted their lives to monetary goals are now left with nothing.

Without daily self-evaluation, a person will lack the inner strength and conviction that he needs to avoid the lies and pitfalls of this lowly material world. With daily self-evaluation, one will taste the sweetness of a life of truth and purpose.

YICHUD OF HISBODEDUS

A selection of teachings from the forth coming sefer of Rav Avraham Tzvi Kluger Shlita.

WORDS OF APPROBATION FOR THE FORTHCOMING BOOK "YICHUD OF HISBODEDUS":

"... LET US RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE, ENCOURAGE AND STRENGTHEN THE HEART OF THIS GREAT MAN WHO HAS DONE SO MUCH TO INCREASE TORAH AND FEAR OF HEAVEN IN THE WORD. A GAON AND EXPERT IN BOTH THE REVEALED AND CONCEALED PORTIONS OF THE TORAH, MOREINU HARAV AVROHOM TZVI KLUGER, SHLIT"A, RAV AND ROSH YESHIVAH OF THE NEIZER YISROEL COMMUNITY OF BEIT SHEMESH. HIS NAME AND FAME IS KNOWN ALL OVER THE WORLD. WITH HIS DROSHOS AND HIS WRITTEN WORDS, HE HAS THE MERIT TO REVEAL HASHEM AND HIS FAITH IN THE WORLD, AND TO IGNITE THE SPARKS OF JEWISH SOUL, AND TO HAVE HASHEM LOVED BY HIS CREATIONS." HaRav Yaakov Meir Shechter shlita

"WITH THESE SPECIAL WORDS, I GIVE HONOR TO THE TORAH AND I PRONOUNCE THE PRAISE OF OUR FRIEND, THE GAON AND CHOSSID, WONDROUSLY GREAT IN TORAH AND CHASSIDUS, THE MASTER IN TORAH, MOREINU HARAV AVROHOM TZVI KLUGER, SHLIT"A, RAV AND ROSH YESHIVAH OF NEIZER YISROEL, BEIT SHEMESH, WHOSE TEACHINGS ARE SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE LAND AND TO ALL ITS INHABITANTS. HEAVEN HAS GIVEN HIM THE PRIVILEGE TO BRIGHTEN THE EYES OF THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR HASHEM, AND TO QUENCH THE THIRST OF THOSE WHO YEARN TO CONNECT TO THE LIGHT OF THE TRUE TZADDIK." HaRav Mosher Kremer Shlita

"I PRESENTLY KNOW RAV KLUGER, AND I KNEW HIM BEFORE, IN HIS YOUTH, WHEN THE SPIRIT OF HASHEM HAD ONLY FIRST BEGUN TO RING IN HIS HEART. HE PUT ASIDE ALL OTHER CONSIDERATIONS, AND DEVOTED HIMSELF TO BECOME CLOSE TO HIS MAKER, MAY HE BE BLESSED. HE PUT ASIDE THE MANY ISSUES THAT PEOPLE ARE OCCUPIED WITH IN ORDER TO FOCUS ON UNITING WITH HIS CREATOR AND SERVING HIM WITH LOVE AND FEAR, AND TO UNITE THE HOLY ONE WITH HIS SHECHINAH. FROM THEN, AND ALWAYS, HE PLACED ALL HIS EFFORTS TO BECOME TOTALLY SUBSUMED INTO THE LIGHT AND HOLINESS OF THE TRUE TZADDIK, WITH COMPLETE AND GENUINE SELF-ABNEGATION, AND HE KEPT THE TZADDIK'S COUNSEL WITH SIMPLICITY AND DEVOTION, AND HE PURIFIED AND SANCTIFIED HIMSELF WITH GREAT TOIL WITH THE AVODAH THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US OVER THE GENERATIONS, AND HE HAS THE MERIT TO GATHER COMMUNITIES AND TO GIVE THOSE WHO ARE THIRSTY FOR HASHEM'S WORD TO DRINK FROM THE SOWING WELLSPRINGS OF WISDOM." HaRav Nissan Dovid Kivak

THE THEME OF THIS BOOK

The single most important point of this book is this: to know and comprehend and to take to heart the full depth of what it means "to speak as one friend to another." This refers to the depth of the bond in the hearts of the giver and the receiver. This is the path connecting

the Jewish people to the blessed Creator, Who, as a beloved, has called us “My sister, My beloved, My dove, My perfect one” (Shir HaShirim 5:2)¹.

