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## Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus Preparation - 010 Developing Inner Listening

### Summary Of The Previous Classes

With the help of Hashem, we have discussed the beginning two stages of *hisbodedus*: the first stage, **habatah** – inner sight of our actions – and the second stage, **hakarah**, inner recognition of ourselves.

We mentioned that there are two levels to *hisbodedus*: external seclusion, and internal seclusion. External seclusion is when a person secludes himself where there are not any other people. Internal seclusion allows us to reach deeper and deeper into ourselves to become more and more “alone.”

After we become totally alone *mammash* we can reach the final level of being alone with Hashem. (We have not yet addressed how we get to the final level which is the eventual goal.)

We have discussed that first a person needs to become internally calm which allows a person to use that calmness to begin to know his inner self better. After that, we discussed that we need to develop the abilities of **habatah** (inner “sight”) and then **hakarah** (inner “recognition”). This requires us to “see” deeply and reflect, with our thoughts, into the actions we have done. Through that, we come to understand ourselves better. [[classes #07, #08 and #09](#) [1]].

### Hakshavah - Inner Listening

Now we come to the next stage, which is “**hakshavah**”, inner “listening.” We will learn about developing a new kind of inner sense: to “listen” to what’s going on in our inner world.

When we listen to others during conversations, there are degrees to how well we are listening. Some people listen better, and some listen only on a superficial level. When a person isn’t calm inside, he can’t listen so well to others. The calmer a person is inside himself, the better of a listener he is to others.

For example, if a child asks something from his parents at night when all the other kids have already gone to sleep and the house is quiet his parents will have his full attention. But if the child asks his parents the same thing at lunchtime when everyone has returned from their various schools or on Friday afternoon when the family is busy preparing for Shabbos, it is hard for the parents to give the child full attention. It’s hard to listen well when we are busy.

We can bring many examples, but the point is that we have different levels of listening. Our soul is able to reach deeper kinds of listening than our physical ears do. There are levels of how intense we

can listen to something.

If we have worked on the concepts until now, we have become somewhat calmer, and our listening will have been improved as a result.

### **Exercise #1: Practice Being A Good Listener**

Therefore, before we progress, we should work on the following practical exercise: we should listen deeply to another person every day for five minutes,. This can be either with your spouse or children. Listen to them from a deep, calm place in yourself.

This helps you become aware of your ability of inner listening and to develop it further. It will not just help you listen better in the superficial sense, but it will give you a whole deeper kind of listening, an inner kind of listening.

### **Exercise #2: Try To Listen Even When You're Harried**

Also, even when we are busy, we should try to listen to others as well with as much attention as we can currently give. Although this is a bit difficult, we should still try to listen to others even as we are very busy with something. This will not be with the same depth of listening as when we are calm, but it is still beneficial for us, because it helps us train ourselves to listen accurately to others even when we find it hard to listen.

### **Listening To Others**

The more we get used to this "inner listening (not just with our ears) we will be able to connect better with other Jews and feel a great love for them. We will be able to reach true *Ahavas Yisrael* through listening deeply to others. When you really listen to others from an inner place in yourself, you don't just hear his words; you hear the feelings going on inside him. You get to the heartbeat of what he is saying. You feel his heart talking to you, and not just the words he is saying.

When we really listen to others, we access our inner self, and then we listen to others from our inner self. This is very relevant if you are a therapist, psychologist or social worker. When you listen to others who come to you with their problems, don't just listen to what they are saying. Listen to what's going on in their heart. Feel their pain and their other emotions; don't just superficially hear their words and take note of what they are saying. When you listen to them from your inner self, you feel another's feelings as he talks to you.

### **Listening To Yourself**

Until now we have discussed internal ***hakshavah*** and external ***hakshavah***, but both are really external forms of listening because they are listening to someone "outside" of one's self - listening to someone else.

