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[Home](#) > Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus Preparation - 002 Preparing To Be Alone

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A Baby In Its Mother For Nine Months - Alone

After the introductory first chapter, we can now begin to recognize our power of “*levad*”, being “alone.” Since some people can’t progress as easily in this avodah as others do, we will begin from the first, basic step in this, so that everyone studying these words can gain.

For nine months, a baby is in its mother’s stomach, alone from the world. Why did Hashem make such a situation? What is the lesson behind this? It is to show us that we have a power to be alone and secluded from the world. This state enabled us that we can always be “alone” when we choose to.

Why is this ability so important that it had to be given to use before we were born? It is because we spend all our life amongst people. Since we are always around people, we need to be alone sometimes (as we will see), and for this reason Hashem gave us this ability even before we were born, so that we have the ability to start out with it in life.

Now we will explain this avodah to be “alone “ - *levad*, or “*hisbodedus*.”

The Initial Struggle To Be Alone

Most people naturally love to be around people, and they do not like being alone. It does not come naturally to them to be alone. For these people, we will focus on how they can acquire the ability to be alone.

Every person - man or woman - needs to have times of being alone. What you do during this time is a separate discussion, but the basic point is that everyone must have times of being alone.

This will be a bit of a battle at first. It is hard for a person to get used to having times of being alone when he’s not previously used to it. Yaakov had to fight with the angel “alone”, which implies that it is indeed a struggle to learn how to be “alone.”

There are people who by nature are terrified of the thought of being alone. As soon as they are alone, they are seized with anxiety, and they will immediately do something, such as calling a friend. Others have an easier time being secluded, as they are more reserved by nature; **those people do not need this chapter** and they can go to the next step. But for most people, it is hard to learn how to be alone and not to run away from this, and they will need the guidance in this chapter.

How To Get Used To Being Alone

We can advise for this that one can do something light and relaxing as he is alone, such as listening to music or to do the laundry. In this way, it doesn't feel as if you're totally alone, because at least you feel like you're doing something.

Each person needs to figure out what calms him down, and then use that to start out with when he is alone.

Every person, in either case, needs ***fifteen minutes a day of being alone***.

As you get used to fifteen minutes a day of being alone more and more, your soul gets used to the concept, and it will be calmed. With some people it takes more time than others. Eventually after getting used to this, it will become natural to you – and it won't feel hard to do this anymore.

If you feel that it has become natural for you to do this, you can now proceed to the next step – but only on condition that it is indeed natural for you, and that this isn't stressful at all.

What Do You Like To Do When You're Alone?

After this comes the next step: do things that calm you down during these fifteen minutes. We will soon learn what these things are that can calm us down.

All of us do things we enjoy; some things we enjoy doing with others, and other things we enjoy doing when we are alone. We need to discover what we enjoy doing when we are alone, as this will help us during these fifteen minutes of being alone. We are referring to small things we enjoy doing when we are alone. Take out a pen and paper and write down what you enjoy doing when you are alone.

Again, let us summarize the two steps. Step One is to have fifteen minutes of being alone. Step Two is to do things you enjoy during these fifteen minutes. For those who find it easier to combine the two steps at once, they can do so, but for others who do not find this so easy, they should split this up into two steps: first make fifteen minutes a day of being alone, and then discover what you enjoy doing when you're alone.

As a person gets used to this more and more, he acquires the ability of "*levad*" – both to be externally alone, as well as to enjoy what it's like to be alone – and a third gain as well: to find tranquility in being alone.

Choose Quieter Actions

After you make a list of what you enjoy doing when you're alone, think about the following: Which of these actions on the list would you consider to be louder or quieter actions? The reason we need to do this is because we are trying to gain the quietest kind of situation possible. The soul is only reached through silence, for it is written, "*For Hashem is not found in a loud voice, but in a soft, subtle sound.*" For this reason, the deepest silence will help us get there.

We all understand that we need physical seclusion for this, but it's harder to understand why we need to quiet our surroundings even when we are alone. Most people have a hard time understanding this part of the avodah, and for this reason, they never end up enjoying the silence; they definitely never get to the third step, which is to feel the tranquility in this.

Therefore, it is very important for us to figure out what we enjoy doing when we are alone.

“Hisbodedus” Is Not Just Meditation

Some of the material in these classes is well-known to many people, such as the need for physical quiet. But the other aspects contained in these classes – the need for internal quiet – are matters which will seem foreign to us at first, and they are concepts which will take time to become opened up to you. It is to develop a whole new kind of thinking and lifestyle which people are not used to.

There are various therapies developed by the secular world that involve meditation, but they only cover the external aspect of being alone. Meditation in the secular world is a superficial act in which the general instructions are, “Do A, now do B, then do C.” This doesn’t help us reach our internal world. The Torah approach to meditation is that we need all this calm and quiet as a way for us to open up our soul.

Becoming Mature

The third step we mentioned – feeling the tranquility in being alone – can now be understood better.