The time of hisbodedus, the time of closeness and intimacy that a Jew has with his Maker, is the time that illuminates every other time of life—including his essence after Moshiach arrives, and in the World to Come. His time is the entrance to loving and revering God, to walking in His ways and keeping His mitzvahs.

For any of this to happen, one has to understand what intimacy is, and what it means to have a connection with another. In particular, it needs to be understood how to live this in practice, in daily hisbodedus. After all, a Jew’s daily life is “Filled with ups and downs, with all that Hashem asks of him. The soul is not always ready for intimacy. His work comes to explain the idea of hisbodedus-intimacy that Rebbe Nachman revealed and taught, that shines brightly across the spectrum of life. It speaks of the two very broad states in which one can have hisbodedus: feeling great and, quite often, feeling crummy. The latter has its own special language of intimacy.

So these essays do not speak only of the lofty, exalted times. Rather, they speak of all the states and situations that life and the soul encounter in hisbodedus:

- waiting and faith
- screaming and anguish
- moaning and regret
- a guilty conscience and estrangement
- pain and tears
- begging for rescue and taking stock of one’s actions
- returning to God and needing condolence
- making a plan and accepting what may happen

Each of these is a type of yichud, akin to “And if I should make my bed in Hell—You are here!” (Tehillim 139:8). We will speak about the challenges to living a hisbodedus life. We will shine the light of yichud on all of these, from a perspective of geulah.

YISROEL, IN YOU I TAKE PRIDE²

Hisbodedus is meant to produce a complete integration of Giver and receiver, a total and absolute connection with Hashem. From the outset, we need to understand that this does not happen immediately, but is a step-by-step process. Similar to what Chazal teach about

¹ As alluded to by the verse “Face to face (panim el panim) as a person speaks to his friend” (Shemos 33:11).
☑The word panim also refers to what is lifnim (inside) the friends.

² Cf. Yeshaya 49:3

prayer, that one stage follows another—“First one praises God and only afterwards makes his requests” (Brochos 32a)—there is also an order to readying one’s heart for hisbodedus.³

In any sort of bond or close relationship, like a conversation between family members, there isn’t an instant feeling of that strong closeness. A rational person patiently allows for prior stages that lack the richness of the deep feelings to come, because he knows “that’s how these things work.”

An inner spiritual life, the lot of the misboded, follows these same rules. The misboded needs to know—and believe—that slowly but surely he is advancing toward the desired goal. This chapter provides a synopsis of the ideas expanded upon in the rest of this book.

THE FIRST STEP

The first thing to know is this: the giver grants the receiver entry in a way that builds him, and that gives him a sense of his worth and contentment to be a receiver. For example, a beggar comes to a person’s home. The donor won’t settle for merely giving a contribution. He is glad to have the opportunity to give, smiles sincerely, and says so: “It’s good you came. The lucky beggar feels ten feet tall and recognizes how important he is. From this point on, his receiving will be totally different.

This is evidence of a willingness to connect, even before the virtues and hidden charm of the receiver’s soul are revealed. We have a clear indication to associate and provide for the receiver.

When a Jew hears that he is valued and appreciated, as if Hashem is telling him, “I’m glad you came,” he wakes up. He feels ten feet tall when he hears that Hashem desires him and wants him to speak with Him. These wonderful words flow from the Blessed Giver onto the Jew like life-giving dew.

