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Nochach P'nei Hashem: To Feel That Hashem Is In Front of You

When we discussed *hisbodedus* previously we explained about talking with Hashem all the time. Now we will progress to a more complete level of *hisbodedus*, which is to feel: nochach p'nei Hashem, to feel that we are literally "opposite" Hashem, face-to-face with Him when we speak with Him.

The concept of *nochach p'nei Hashem* is more than just a mere knowledge or feeling of Hashem's existence. It is to feel that He is literally in front of you when you speak to Him, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes: "As a man talking to his friend."

Nochach is personified by the word "Attah" in the words "Baruch Attah Hashem", Blessed Are You, Hashem - that when we talk to Hashem, we are talking to Him face-to-face, in first person, "You."

The inner way that a Jew is supposed to live life is to feel that he is literally facing Hashem. When a person has an external relationship towards Hashem, he thinks that Hashem resides in Heaven, while he resides on Planet Earth, far away from Hashem, (*chas v'shalom*). A person, when he davens, might have the mentality that he lives in America, while Hashem is far away in Eretz Yisrael, somewhere in the *Beis HaMikdash*....

But *nochach* is to acquire the perspective that Hashem is literally in front of you. It is to feel how Hashem is "Attah", "You" in first person. So when we say the word "Attah" in Shemoneh Esrei, we must feel the meaning of what "Attah" implies. When a person does *hisbodedus* with Hashem only periodically, then sometimes he will feel how Hashem is with him, and sometimes he won't. Sometimes he will feel how Hashem is in front of him, and sometimes he won't feel it. He'll feel far from Hashem.

But when a person gets used to speaking with Hashem regularly throughout the day, he will find that he can always converse with Hashem, and that will give him a constant bond with Hashem. It is though continuously talking to Hashem throughout the day that a person can slowly work on acquiring the level of *nochach/attah*. One must clearly feel that the purpose of life which we need to direct ourselves towards is: to reach this step of *nochach p'nei Hashem*, which we will further describe in this chapter.

Alone, Not Lonely

Nochach means to live a life in which the reality of Hashem's existence is constantly revealed to you. It means that in any given time or place or situation, you can feel that you are never really alone as it appears. We can always feel Hashem as reality in front of us. We can feel this no matter what ups or downs we are going through; whether we are going through a joyous time or a difficult time. No matter what level we are up to in serving Hashem, we can always live the reality and experience of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Until now we have explained the concept of *nochach*. Now we will explain how exactly we can practice it. However, it can only be reached if we've already worked to acquire all steps that were explained in the previous chapters. The more we have worked to acquire those levels - both intellectually and emotionally - the closer we can come to the level of *nochach*.

Step One: When You Find Yourself Alone

The first step is to keep reflecting on the fact that we are never alone, for Hashem is always near us. Every day we always have times in which we are alone, by default. We need to use those times to our advantage and use them as times of quiet solitude, when we can reflect on the fact that you are not alone - for Hashem is next to you.

So when you find yourself alone, take the opportunity to have the following conversation with yourself either verbally or mentally: "Am I really alone? No, I am not. Hashem is always with me."

When you get used to this each day, you train yourself each day, week after week, month and month (and year after year!) to use your times of being alone for reflecting about how you're really not alone; that Hashem is with you.

The point of having this conversation with yourself is to do so in a question-and-answer format with yourself, because that helps it internalize better in your heart.

Remember: Yaakov Avinu fought "alone" with the angel, but even when he was "alone", Hashem was really with him and helping him.

Step Two: Have Fixed Times of Being Alone

Besides for the times of the day in which you find yourself alone, though, you also need to set aside specific time in your daily schedule in which you can be alone and have this reflection.

When you choose a place to be alone in, try not to be in a place which will disturb you; don't be in a place in which your evil inclination can get aroused, and it's also better to be in a place that's far from people. When you're secluded from people, it's much easier to feel "alone"; that is to say, your *nefesh habehaimis* (lower, animalistic part of the soul) can sense that you are in a secluded place.

When you feel that aloneness, now you can start to go in the other direction: tell yourself that you're really *not* alone! With the more you do this, you can eventually reveal the depth of your *neshamah* - the light of your Divine soul.

Step Three: Utilizing Our Times of Loneliness

So far, it was explained the two steps to feel *nochach p'nei Hashem*. The first step was to utilize the times that we are alone to "reflect" and have a conversation with ourselves that we are really not alone, for we are with Hashem. The second step is that we also need to set aside specific times of the day in which we are alone in order to "reflect". But there is also the following third step we need to do, which is very important.