True listening does not just include really listening to other people, but we also need to listen to ourselves. A person listens to himself - from himself. We need to be able to hear what we are saying, like when we *daven*. The *halacha* is that one has to be able to hear what he is saying in *davening* and when we say *Shema*. However, this is only the superficial layer of listening. There is also an inner layer of listening - to listen to our actual self. Listening to our inner self is a way for us to access our inner self.

Most people never heard of this concept. We are used to a noisy world, and our ability of inner listening is compromised. We have such a noisy lifestyle - hearing others talking all the time affects

our ability to listen inside ourselves. But if we become calmer, we can listen to the inner sound in ourselves, which has a very subtle kind of frequency that we aren't used to. It is an **inner voice** [1] (*kol penimi*) inside ourselves which we can begin to hear when we become calmer inside ourselves.

We all recognize physical sounds. When we listen to someone speak, we hear a vocal sound leave another person's sound box, where it then enters our own physical body. But there is more to these sounds we are taking in. Whenever a person talks, there is an inner sound in the words, and it a sound coming from his soul. It is conveying a message.

To illustrate, if there is a bug walking by us and it is rubbing against a leaf, we usually can't hear it amidst a noisy day. But if things are quiet, like at nighttime, we can listen to the ant moving and making little noises. We hear it ruffle against the leaves.

In the same way, when we get calm inside, we can hear subtle kinds of sounds. We can begin to hear the sounds of the soul, present in the words that a person speaks.

On the deepest level of listening, a person can hear the *kol demamah dakah* (a "soft, subtle voice") of the *Bas Kol*, [2] and even deeper of *Ruach HaKodesh*. [3] and even deeper, of *Nevuah*. [4] These are the highest levels of hearing spiritual sounds which we are not analyzing now. We are discussing the levels of the revealed *nefesh* which each and every one of us is in touch with to some extent. Even if we don't reach such exalted levels, we can still develop an ability to hear the refined sounds of the soul, by attaining some quiet by avoiding the great noise that envelops us in this world.

When Adam sinned, Hashem called to him, "Where are you?" Adam was afraid of retribution and went into hiding. The simple meaning of why he went into hiding from Hashem's voice was because he was ashamed. The deeper meaning is that ever since the sin, mankind cannot hear the spiritual kind of sound to its fullest level.

Yet, we can still get in touch with spiritual sounds the more we enter inward into ourselves. For example, we have the *shofar*, which is not meant to just to hear it in the physical sense. The *shofar* serves to awaken us to spirituality. So we still have, to some degree, an ability to hear spiritual sounds.

This concept sounds foreign to anyone who hasn't become calmer inside himself yet. If someone has become calmer inside himself, though, he will be able to identify with the concept we are describing.

The more we attain inner quiet, the more we can access our inner listening. When you listen to yourself, it's not with your physical ears, but with your heart. [5] It is when you pay attention to what's going on in your heart. It is an awesome inner ability that we have. If we reveal this ability from within ourselves, we will discover an amazing kind of self-awareness in ourselves. It will manifest as a clear perception towards one's inner self.

### **Listen From Your Heart, Not From Your Ears**

Previously we discussed *habatah* and *hakarah* - to use the thoughts of our mind and to reflect deeply which involved our intellect. Now we discussed *hakshavah*, which is not an intellectual kind of ability, but rather a "heart" ability - to listen with our heart, to listen to what's going on inside ourselves.

It must be emphasized that today's class is not for everyone. If someone has worked on these concepts so far, the following stage we will present will be easier to understand. If someone has understood these concepts intellectually, but he has a hard time implementing them on a practical level, he can still understand what is to come. Needless to say, if someone has reached that deep place of silence within themselves where they can develop this power of *hakshavah*. even the more

so will they understand what we will be presenting in the next classes.

## **Disconnect From Physicality And Fix Your Worst Middah [6]**

Firstly, in order to benefit from these classes we must realize that, we need to disconnect somewhat from the physical world. We need to slowly detach from all the physicality of this world in order to attach ourselves to the inner, spiritual world.