The idea is this: If yichud in a state of broad-minded awareness is your goal, you can’t reach it with a tiny attitude. A Jew must buy in to the fact that God holds him dear. That, in turn, has to cast light on his current situation. No matter how difficult it is, he cannot think that it is a singular experience.

This is a crucial rule that our teachers shared: Don’t use smallness to escape smallness! Instead, illuminate your mind with thoughts of how great the Jewish neshomah is. Imagine your heart shouting out a bas kol announcing the greatness of your neshomah. Its light will

³ Queen Esther, a model of the Jewish soul, provides a practical example. When she wanted the king to grant her request, she didn’t just blurt it out. She asked only to dine with him, even after she knew that he wanted to help her. Calmly and patiently, she followed her plan until the time was ripe and she cried out, “Give me my life! Save my people!”

push away the darkness. Even if some difficulties still require attention and resolution, the right time will yet come.⁴

Feeling good about yourself is the ticket for doing hisbodedus. When a Jew reminds himself how important he is to Hashem, by believing that God is lifting him, he reignites his heart with his God given worth.

As we wrote earlier, we still haven't come to the fullest expression of the bond. We are just on the first step of being built and of hearing our praises. "That's why we don't yet have a strong feeling. But we still believe and recognize the taste and value of the current first step, and let ourselves get close enough to hear Hashem say how important we are.

TO REQUEST A FIVE CHAPTER PREVIEW OF THE SEFER **YICHUD OF HISBODEDUS** PLEASE EMAIL NEIZERYISROELUSA@GMAIL.COM

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⁴ Roundabout methods are the best way to deal with smallness. "Bigness pushes away smallness," the Arizal says. Reb Noson related the following story: Reb Gershon of Terhovitzta once complained to Rebbe Nachman that he was "finding it hard to pray and study the way he should. The Rebbe told him, "You just do good and work honestly at your devotions. If you keep at it and consistently do what you can, the good will remain and the bad will automatically disappear" (Chayei Moharan #447).

SECLUSION ¹

RAV TAL ZWECKER

SECLUSION FROM MAN AND SOCIETY TO HELP CHARACTER TRAIT DEVELOPMENT AND SELF PERFECTION.

This is perhaps the most common use of hisbodedus as a mussar tool. It would be categorized as external hisbodedus by Rabbeinu Avraham Maimonides son of the Rambam who wrote “The meaning of external hisbodedus is distancing oneself from people and detaching one’s feet from their habitat and separation from them.

This is all done to save oneself from the things that the general populace is steeped in. To be sure that one will not be disturbed by their sight or their conversations nor bothered by their ideas.”

Man and society tend to be a distraction from Hashem and His Torah. They are also viewed as likely to invite frivolity and sin such that a Jew who seeks wholeness in his character development and wishes to refine himself, attaining perfection must really seek temporary periods of isolation from society to seclude himself and work on his character.

Perhaps the earliest source that makes use of isolation and seclusion to this end is the Chovos Halevavos – the Duties of the Heart where Rabbeinu Bachya Ibn Pakuda writes “When you are inclined to allying your soul with the company of others and society at large to socialize and find pleasure in them, reflect then on the value of Bedidus - solitude and seclusion from others, and about all the drawbacks and evils of their friendship. . .The general rule of thumb is that most sins can only be transgressed by two or more people such as illicit relations, and bad business deals, and swearing falsely, and false testimony and all verbal sins can only be transgressed in public with other people. However seclusion Bedidus and isolation from people is a rescue from all the aforementioned sins it is also the stronger among those practices which bring about good character traits. It has already been said that the pillar of purity of heart is a love of Bedidus – seclusion and a partiality for solitude.” (Gate of Cheshbon haNefesh 3:17)

¹ Excerpt from: Sefer haHisbodedus. The forgotten path of self perfection and character development through seclusion and meditation. As seen through the classical Mussar sources. By Rav Tal Moshe Zwecker, Director Machon Be'er Mayim Chaim Publishing Chassidic Classics in the English Language www.chassidusonline.com chassidusonline@gmail.com