Every person has periods in his life in which he feels intensely alone. This can go on for an amount of days, or it can be felt at certain times of the day in which loneliness just hits you. This happens even to people who have family, parents, and friends that they are close with. There can be all sorts of reasons why we get lonely – external reasons, or more spiritual reasons. Either way, we all have times in which feel lonely.

How does a person react to it? It appears to be something difficult we must “deal with”. We might try to comfort ourselves by saying “*Gam Zu L'Tovah*” (“This too is for the best”), or we tell ourselves that we are supposed to accept suffering with love, as Chazal tell us.

That is true, but there is a more inner way to react to the loneliness. The deeper reason of why loneliness happens to us is because that’s the way Hashem made us – we get lonely because we are supposed to transform that initial feeling of loneliness into an opportunity of feeling “alone” with Hashem! Which means that we are never alone at all. Loneliness is therefore a great opportunity in which a person can acquire the level of *nochach p’nei Hashem*.

The Loneliness of Being In Shidduchim

There are many different periods of loneliness a person can experience in his life.

Here is a very common example: being in *shidduchim*. A boy or a girl in *shidduchim*, as time goes on, can begin to feel very lonely, like when many of his/her classmates are all getting married one by one, leaving him/her all alone.

Sure, coming home to be with your parents can ease some of the loneliness, but as time goes on, a boy or girl realizes that being at home with the parents does not take away the gnawing loneliness that he/she feels. And it begins to get intensely lonely.

What will happen? Either it will breed on some form of sadness or depression, or, a person will simply take his mind off the loneliness, by getting involved with other pastimes.

But the truth is: it’s an opportunity for a person to transform this loneliness, into feeling Hashem next to him in his life. You are supposed to feel that pain of loneliness, and you can feel it intensely. When you feel it, tell yourself that you’re really not alone, because you can really choose, if you want, to find *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in this “lonely” situation.

Upon a deeper understanding, one can even look at it as a Heaven-sent opportunity to acquire the perspective of feeling *nochach p’nei Hashem*. There couldn’t be a better time to work on it!

Loneliness In Marriage

Here is another example. Often, between husband and wife, it will happen that there are times of marital discord. Sometimes a couple is having a harmonious relationship, and sometimes, the marriage is stormy. Every couple has their good periods and their bad periods in their marriage. When the *shalom bayis* (marital harmony) is not good, it feels intensely lonely for the spouse who feels abandoned and isolated by his/her spouse. He/she is hurting and it will feel very bewildering and lonely. But it is a great opportunity for one to feel that he is not really alone - for Hashem is still with him.

Of course, every couple must work hard for their *shalom bayis* and try to make it work between them, each doing his/her part. But, inevitably, there will be very rough times, inasmuch as they try to work on it; so there will always be times in which one of the spouses feels estranged from the other. It is during those times that a person can concentrate on this fact, that although it appears that he’s

alone, he is really not, for Hashem is always with a person, no matter how bad the situation looks.

More Examples of Loneliness

Another example is that often, one of the spouses has to leave the home for a number of days due to a business trip, or because he/she goes to Eretz Yisrael, or when a mother has just given birth. These are situations in which one of the spouses will find him/herself alone, and it can feel very lonely. Another example is when the children are all in yeshiva, leaving the parents all alone, when they miss their children very much.

In all of these situations, a person can realize during his loneliness that he is really not alone: Hashem is with him.

The more a person gets used to working on the steps described here, the better he will be able to use these situations to uncover from his loneliness a relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, feeling Hashem in the loneliness and thereby banishing the loneliness he initially felt. Eventually, if a person keeps persevering with this avodah, he can uncover the depth of the light of his *neshamah* (Divine soul), and feeling closer and closer to Hashem.

Loneliness In Your Social Life

Now we will explain how to apply the concept of *nochach* within our family and social life. A person, by nature, wants to connect with people. Indeed, Chazal say that one should get along with people. Some people have a reserved nature while others are more outgoing in their relationships with others, but all people wish to connect to other people and need it.

However, even when a person is social and outgoing, he will often find that there are times in which his friends are all reciprocating, and that there are other times in which he feels that others are isolating him. Sometimes we get smiles and compliments from our friends, but sometimes, we feel ignored by them, as if they're not interested in us; and this happens even with our closest friends.

There are also situations in which a close friend dumps you; this feels terribly lonely when it happens. Either it happens because your friend moves away or because he doesn't even have time for you anymore, or it happens simply because he has lost interest in the friendship, due to personality factors or another unknown reason. It doesn't really make a difference what causes it - either way, you feel horribly lonely when a good friend of yours is suddenly not your friend anymore. You then feel uneasy even as you're among your own friends.