Secondly, we will need to reflect on our middos before we continue. Each of us contains four elements in our soul – fire, wind, water, and earth. Each person has one element that is more dominant than the other elements, which is his main weakness. The element of fire is the root of the trait of haughtiness. The element of wind is the root of forbidden speech, mockery, and falsehood. The element of water is the root of desires. The element of earth is the root of sadness and laziness.

Each of us has one particular bad trait which is getting in our way; so each of us needs to figure out what our worst *middah* is. This must be done simultaneously with all the inner work we are trying to do. Without discovering our weakest point, it is very hard to succeed.

## **Questions And Answers With The Rav**

**Q1: *The Rav always teaches that our bad middos are to be viewed as a “garment” over our soul, as our actual soul is always pure; but in this class the Rav has said that we need to find the worst middah in our soul. So is our worst middah coming from just our body - the garment over our soul - or is it located in our actual soul?***

**A:** The worst *middah* is coming from our body, which cloaks our soul; it manifests in the lowest part of our soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*.

**Q2: *Can the Rav give practical examples of how we can apply habatah-hakarah-hakshavah, in particular for a woman who has just gone through a stressful time with a child and she wants to better recognize her child’s needs?***

**A:** In these classes we are discussing **in general** how one can get in touch with the soul, and from there, one can improve other details in his life. If one learns how to develop his inner abilities of *habatah*, *hakarah*, and *hakshavah*, then he will be able to notice other things as well in his life, though, as a result. For example, when a child is crying, one will be able to realize why the child is crying, if he has developed his abilities of *habatah-hakarah-hakshavah*. When a baby cries, sometimes he’s hungry or in pain; we can discern the reason why he’s crying, with the more we deepen our abilities of *habatah* and *hakarah*. But there are other times in which he’s crying for a deeper reason – it is because he was used to learning Torah from an angel in his mother’s womb. We can only think like this if we have developed the ability of *hakshavah*, discussed in this class. But this is just one example of how we can begin to hear things in an inner way.

Learning about these inner abilities should be learned as a way for us to improve ourselves on an individual level, and it is not meant to be learned to apply it to the rest of what goes on in our life. But obviously, if you learn about how to develop these abilities within yourself, on a purely individual level, you will come to improve other areas in your life as a result (such as better recognizing your child).

**Q3: *When I attain inner quiet, I feel clarity, but what does it mean that there is an inner voice in me?***

**A:** What you are describing is *habatah*, that when you quiet your mind, you feel a new perspective on things. But this is still within your thinking intellect. After using our intellectual abilities of *habatah* and *hakarah*, a person can access the next stage, which is *hakshavah* – to “listen” with your heart. This is *not* an intellectual ability, but an ability you use your **heart** for. It is **when you use your heart to pay attention and hear to the inner voice behind something**. It is a hard time to describe what it is.

Your power to think is only using the external part of your intellect, but the inner layer of the intellect is the ability of *habatah*, inner sight. The ability of *hakshavah* is a different sense; sight and hearing are two different senses, and this is true with regards to inner sight (*habatah*) and inner listening (*hakshavah*) as well. Inner listening, *hakshavah*, is totally coming from your heart, and not from your brain\mind\intellect, because it's not an ability you use your intellect for.

**Q4: How do I disconnect from materialism, being that I am a married woman who takes care of the home and I have to make sure that my family is having its physical needs? By nature, I am not drawn toward running after materialism, but I want to know how I can disconnect from materialism in a healthy way, while at the same providing the physical needs of my household.**

**A:** You should clarify the following two things: 1) Are you asking this question (how you can detach from physicality) concerning other areas in your life as well, or is it only with regards to the home situation? 2) Also, are you disconnecting from physicality because you feel a need to connect more with spirituality, or is it simply because you don't recognize the physical needs?

If you are taking care of your household because you want to do provide your family, then it's *chessed*, and then being into the physical needs of your home is really being involved in spirituality.