Here we see advocated an approach to sin that says we should flee from it. This approach has been advocated by the Rambam as well and in our times by the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovez HaRav Elazar Menachem Man Shach z"l of Bnei Brak in his collected letters "Truly wherever a man finds himself in our generation he is obligated to misbodedus - seclude or isolate himself to a certain degree and as the Rambam wrote regarding this practice in Chapter 6 of Hilchos Deos Halacha #1 all the more so in our times." (Volume 4 Letter #343)

The Rambam referred to states "The way man was created naturally inclines him after the opinions and actions of his friends and comrades to act in the custom of the society in his country. Therefore one should attach always himself to the righteous and dwell among the wise sages in order to learn from their deeds. He should distance himself from the wicked who tread the path of darkness so that he will not learn from their actions. This is as Shlomo said "He who walks among the sages will grow wise, and the wickedness of fools will cause one to become wicked."

And he said "Happy is the man etc." So if he one lived in a land that had evil customs and the people there do not walk on the just straight path he should move to a place where there are righteous people who do practice good customs. However if all the countries he knows and has heard of all go in an improper path as in our own times.

Or if he cannot reach a land that has just and upright ways because of the roving bands of brigands and thieves or sickness he should live Badad - alone in isolation as it says "Yeshev Badad Yidom – Sit alone and be silent." If these people are so evil and sinful that they will not let you live among them unless you mix with them and practice their evil ways go out and dwell in caves and crevices and deserts rather than practicing the way of sin as it says "Who will place me in the desert a lodge for guests?" "

This practice is also mentioned by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in Mesilas Yesharim – The Path of the Just where he writes that "Separation as practiced in custom is hisbodedus – seclusion and separation from society, in order to free the heart to the service [of Hashem] and to reflect upon it properly." (Chap. 14 The elements of Separation) and similarly "The most valuable of all [means] is seclusion – hisbodedus . . . Eliyahu and Elisha choose the mountains because of their practice of seclusion and hisbodedus.... this medium to be the most proper means to acquire perfection and separation in order to prevent themselves from being influenced by the inanity of their fellow man." (Chap. 15 The means to acquire Separation) He also writes "That which helps acquire this trait [of holiness] is hisbodedus and a lot of selfdiscipline and separation. This is done to get rid of distractions." (Chap. 26 The Trait of Holiness)

Another advocate of hisbodedus as a medium to achieve self-perfection in character development is Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz in Yaaros Devash he teaches that "The earlier pious Chassidim would always choose to sit dwelling in caves in order to meditate in seclusion –

lehisboded and to distance themselves from people which habituate and cause one to sin. The prophet himself cried out (Yirmeyah 9:1) Who will place me in the desert? And Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai peace be upon him sat in a cave for several years . . . he chose this place to dwell in order to acquire perfection . . . as is related in tractate Shabbos page 33b. Afterwards he and many of his generation dwelled learning Torah in caves as we find often in the Zohar . . . about sages who always dwelt in caves in order to acquire [the trait of] perfection and to distance themselves from people. ” (Part 1 Derush/Sermon 14 for the days of Selichos).

It is highly significant to note that Malbim to Kings I 19:3 notes that Eliyahu used to misboded - meditate most of his days and toil at self perfection to perfect his soul. Being that Eliyahu was a prophet and that most of the commentators including Malbim himself discuss hisbodedus in association with the prophets’ attempts to achieve prophetic revelation we can safely surmise that this form of hisbodedus is also the first step to the final version of hisbodedus which is a medium associated with meditation and revelation. In fact as we will discuss later the whole introductory portion of Rabbi Chaim Vital’s work Shaarey Kedushah on achieving ruach hakodesh, is devoted to developing one’s positive character traits. Since as Rabbi Chaim Vital teaches this is in fact the first step in seeking Divine revelation.

SECLUSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF HUMBLING ONESELF TO HASHEM AND REPENTING BEFORE HIM, OFTEN USING PERSONAL PRAYER.

One could in fact argue that this an extension of the first method mentioned above. However while that is true if we are using these four steps as rungs in a ladder, if each version of hisbodedus is practiced on its own the most practical difference between this seclusion and the earlier mentioned is that while the first type of hisbodedus is passive in that it preaches fleeing from society and its sins to achieve character development; this form of seclusion advocates active hisbodedus.

Here we find encouragement for repentance, soul searching and spontaneous prayer. This form of hisbodedus would also be characterized as external with some internal components such as the soul searching that one might perform.

One of the earliest sources advocating this type of seclusion is Rabbeinu Yonah haChasid of Gerondi in his Shaarei Teshuvah where he teaches that “One can achieve levels of humility and shame if he secludes himself in thought – behisboded to think of the greatness of Hashem and how great is the evil of a slandering mouth.” (Gate 1: 22)

Here we see an internal hisbodedus advocating a non-prophetic outcome. The mental hisbodedus that Rabbeinu Yonah advocates has as a goal achieving levels of humility and shame rather than revelations and prophecy that we shall see is the goal and purpose of

other forms of internal hisbodedus. This is another example why we have concluded that hisbodedus can be practiced as a mussar tool for the goals of character refinement, humility and repentance, without ever having a loftier goal in mind.

The two most detailed advocates of active hisbodedus in a pure mussar sense are Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Kayduner in his work Kav haYashar and Raaabbi Eliyahu Vidas in Reishis Chochmah and Totzaos Chaim. The Kav haYashar teaches that one must practice hisbodedus daily. He also details examples of what one should do and think once he has secluded himself. Here are a few examples “Therefore a piece of advice given to any man called Yisrael, to subjugate his hard heart, take some free time for himself and hisboded – isolate himself in a hidden place in order that he will feel great humility and humbleness, and so that the awe of the Holy One Blessed be He will seize him. He should ponder and think about the days and years of his life which have already passed and are were like naught, and how each day his time grows shorter and the day of his reckoning is approaching, the day of death which no one can estimate since it comes all of a sudden out of the blue.” (Chap. 1) And “This is what man should think about as he engages in hisbodedus daily, since it is an obligation to engage in hisbodedus in order to repair and rectify his sins and iniquities carefully.” (Chap. 12) And “Therefore one must engage in meditation in seclusion – lehisboded behisbodedus in the synagogue, he should speak with all his heart before The Knower of all Thoughts Blessed is He, he should weep and cry tears and sigh deeply with all his heart with a contrite broken heart remembering his previous sins and his youthful misdeeds.” (Chap. 23)

Here too it is important to note that in Chap.12 the Kav haYashar teaches that “It is a great obligation to perform hisbodedus carefully, maybe from above a spirit of wisdom, insight, understanding and fear / awe of Hashem will alight upon him to guide him on the proper path so that he should not stray from the path of our holy Torah. If we would receive with our own actions what the earlier sages received we would be able to fulfill our wishes and receive the desires of our heart.” This can be taken literally to mean that the ruach - spirit mentioned is akin to revelation or ruach hakodesh. That being the case we have more clear evidence to support Rabbi Chaim Vital’s conclusion that the first steps in the quest for revelation are character trait development and refinement.

Rabbi Vidas teaches in Totzaos Chaim #130 “At least once a month he should try and attempt to seclude himself le-hisboded in the synagogue or house of study to cleave unto his maker. He should [use] a little [of that time] in reviewing his deeds, a little in prayer and a little in Torah study. On this day that he designates for seclusion – misboded he should refrain from discussing matters that pertain to business with anyone at all.” And in Reishis Chochma Gate of Holiness 6:16 he writes “In order to acquire holiness it is necessary to be in a holy place. . . regarding this there are two aspects: either the place becomes sanctified through Torah study and prayer for example a Beis Midrash – House of Study or a Beis Knesses – synagogue or the place is holy meaning separate and isolated from people..”