The Solution

When you're experiencing a period like this of anxiety from your relationships with others, first of all, it may be worth it for you to examine your social skills. Maybe you didn't realize that something in your behavior caused your friends to slowly want to pull away from you. Or, maybe you only had superficial kinds of friends, and you need to form truer and deeper friendships with others. So first look into yourself and get in touch with how you're using your soul abilities of connection with others, and try to understand how true connections with others can be achieved.[\[1\]](#)

But, in addition to this, you also need to realize that times of isolation from others happen to you as an opportunity from Hashem for you: to uncover Hashem in your loneliness. In fact, it's even possible that Hashem brought this upon you just so that you will realize that only He is your true Friend! Chazal say that Hashem is called the "Friend" of a person - He is our one and only true Friend.[\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) So when you get badly hurt by a close friend, you have a two-fold introspection to make: you need to examine yourself deeply and learn how to use your soul's abilities to form healthy and lasting

friendships (or maybe you need to seek a true kind of friend). But along with this, you also need to realize that the loneliness and isolation you are feeling was sent to you from Hashem so that you will feel that you are really not alone; Hashem is with you, and He is your real Friend.

Alone From Others, Alone With Hashem

Now we will mention an additional point which is more subtle.

Every person's soul is multi-layered – there are external layers and more inner layers of the soul. The outer parts of our soul are the parts of our life in which others are included. When you find that your friends are involved in your life and they understand you, what do they understand? Your friends understand the outer parts of your existence and are included in your life on that external level.

But the more you merit to enter inward into your soul and you live an internal and soul kind of life, you will also discover that for some reason, there are certain areas of your life which you just can't include others in. With the more innerness you uncover in your life, getting further and further into your soul, the less you feel a need for companionship with others, because it is "alone" from others, and it is there that you experience the deepest part of your relationship with Hashem – and it's totally private, between you and Hashem.

No one else knows of it – no one but you. Your friends won't understand that part of your soul because it's a private part of your soul that no one can understand.

The more inner you become, you'll discover that it's harder to include your friends in your life, because your life has become so much deeper and so much more inward. It's almost impossible to bring others into your soul kind of life. You realize more and more that there are fewer people who understand what's going on deep inside you. And the more you enter inward into your soul, it seems that less and less people are really involved in your real life.

When you truly reach the very depth of your soul, you will see that it is so private from others that you have no friend at all who can understand what you've reached in yourself. This can make you feel lonely if you don't know how to view this properly.

Indeed, the innermost point in your soul cannot be revealed to anyone at all except yourself. It is best described by the statement, "My heart cannot be revealed by the mouth" (*Liba l'pumei lo galisi*). There, in that most private place of your existence as a soul, you are utterly and truly alone from others, and thus it is there, and only there, that you can really feel alone with Hashem. It is hinted to in the words of Chazal that "Man was created individual."

There's a deep place in your soul which feels totally individual from others, because no one else can be there but you. There's no way for you to describe it to others because by its very essence, it is a place in yourself that is entirely designated to be used in your private relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

This concept will not be understood or felt by most people. The individuals who have merited to get very far into their innermost depths of their souls can relate to this. There is a place in the soul which others are not able to be included in; it's simply indescribable to another person, and you're the only who knows what it is.

We have described here how a person needs to channel his loneliness towards developing his relationship with Hashem, and how he needs to feel *nochach p'nei Hashem*, that Hashem is literally in front of a person, and thus we can talk face-to-face with Him. The second step, *nochach*, has been explained here in concept.

Now we will say a practical point in how one can develop this concept of feeling a constant relationship with Hashem in which he also feels *nochach p'nei Hashem*.

Talking To Hashem In First-Person

The way to talk to Hashem is to talk to Him in first-person context: “Attah”, “You.” You can talk to Hashem and say to Hashem, “You created me. You sustain me.” You can ask Hashem for things and thank Him for things, addressing Him in first-person.

Alone With Your True Friend

So there are really two parts that are including in talking to Hashem.

The first part is to tell yourself that you’re not alone and that you’re with Hashem. This part emphasizes how you are receiving from Hashem; that it’s for your own good when you’re alone, because even when you’re alone, Hashem is always with you, keeping you alive and sustaining you.

The second part of talking to Hashem is, that as you talk to Him more and more throughout the day, you can feel more and more that he’s in front of You, no less than how you’re talking to a friend.

At first, this will feel unnatural to you, because you don’t feel that He is literally in front of you. But the more you get used to it (even when you don’t feel it), slowly but surely the depth of your soul will become more and more revealed out in the open, and then you’ll feel the awareness of *nochach p'nei Hashem*.

