

BILVAVI

**HISBODDEDUS
CRASH
COURSE**

AISH KODESH - WOODMERE, NY

**שיעורים בארה"ב אייד תשפ"ג 009
התבודדות למעשה הדרכה בקצרה**

SOLITUDE FOR THE PURPOSE OF FINDING YOUR UNIQUE SELF

Hisbodedus (lit. seclusion) has an external and internal layer to it. To give a more precise definition, the outer layer of it is called *hisbodedus*, and its inner layer is called *yichudiyus* – “uniqueness”.

Let us first think a little about the first part: the external level, which is called *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus means to be separate from everything, from surroundings. The first practical part of external *hisbodedus* is to look for a place where you can be the most separated from the world.

Sometimes people choose a place that’s very much connected with all that’s going on in the world. But, a person has to find a calm place that’s closed off from the world and from his surroundings. That is the basic part of reaching external *hisbodedus*.

More importantly, *hisbodedus* is a time to disconnect our inner state from all that’s going on in the world. So, a person needs several factors that will help him inwardly separate from the world. Finding a calm, separated place is the first step, and the next part is to separate our soul from the world.

Merely finding a private place to be in isn’t going to accomplish this. In order to separate our soul from our surroundings, there’s an internal process of how to reach it. Briefly, we shall mention a few important points about this.

DISCONNECT SO THAT YOU CAN RE-CONNECT

People have a wish to know what’s going on in the world and to talk about what’s going on in the world. When finding a private place, one needs to disconnect from all ‘reaching out’ to people, disconnecting from all the devices of communication that exist today, and to internally separate from the very desire to know what’s going on in the world. Today a person can be sitting alone in a private room, yet he’s connected with the entire world through various means of communication. That is the complete antithesis to *hisbodedus*.

Practically speaking, leave all devices of communication outside of the room. Forget for a second about the terrible material that may be on it – even if it’s the simplest and most kosher device in the world, it doesn’t let you be alone from the world when you’re able to communicate with anyone at any moment. Being connected with what’s going on in the outside world is a total contradiction to *hisbodedus*. Obviously we don’t mean that you need to be disconnected the entire day from the world, but during the time that you set aside for *hisbodedus*, you have to be totally disconnected from the world, if you want to do *hisbodedus*.

VISUALIZING ADAM HARISHON ALONE IN THE WORLD

Going further now, the very desire to be connected with the world and all that’s

going on it will prevent you from *hisbodedus*. During this time of being alone, you must decide that right now for this time you will not be involved with anything else other than what you're doing now.

To say this more deeply, during this time, you are being like Adam HaRishon when no one else was in the world yet. This might seem like a fantasy and far off from reality, but on a very subtle level, the state of Adam being alone in the world is a state that still exists deep in our soul. It might seem like a far off concept. If you can visualize yourself as Adam HaRishon being alone in the world, you can now proceed to the next step.

CALMING THE BODY

Being alone, in the external sense, is to be disconnected from all of the noise that's taking place in the outside world. But in addition, there is also 'internal' noise. Throughout the day, we have internal noise accompanying us throughout the day, in different ways: We feel hunger to eat and we feel thirsty for a drink.

Before your time of *hisbodedus*, make sure you've eaten enough and that you've drank, so that you've calmed your hunger and thirst and now you won't be getting hungry or thirsty while you're in middle of doing *hisbodedus*. This is so that you can in a state of total calm and now you can enter into a deeper place.

To illustrate what we mean, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l would make sure to

eat something before he came home, so that he could enter the house after a long day in a calm state. Most people come home tired and exhausted and hungry, because they haven't eaten much all day, and they feel it's a high level and too difficult to make sure to come home calm every day. To the contrary, most people will say that it's better to come home hungry so they can hungrily eat the supper the wife prepared and then thank her properly.

We cannot say this is wrong, but the point is that we have brought an example in which a person should try to come home calm. In the good old times, people came home calmly into the house. This illustrates how we need to enter *hisbodedus* – we need to enter it from a calm state, having already eaten before so that we won't be disturbed by pangs of hunger and thirst during the time of *hisbodedus*.

CALMING THE SOUL, PART 1 – CALMING THE THOUGHTS

After we have made sure to calm the body through eating and drinking sufficiently beforehand, we need to calm the noise of the soul.

What creates noise for the soul? The main noise that we have is the noise of our thoughts which are jumping from thinking about one topic to another and then another. Every person has to learn how to halt his thoughts for a moment.

What should a person think about?

To think only about Hashem and how to serve Him better may be too hard for a person who is first trying to do *hisbodedus* and enter a calm state.

A person can be alone in a room but he's not really alone, he's involved in all kinds of thoughts and memories and what someone said to him and what he needs to respond, etc. In other words, his mind is full of imagination. His body may be alone from the world, but his soul is far from being alone.