The other detailed example of this form of active hisbodedus is Rabbi Elazar Azkari in Sefer Charedim. Here a very important teaching is quoted in the name of the Holy Arizal himself. The Arizal taught that all forms of self-mortification in order to aid on the path of repentance apply only to those not engaged in full time learning. In fact the Arizal advocates hisbodedus as the single most important tool for the ben-Torah to use, so much so that it should be put to use weekly or at least monthly. This is highly significant since we find similar teachings in the poskim of halacha in regards to a ben-Torah skipping extra prayers and where he is also instructed in learning Mussar. (The two approaches are quite complimentary and the parallel is hard to miss. Both indicate that a ben-Torah must have a different approach than the average Jew. Both conclude that Mussar is obligatory. One advocates study of mussar works while the other practicing hisbodedus.) See the Mishna Berurah Orach Chaim 1:4 (MB 12) where he relates “He who is a Baal Torah – master of Torah and has a heart to understand and learn can hold back from saying various extra prayers and supplications printed in the Siddurim. It is better to learn instead. A man is also obligated to establish set times to learn mussar works daily whether a small or large amount. (See also #26 in the Shaar HaTzion where he adds that this is an even greater obligation than learning Mishnah.) ”

Here is what Rabbi Azkari says “I found written in the books of the G-dly Kabbalist the Holy Pious Rabbi Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi in a handwritten work called Beis Middos – “Whatever you find written in the works of the rishonim rebuking sin including self-mortification. . . .were all meant only for those who do not toil in Torah study. However whoever is engaged in Torah study as a profession. . . .has the following method for self improvement; he should not weaken himself nor take away from his studies, rather one day a week he should distance himself from people and seclude himself and yisboded between himself and his Maker. He should unite his thoughts with Him as if he is standing before Him on the Day of Judgment. He should speak to Hashem as would a servant to his Master and a son to his Father.

It is found in several books that hisbodedus and separation and dveykus were customs practiced by the pious Chasidim of Israel. When they were secluded alone they would remove the thoughts of this world and tie their thoughts to Master of everything. The aforementioned Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzhak learned that this method is seventy times more beneficial to the soul than learning. According to man’s strength and ability he should separate and seclude himself ve’yisboded one day a week, or one day every 15 days, or once a month and no less.” (Mitzvas Teshuva Chap. 3)

SECLUSION IN ORDER TO ISOLATE ONESELF, BLOCK OUT DISTRACTION AS A PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION.

This is by far the most commonly found reference to hisbodedus. Almost all the commentators to Tanach use the word in this sense. This usage of hisbodedus is external but its sole purpose is to act as a preparatory device for revelation and prophecy. We shall see below that the patriarchs and the prophets from Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov to Moshe, Eliyahu and Daniel they all preferred going to the mountains and other places in order to be alone and isolate themselves from distraction. They would then meditate and practice the final internal level of hisbodedus of the mind in attempts to achieve prophecy.

Here are a few examples in the Torah literature that speak for themselves:

Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, the Rambam in his Mishne Torah teaches that “The prophets could not all prophecy whenever they wanted to. Rather they would direct their thoughts and sit in happiness with a good joyful heart and meditate in seclusion – misbodedim.” (Mada, Hilchos Yesodei haTorah 7:4) “The mountain is a place of hisbodedus (seclusion & meditation) for prophecy since people do not see distractions there which could distract the mind from concentrating thoughts on Hashem” (Rabbeinu Bachaya Bereshis 46:32)

“And Moshe was a shepherd. Moshe took this occupation as was the custom of the early righteous Tzadikim as we find by the righteous Hevel, and the patriarchs, and the tribes. The reason being so that they could distance themselves from civilization which can be a cause of sin and furthermore in order to meditate in prophecy - lehisboded benevuah.” (Rabbeinu Bachaya Shemos 3:1)