Awareness To The Word “Attah”

A person can try this as he says the word “Attah” [in the blessings of Shemoneh Esrei]. When you say the word “Attah”, don’t just say it in a superficial manner; try to say it from an inner place in yourself. Don’t pressurize yourself to do this; instead, say the word “Attah” slowly and patiently, with concentration on the fact that Hashem is in front of you. The more you get used to this, your sensitivity to it will slowly increase; you will feel it not just as an emotion, but as a holy feeling that comes from your *neshamah*.

In Conclusion

To summarize briefly, we explained with the help of Hashem, that a person needs to utilize the three types of times of being alone, and in addition, one needs to slowly increase his awareness of the concept of feeling *nochach p'nei Hashem*.

Getting used to this will increase your sensitivity to these concepts, and it bring you to resemble the level of what it’s like to standing at Har Sinai - when we all stood *nochach p'nei Hashem*, when Hashem spoke with us; as it is written, “Face-to-face I spoke with them.”

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: When I concentrate on this awareness as I say the word “Attah” that I am with Hashem face-to-face in a very real way, won’t that compromise on my feeling of yirah/awe for Hashem?

A: We need both *ahavah* (love) and *yirah* (awe) of Hashem. From our love for Hashem we can come to have awe of Hashem. While it is definitely true that a person can be lacking awe of Hashem and thus overdo the love towards Hashem and get too comfortable with Him, we still need both *ahavah*

and *yirah* in our relationship with Hashem, and with the more of a real sense of *ahavah* that we develop towards Him the more we can have *yirah*.

Q2: Isn't it a contradiction to have both ahavah and yirah towards Hashem?

A: Our entire existence is a contradiction, for we are made up of body and soul, the greatest contradiction possible. Hashem is called *yoshev b'seiser elyon*, "He resides in the hidden upper chambers" - in a "*seiser*", from the word *stirah*/contradiction, to show us that we are supposed to serve Him amidst all the contradictions in our Avodah towards Him. Although *ahavah* and *yirah* towards Hashem are two contradictory concepts, we need both of them and each of them needs the other one in order to properly thrive.

Q3: Doesn't feeling "nochach p'nei Hashem" imply that I am apart from Hashem? If so, how can I feel that He is near me when I am still far apart from Him?

A: When you're talking to your friend, is he near you or far from you? He is near you. So too, when you talk to Hashem and you know He is in front of you, you can feel that He is near you.

Q4: When I say "Attah" and I am supposed to feel "nochach pnei Hashem", is that the same concept as feeling like I am part of Hashem?

A: What you are describing is a very deep concept, called *hiskalelus* (integrating with Hashem) and it is a very high level, which needs many introductions to explain it and reach it. So far, none of the classes have been describing how we reach *hiskalelus*. The classes here are not addressing such high levels and the focus here is on the simpler levels. Here in this class it was described a far simpler level than *hiskalelus*: to just feel that Hashem is in front of you.

Q5: In Shemoneh Esrei, why do we refer to Hashem as "Hu" (Him) and why do we sometimes refer to Him as "Attah", You?

A: The Men of Great Assembly established Shemoneh Esrei, having in mind that there are different layers in our soul; there are external layers in our soul which relate to Hashem only in third-person, as "*Hu*", and the more inner layers of our soul can relate to Hashem in first-person, *Attah*.

There are actually two perceptions of how to understand "*Hu*." The lower level of *Hu* is to simply relate to Hashem in third-person, *Hu*, (Him), where a person feels that Hashem exists but he doesn't yet feel a part of Hashem. The higher level is to integrate your own existence with Him, which is a much higher perception of relating to Him as *Hu*.

Q6: If I relate to Hashem as the Being whom I must draw forth His great rachamim (compassion) on me, is that also called living a life of nochach pnei Hashem?

A: *Rachamim* is a *middah* of Hashem, but it is not the same thing as *nochach*. *Nochach* is to feel Hashem as a reality in front of you.

Q7: What is the purpose of hisbodedus with Hashem - is it to feel alone with Hashem and thus become isolated from people, or is the purpose of hisbodedus to be able to relate to others in a better way after I do hisbodedus?

A: Of course *hisbodedus* improves your interpersonal relationships, but it is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal of *hisbodedus* is to feel how you're alone with Hashem, and this of course improves your relationships, but that's not the point. In a sense, though, the purpose of *hisbodedus* is really meant to be carried over into your relationships, because when you do proper *hisbodedus*, you reach greater

connection with Hashem, and then you are able to shine that light of emunah onto the rest of the world. Avraham Avinu excelled in the middah of chessed towards others, but what did he mainly do? He taught people about emunah in Hashem.

[1] See Getting To Know Your Soul, Part II, Chapter 12 - Hiskashrus: Connection

[2] See Rashi to Shabbos 31a

[3] For further understanding see Bilvavi on Mesillas Yesharim: Hashem - Your True Companion

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