**Q5: How can I know if I am taking care of the physical needs of my home or if I'm indulging in materialism?**

**A:** This is a very general kind of question, and it is very hard to answer. It depends on the situation of your home. Our spouse and children have different needs. It also requires a lot of *tefillah* and *siyata d'shmaya* to know the fine balance. It is not possible to give exact guidance on how to balance your home's needs while at the same time avoiding a materialistic lifestyle.

**Q6: We are already used to hearing the “inner voice” going on inside our mind. Where is the “inner voice” coming from in our soul, which was discussed in this class?**

**A:** I understand that you are not speaking to yourself verbally, but mentally. This is not the “inner voice” which was discussed in this class; it is rather an external and superficial kind of ability that people have (a mental kind of ability). The “inner voice” which we discussed in this class has levels to its depth. The more a person reaches greater depth in his soul, the more his “inner voice” is coming from a deeper place in the soul. For example, if a person is at the lowest level of the soul, *nefesh habehaimis*, a person will hear the inner voice of his *nefesh habehaimis*. If he has reached into his soul beyond the *nefesh habehaimis*, he will not only hear the inner voice of the *nefesh habehaimis*, but he will have an inner voice that is beyond the level of *nefesh hebeheimis*.

**Editor's Note:** For more on the “inner voice”, we quote a shiur from the Rav – [Listening to Your Inner Voice](#) #2] [03\\_דע את הויתך](#) in which this deep matter was explained a bit more (although it still sounds kind of ambiguous):

“Just as we can hear a physical voice and know it is real, we can hear spiritual sounds as well. We can also hear spiritual sound! If we listen to the inner voice going on inside of us, we can hear spirituality in the same sense that we hear physical sounds.

Many times we hear the Yetzer Hora (evil inclination) telling us to do something improper, but we aren't aware that it is the Yetzer Hora. Yet all of us can attest that there is definitely a voice inside us telling us to do it! We all hear voices inside of us, but we usually aren't aware of what it really is.

There is actually a “voice” contained in everything, just you can't hear it. The Arizal said that in every word there are three things: the word, the tune, and the pronunciation. There is a “tune” in everything. Knowing the tune of a word in the Torah – knowing its taam – is essentially to know the inner meaning of the word. On a deeper note, the letters of a word are the “body” of that word, and the tune of the word is the “soul” of the word.

We need to learn how to listen to the inner voice found in everything, to feel the voice in what we see and hear.

The Kotzker Rebbe said that there is something called “a silent cry.” It is a subtle sense in a person to be able to hear an inner voice going on inside himself.

Many people are searching for meaning in life, but they are missing this subtle sense to be able to hear the inner, spiritual voice in something. That is why they don't find what they are searching for.

Only something spiritual has within it a spiritual voice that we can hear. Something impure and unholy contains no spirituality, and there is nothing there to hear.

The voice of the soul is a totally different voice than any other sound or voice we are used to. If someone lives totally through his bodily senses and doesn't sense through his soul, he is deaf to the voice of the soul. All of us have a body – if a person wouldn't have anything to do with his body, he would die. Of course we have to use our physical senses. But we need to hear the spirituality inside the physical. We need to learn how to only listen to the spiritual voice in something.

The Sages say that every day a heavenly voice (bas kol) goes out and declares that we should return to G-d. The Baal Shem Tov explained this to mean that every person can hear an inner voice in him telling him to do teshuvah, and this is hearing the bas kol.

How do we listen to our inner voice? The body's voice has many voices. Our physical voice can be heard in many different tones. The soul's voice, however, is only one voice. It is an all-inclusive voice – it is a voice that contains everything. A person has to see himself as a soul, to realize that he is a soul. There are five rooms in our soul – Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah and Yechidah. Before Adam sinned, the human soul consisted only of a Yechidah. Only after the sin did the soul split up into five layers, so to speak. What we need to listen to the innermost point in our soul – the Yechidah. Even listening to our Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah or Chayah isn't our innermost voice, although they are parts of our soul. The voice of the Yechidah in us is our innermost voice, and we must hear only its voice.