It is a deep process to become internally alone. Everything described until now – finding a private place, being alone (*locking the door*), cutting off from the world, calming the body by eating and drinking first – is all the external part of *hisbodedus* and it doesn't yet get us to internal *hisbodedus* of being internally alone from the rest of the world.

Briefly, the way to calm the thoughts is by thinking of something that calms you. (*If there is an extreme worry or problem going on, then simply thinking of calming thought isn't going to work for this, and those issues or worries will have to be taken care of. We are speaking here of calming a mind that is filled with small, regular, normal worries. What kind of thought can you think of that calms you?*)

There may also be a certain kind of food you can eat that will calm your mind. Hunger not only disturbs the body, it also disturbs the mind's thoughts as it thinks about the hunger. So eating something can calm the body and mind.

Another way to calm the mind is to hear

calming *niggunim* (songs). Not every song calms every person, and each person has different *niggunim* that calm him. Some people are calmed by a deep, long tune or song that has no lyrics in it. Others find this boring and they fall asleep from it, or it reminds them of sad or stressful things. It depends on each person, and each person needs to know himself a bit in this area, to know which songs or tunes calm him. (*Not which songs make him happy, rather, to know which songs calm him.*)

It can also change with time. Sometimes there are periods where a certain song or tune calms you and sometime later you find that it doesn't calm you anymore and you need a different song now to calm you. You may also find that even if you were always calmed by a slow relaxing song, now you are no longer calmed by it and you now need a song that's a bit louder and more upbeat. This happens because our soul likes to 'move' in different ways, and now it may need a different kind of movement in order to be calm. If the soul is no longer being calmed by a slow deep song, that means it needs a different kind of movement to become calm, so it may require now a song that's not slow and deep but a song that's quick, loud, and more upbeat, in order to be calm.

Besides for being calmed through song, looking at relaxing pictures also calms the soul. Examples include looking at the sky or at a picture of the sky. If you look at a picture of a scene from the world, this might not calm you but when you look at a clear sky,

the Arizal says it opens the mind for Ruach HaKodesh, but on a deeper level it opens up the mind to become calm. Sometimes you may need to sit in a more comfortable place, and some people need to sit in a different position in order to get relaxed. Sometimes, a softer chair is needed too.

An additional factor that calms the mind is to read something light. Reading the news is heavy reading and it connects a person to the world, and doesn't allow the mind to be calm, whereas reading something light and neutral can relax the mind.

Each time a person should make use of the technique that he feels can help him become calmer right now.

CALMING OUR SOUL, PART 2 - AWARENESS OF BREATHING

Until now we are talking about using the external world to calm down. Now we will speak about using the soul's powers to calm down. Our soul can calm us down either through our power of thought (*thinking of calming thoughts*) or through our power of breathing.

We were created with the power to breathe in and out. Before Hashem breathed into us a soul, we were still and unmoving. Hashem's breath allowed us to now move and breathe. Part of calming down is to reach the root of our movements. An infant doesn't really think, it only breathes, and it breathes calmly.

When the mind isn't that active, breathing is stronger. Thinking adults though are less conscious of their breathing. When we sit down calmly or when we lay down to go to sleep, the mind is calmer and our breathing gets stronger and deeper.

Earlier we explained how to calm the mind's thoughts, now we are speaking of a deeper power, the power of conscious deep breathing. When our thoughts aren't that active, when we aren't thinking of something heavy and mind-consuming, we are able to become more conscious of our breathing.

Most people aren't conscious of their breathing. We are usually aware of what we are thinking (*more or less*), but we usually aren't aware and conscious of our breathing. Any person walking around and taking care of his errands or responsibilities isn't thinking about his breathing. Certainly if we ask any person "Are you breathing right now?" He will answer "Of course I'm breathing, how can I not be?" He knows it, but he's not aware of it as he goes about his day.

People become aware of their breathing only when they are panicking and they become short of breath, or those who live with the condition of asthma, and then they go to the doctor to see what's going on. On a day-to-day basis, most people are not conscious of their breathing. But Chazal taught us, "For every breath and every breath, praise Him." If a person isn't aware of his every breath then he can't thank Hashem for it. The first step is to

become aware of the breath, and the second step is to thank Hashem for it. We can't jump to thanking Hashem for something we aren't aware of. First we need to become aware of our breathing, and then we can thank Hashem for each breath. It's obviously a high-level *avodah* to thank Hashem for every single breath, and this cannot be done all day, but **any person can do it for half a minute a day and thank Hashem for his every breath.**

A person needs to become aware of his breathing. One should choose a quiet time, go into a private place, and either sit, lie down or lean in a relaxed position, and then, after you're relaxed, **listen to your breathing.** This is the first step – merely becoming aware of your breathing.

The next step is to **become aware of the different kinds of breathing** you have. You will notice that sometimes you are breathing slowly and relaxed and regular, and sometimes you are breathing more quickly, like if you are going through any kind of stress or difficulty, either in general or at the moment. You can gradually become aware of when you are breathing slowly and when you are breathing more quickly – the different kinds of movements of your breathing.