As we get older, our tastes for things change. When we are children, we enjoyed certain hobbies, and when we get older, our tastes and enjoyments change. Children often like loud music and action, while older people often enjoy quieter music and quiet. This shows us that we need to mature our tastes a bit and learn how to get used to enjoying subtle matters. The reason that older people enjoy quiet more is because as the soul matures, its needs change – it wants calm and quiet, not action and noise.

There are people who still act very childish as they get older, and they still like action and noise. This is actually a reflection of an inner problem in the person – he’s still acting like a child, and he hasn’t matured yet.

So we should look at the list of things we’ve written down and see which actions are loud and which are quiet, and then only do what’s quiet.

When we become used to enjoying the quiet, we will find ourselves being opened up to a whole new world of enjoyment.

Summary of the Three Steps

Let us summarize the three steps:

Step One – Physical quiet every day for fifteen minutes.

Step Two – Do enjoyable things during these quiet times (for others who don’t need this, they can just have the first step).

Step Three – Do things that are not just enjoyable, but things which are calm and quiet. This is actually the introduction to entering our inner self, a world of enjoyable solitude.

Tips To Help Yourself Relax

Here are some more ideas of how to actualize all this.

1. Find a place that you like to be alone in, such as nice looking room, or a room with pretty paintings in it.
2. Put on nice (Jewish) music that is relaxing.

3. There should be a window in the room in which you can see the clear blue sky, which you can look into as you're there and enjoy the relaxing view.
4. It would also be a good idea to put something that smells fragrant in the room, such as *besamim*.
5. Eat a light treat in the room that relaxes you.

We have so far mainly discussed the external ways how to attain quiet, but in the next class, we will discuss how to develop internal quiet.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE ROV

QUESTION: *When being alone, I find it very hard to feel calm, because my mind is full of many kinds of stressful thoughts. What can I do to calm myself down?*

ANSWER: It is indeed difficult to find calm when you are alone, and that is why we have these classes. If you do what it says here, you will be able to help yourself. Many people mistakenly skip the step of first calming yourself down and try to jump to the higher stage of being strongly connected to *ruchniyus*, but they never get there, because they missed the first basic step.

QUESTION: *A metzora (leper) is punished with being secluded, so doesn't this imply that being secluded is a bad thing?*

ANSWER: Because the *metzora* was "alone" in an evil way - by being far from Hashem - he must learn how to be alone in a good way.

QUESTION: *If I daven with concentration for 10-15 minutes a day, will that be considered "hisbodedus"?*

ANSWER: This is similar to the first question. We cannot jump to *ruchniyus* if we aren't calmed first. We have to start from a basic point in order to get to the higher point; we need to work our way upwards - from the bottom up.

QUESTION: *I am alone a lot - I do not have children, and my husband works most of the day and isn't around. Do I need to make time for being alone? (And I enjoy being alone all day - I read and I listen to shiurim, and I enjoy just being alone doing nothing).*

ANSWER: Are you choosing to be alone, or is it due to life circumstances? **(Yes, I choose to be alone, because it's enjoyable)**. If you are choosing to be alone all day, this is extreme, and it isn't a balanced way to live. When you are alone all day, do you get to know yourself better and feel that you have entered yourself very inwardly (*Ievad*)? **(Yes, I do.)** Do you feel that because you are alone all day that you have come to understand yourself better? **(I think I'm at the beginning of that)**. It is wonderful that you strongly identify with the need to be alone, but the goal of these classes is to live by your discoveries which will result as these 15 minutes of quiet time.

QUESTION: *All this alone time is making me very depressed; I really want to know my inner self, but I'm getting all kinds of terrible thoughts about myself all day - all day, not just during this quiet time. I know it's all coming from my yetzer hora, but I still really, really want to be close to Hashem. How can I keep onto my ratzon without getting depressed?*

ANSWER: It must be that you are not enjoying life. You need to calm your body in order to reach your

soul. For this reason, don't jump to deep thoughts, but instead focus more on getting a physically comfortable environment, in the manner which we have described.

QUESTION: *If I read a book during this quiet time, will that help me calm down?*

ANSWER: Yes, read something enjoyable, but don't read nonsense. Only use this as a temporary means to get yourself calm.

QUESTION: *In the last class, the Rov said that our ratzon for hisbodedus has to become our strongest ratzon. If I have a ratzon that my husband should feel better, does that hold back my ratzon for hisbodedus being number one?*

ANSWER: That is a physical *ratzon*, but your deepest "spiritual" *ratzon* should be your *ratzon* for *hisbodedus*. Do you want your husband to get better for a physical reason, or for a spiritual reason? (***I don't understand - my husband is my whole being! He's the important matter in my life - I feel that he is who I am!***) Of course your husband is very important in your life, but "you" are not your "husband". You need to develop your own spiritual world, and that of course can also be given over to your husband and to others - but you need to realize that you need to have your own *ratzon* to develop ***your ruchniyus***.

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