How do we hear our Yechidah? The Yechidah only has one voice. It is a kol demamah dakah, a “soft, subtle voice”. It is a very refined voice, and it is the voice of our very essence. It is also “a voice that doesn't stop”, similar to the voice that was heard by Har Sinai. It is written in Tehillim, “For G-d is not heard in a noise, but only in a soft, subtle voice.” This is not referring to our physical voice, but to the voice of our essence. It is not referring to the voice of the Yetzer Hora – or even to the voice of the Yetzer Tov! It is the voice of our very being – it is deeper than what we desire. It is our very essence, which is who we really are. We must listen to that voice which comes our very being.

Concerning Hannah it is written, "And Hannah spoke on heart, and only her lips were moving, and her voice was not heard." This does not mean simply that she spoke quietly or whispered. The depth of this matter is that she spoke from her innermost voice, the voice of her very being.

May G-d merit us to reach our innermost part of our soul and hear that voice."

"How does one hear from his Yechidah? By Har Sinai, there was a "great voice that did not end." Usually, most of our talking and hearing has interruptions in between. But there is a kind of hearing that has no interruption - there is a way to hear something forever. How? If one absorbs what he hears, then he hears it forever. This is the inner voice in the soul - it is a voice that never ends. It is the voice of Yechidah, and if we hear it and absorb it, we hear it forever. To absorb what we hear is the highest level of hearing - hearing of the Yechidah."

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**[1]Editor's Note:** To clarify, what the Rav is describing is based on a concept of the Baal Shem Tov. A person can hear the Bas Kol (Heavenly voice) which goes out each day and announces that we must do teshuvah. However, it should be noted that this is not simply referring to "hearing voices in the head". If someone convinces himself that there are "voices in his head" - or if he deludes himself into thinking that Hashem or some other spiritual force is "communicating" with him through his mind - he is suffering from a mental illness, rachmana litzlon - or he is just deluded by imagination and maybe he's starting to "snap"...he needs professional help!

The "inner voice" which the Rav is describing, on its deepest level, is referring to a spiritual yearning that one can begin to feel, with the more calmness you have around you and inside yourself. Even if we do not hear this inner voice for spiritual yearning (which most of us probably do not), the Rav is saying that since there is an inner voice contained in everything we hear, we can hear things with greater depth and thus "hear" a deeper implication in what we are hearing.)

**[2]** A Heavenly calling, that goes out every day announcing people to do teshuvah

**[3]** A level of prophecy

**[4]** Prophecy

**[5]** For more on the concept of "heart listening", refer to [Getting To Know Your Inner World #005](#) [3]; [The Intellect and the Heart: Woman's World #005: Listening To Your Inner Voice](#) [4]; [Woman's World #009:Heart of the Jewish Woman](#) [5]; and [Rosh Chodesh: Avodah: Tishrei:Feeling Spirituality](#) [6].

**[6]** Discovering our worst middah is discussed in these series : [Da Es Nafshecha \("Getting To Know Your Soul"](#) [7]and [Da Es Middosecha \(Understanding Your Middos\)](#) [8], and

[Fixing Sadness](#) [9] and  
[How To Work on Your Middos](#) [10].

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**Source:** <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-hisbodedus-preparation-010-developing-inner-listening>

#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.ko>

[2] <http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.hava>

[3] <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-inner-world-005-heart-intellect>

[4] <http://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-how-jewish-mother-prepares-rosh-hashanah>

[5] <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/womans-world-09-heart-jewish-woman>

[6] <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-007-tishrei-touch>

[7] <http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.nafshecha>

[8] <http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.midosecha>

[9] <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-sadness-001-introduction-middos>

[10] <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-5-087-how-work-your-middos>