



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



Candles lit at the tomb of King David just outside of Jerusalem in the City of David.



find the
ALONE

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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.

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

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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, with-

out *yisbuv badaat*, 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 *yisbuv badaat* 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 baba*, 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.¹ 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 badaat* 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 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 nega-

tive 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. It is also the world in which our forefathers exist and can be revealed simply through dedicating a few quiet moments a day to gradually disengage from what is not connected to the essential self.

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 restriction of materiality and transform the quality of your life. 🌟

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1. R' Avraham ben Rambam