“It was necessary to mention that he was a shepherd since most of the prophets attained their prophecy through shepherding because prophecy requires hisbodedus - seclusion.” (Kli Yakar Shemos 3:1)

“After the desert - it should have said to the desert rather the meaning implies that he tried to direct them to a more deserted place. He specifically chose to direct them to the desert since he would be able to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded and to investigate after Divinity or G-dliness – Elokis and similar matters.” (Netziv Haemek Davar Shemos

3:1)

ISOLATING THE MIND IN ACTUAL MEDITATION TO REACH A LEVEL OF EXPANDED CONSCIOUSNESS, MERIT REVELATION AND A LEVEL AKIN TO PROPHECY.

The final form of hisbodedus is the least practiced. It once served as a form of attaining prophecy and revelation. Today we have no prophets. However there are clear indications

that using all the former methods of hisbodedus can lead one to this final step, the pinnacle of the pyramid where one can attain a high level of dveykus and cleave to Hashem.

The most clear example is surprisingly found in the Shulchan Aruch where the author is teaching us the Halacha – Jewish Law as to what direction and meaning our prayers are supposed to take on “This is what the Chassidim and men of great deeds would do, they would misbodedim meditate in seclusion and concentrate in their prayers until they divested themselves of their physical form, strengthening their mental faculty or the power of their mind until they reached a level close to prophecy.” (Orach Chaim 98:1)

Another very clear example of hisbodedus meditation is from Rabbi Moshe Cordevero known as the Ramak in his work Pardes Rimonim. “The prophets peace be upon them would achieve [revelation] through the letters with great secluded meditation – behisbodedus gadol, and a refined pure soul.” (Gate 21 Chap. 1) “Some of the earlier sages explained that by transforming and combing the 72 letter name and other [Divine] names through much great secluded meditation – behisbodedus gadol, a righteous Tzadik can merit a minor revelation of a heavenly voice called bas kol meaning that Hashem’s spirit can speak through him with His words on his tongue.” (Gate 30 Chap. 3)

But perhaps the clearest example of hisbodedus as both a mussar tool in its external sense and as process for revelation and attaining the level of Divine intuition known as Ruach haKodesh in its internal sense is a remarkable sefer called Shaarei Kedushah. Its author Rabbi Chaim Vital was the foremost student of the holy Arizal. While Shaarei Keduash is meant as a path for attaining Ruach haKodesh as the author states, it is mostly devoted to mussar in a classic character refinement sense.

However in the final culminating chapters we find the purpose of the sefer to once again come into view when Rabbi Chaim Vital once again introduces the final goal of hisbodedus by outlining the following procedure “Once he is ready and prepared to receive Ruach Hakodesh – the holy spirit **after he has acquired and ingrained all the positive character traits** (emphasis my own). He should enter his house alone after having immersed himself [in a mikvah] in sanctity, in a place where he will not be disturbed by people’s voices or the chirping of birds. If it can be after midnight this is better. He should shut his eyes and divest his thoughts of all worldly matters as if his soul has departed as if he is dead and unfeeling. Afterwards he must concentrate strengthening himself to think about the higher worlds and to connect the root of his soul binding it there to the higher lights. He should imagine as if his soul has left [his body] and has risen up above, he should depict and draw the higher worlds as if he is standing there. If he has done a yichud – unification he should think about it to draw light and the influx of blessings known as shefa to all the worlds. He should intend to receive his portion as well. VeYisboded beMachshava – He should meditate, secluding his thoughts as if the spirit has rested upon him for some time. If he feels nothing he must not yet be ready or prepared. Therefore he must strengthen his resolve to serve Hashem in

holiness and continue to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded as we described until he merits that the spirit rests upon him.” (The Eighth Gate - to describe he who comes to sanctify himself in our times in a very brief manner)

