

Hitbodedut & Jewish Meditation: How To

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How? Set aside time each day to meditate in a room or in the fields. While there, speak out whatever is in your heart, with words of grace and supplication. These words should be in the language you normally speak, so that you will be able to express yourself as clearly as possible. When you entreat God in the language you are used to, the words are closer to your heart and will therefore flow more easily (Likutey Moharan II, 25).

When? The ideal time for hitbodedut is at night, when the world around you is asleep. During the day, people are busy rushing after all the material and physical pleasures of this

world. Although the night time is the best time, every time is a good time. If you can't get up in the middle of the night for hitbodedut, how about trying to find the time to converse with God in the early morning, either before or after the morning prayers – before you get caught up in the rush of yet another busy day? And if that's no good, then really any other time is alright. Whenever...wherever...just remember: the quieter the better.

The main factor is consistency. Rabbi Avraham Chazan used to say: Hitbodedut which is consistent (every day) is thousands upon thousands of times greater than hitbodedut that is interrupted. (Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Rosen).

Where? Regarding where to practice hitbodedut, Rebbe Nachman taught that it's best to find a location which is conducive to meditation and which will allow you to concentrate on your words undisturbed. A private room is good, a park better, out in the fields or forests still better. In short, the quieter and more secluded the place is, the more ideal it is for hitbodedut. But what if you can't go to a park? Or what if you find that whenever you do go, you find yourself concerned for your safety and cannot concentrate on the task at hand? Rebbe Nachman said that it is very good to have a special room set aside for Torah study and prayer. Such a private room, office or study is especially beneficial for secluded meditation and conversation with God. You can also practice hitbodedut under your talit, or even seclude yourself with God while in bed under your covers!

What? Rebbe Nachman teaches: It is good to begin your hitbodedut by saying: Today I am starting to attach myself to You! Start anew every day. If yesterday was good, I hope that today will be even better. If yesterday wasn't the way it should have been, well today is a new beginning and it will be good (Tzaddik 437). The Rebbe himself would start each day by "placing" the day's activities in God's hands, asking that he do everything according to God's will. "This way," he would

say, "I have no worries. I rely on God to do as He sees fit" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom 2). Start your day by having hitbodedut that everything go according to God's plan, that you act in accordance with His desire. By doing this, your prayers are automatically focused on God's drawing you closer to Him.

Rebbe Nachman was once talking to one of his followers about clothing: One must pray for everything. If your clothes are torn, pray to God to give you new clothes. Although the main thing to pray for is closeness to God, still, you must pray for all your needs, large and small.

Hitbodedut encompasses the entire spectrum of life: from the simple, daily affairs of man, to the lofty spiritual heights to which we aspire. When Rebbe Nachman taught that we need to express ourselves in prayer before God for everything we can think of – he meant everything! Whether we need good health (and who doesn't?), success in business and livelihood (and who doesn't?), help with raising our children (and who doesn't?), caring for elderly (or not so elderly) parents, or whatever our hearts' desires, we must raise our eyes, hearts and mouths in supplication before God. We must ask Him to make sure that everything goes alright. If it does, good. If not, pray again. And again. And again. Hitbodedut is not something we do once and then stop. Hitbodedut is daily.

Certainly, a person must focus his prayers on the ultimate goal – serving God. Pray, plead, beg, ask and beseech God that He reveal His ways to you, that He show you His mercy, that you merit coming closer to Him. Pray that you will be able to perform His will, each mitzvah in its own time. Pray to feel the beauty in Torah, pray to feel the sweetness in the mitzvot. Reb Nachman Chazan once labored tirelessly to erect Reb Noson's sukkah. That evening, while sitting in the sukkah, Reb Nachman remarked, "There is a different feeling of joy and satisfaction when sitting in a sukkah which one has worked very hard to build." Reb Noson replied, "That may be, but this

you haven't yet tried. Spend an entire day crying out to God: Master of the Universe! Let me taste the true taste of sukkah!' Then see what feelings a person can experience in the sukkah" (Aveneha Barzel, p. 52 12).

Once you grow accustomed to hitbodedut, you'll begin to see how it's possible to pray for everything – from the most exalted spiritual desires to the most trivial material needs, and everything between. Don't be put off by the following scenario which sometimes happens. There are those who, as they develop their hitbodedut, begin to feel awkward about praying for success in business and the like. "Here I am," this person says, "I'm (finally) praying to God, and all I can think about is money?" If it's not money, it's something else material, and it seems to him that this is not what hitbodedut is all about. Feeling guilty, he begins focusing his prayers exclusively on the spiritual. But, because his heart isn't fully in it, his prayers begin to slacken. In time, his hitbodedut might even stop altogether. Regarding this, Reb Noson once said: Pray to God for a livelihood. Specifically for livelihood. You'll probably start feeling embarrassed that you're asking and pleading so much for the material and you'll eventually pray for the spiritual, too (Aveneha Barzel p.49).

Simply and openly. Rebbe Nachman said to Reb Noson: A person should practice hitbodedut in a simple, straightforward manner, as if he were conversing with a close friend (Tzaddik #439; Kokhavey Or p.12 #54). Have you ever had a problem which you spoke about to a friend, a true friend? You start saying something, this leads to something else, and before you know it you're revealing the innermost secrets of your heart. The words just seem to flow. This is because you're close to that friend, and you see no reason to hold back. Hitbodedut should be the same way:

Like a child. Rebbe Nachman also drew another analogy concerning hitbodedut. In his desire to make it crystal clear how we are to approach this most important practice, he said

that it is very good to pour out our thoughts before God, like a child pleading before his father. God calls us His children, as is written (Deuteronomy 14:1), "You are children to God." Therefore, it is good to express your thoughts and troubles to God like a child complaining and pestering his father (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom 7).

The thing to remember about hitbodedut is this: Choose whatever topic you feel close to at that time. Put in whatever feeling you have. Do it daily.