A subtle point to know is that awareness of your breathing also calms the mind, because when the mind is focused on being aware of the breathing, the mind isn't thinking about anything else. The deep way to calm one's thoughts is through becoming conscious of

breathing. Certainly if your thoughts suddenly remember something stressful or worrisome as you're trying to become conscious of your breathing, it will be a battle like Gog and Magog within your mind. But in the normal scenario, your thoughts are calm and you are becoming conscious and aware of your breathing. This is a very deep and inner way to calm the thoughts. Earlier we explained how to calm down by using external methods, but here we are describing how to calm down from within - through awareness of our breathing. It is like returning to a child-like state, from a conscious awareness. This doesn't mean that you are becoming childish again, but that you are consciously allowing your mind to return to a child-like state.

Though we have described it briefly, it is all our inner *avodah*, "Like an infant upon its mother", to have bittul of our daas to Hashem. In summary, one must be sensible and have daas, but on the other hand one has to be simple-minded like an animal. One half of being a Torah scholar is to develop the mind, and the other half is to be simple, like an infant upon its mother, by nullifying the mind, the daas.

As an aside, how does one nullify the mind? One way is by using the mind itself – to use the mind's ability to become consciously aware. Just as one can submit his mind to another who is wiser than him, so can a person submit his mind to Hashem, Who is far greater and Whose wisdom is infinitely deep. This is how one can nullify his daas (*mature mental strength*)

from within his very daas. That is one way, but that's not what we are coming to explain here. The method being explained here is the ability to leave one's thoughts and enter into a calm space in one's mind. Awareness of breathing is what calms the thoughts.

Let us now move on to the next step. When one becomes aware of his breathing, he can become aware of his inhale and exhale. But he can also **direct** his inhale and exhale. He can inhale or exhale up to a certain amount that he wishes. When he wants to calm down, he can inhale and exhale calmly, patiently, and pleasantly. After running, or when a person is stressed, a person is breathing fast and his chest is pounding. The mind's thoughts not only can become aware of the breathing, but the mind can also direct the breathing to be calmer, deeper, and more relaxed. This is one of the most fundamental ways of calming our soul.

Breathing – inhale and exhale - can be used to calm the soul, as well as to **cleanse** and purify our soul. When exhaling, we are exhaling the bad air and inhaling new, clean air. (*Relatively speaking, that is, to the world that we live in*). We aren't speaking here of the spiritual state of the soul, which is a separate discussion. Here we are speaking of cleansing out the soul with relation to calming the soul. This is a side point being mentioned here, but it's not the main part of the discussion here.

When you enter the process of becoming aware of inhale and exhale and you are directing

your breathing, you are slowly able to calm the soul. You learn how to inhale and exhale properly. The inhale and exhale shouldn't be too short or too long. Don't be now like the Baal Korei leining Megillah who has to say the names of all ten sons of Haman in one breath. The breathing should be calm. Not everyone's inhale and exhale takes the same amount of time, so there is no set amount of time for every person when it comes to how much time to spend on the inhale or exhale. Every person has to know himself well: For how many seconds do I need to inhale in order to become calm? Slowly, you become aware of it.

You can also learn to breathe deeply and not in a stressed way, until you feel how breathing calms you.

All of this cannot be explained fully, because every person has to learn about himself well. But with Hashem's help, part of calming the soul is based on breathing. Sometimes a person can't go straight to breathing since he's heavily involved with something, and he will have to first slowly calm down so that he can get into the ideal state of focused, calm breathing.

Another important factor to mention is, that a big part of the internal noise is coming from one's unrefined character traits. From all of the unrefined character traits, **anger** is the biggest impediment that gets in the way of calming down. Chazal teach us that anger causes one's soul to leave him, it causes one's wisdom to

leave him, and all levels of Gehinnom take effect on him. Anger takes away all calmness.

In order for a person to reach internal calm, he must become aware of what his worst character trait is, and then he needs to calm it [by attaining a balance in that area]. Otherwise, the ugly character trait will prevent him from reaching deep internal calm. If one's worst character is also extreme in its very nature, then it will be even more of an impediment to his internal calm.

Anger is the strongest example of an extreme character trait that prevents internal calm. Strong lusts can also drive a person crazy and create a lot of 'noise' in the soul, but anger causes even more internal noise.

One has to know himself well in general, and in particular, he has to know his personal worst trait and then become more balanced in that area. Understandably, this is not something that is meant to be done during hisbodedus. It is a process to go throughout life – one has to keep balance and purifying his worst trait, and that calms his soul. One needs to learn about the 4 elements of the soul, his personal elemental makeup, his worst character trait, and to be balance it. Slowly this makes the soul calmer.

The more a person works on *bitachon*, the calmer the soul becomes. For a large part of the day, a person is thinking about his problems. A person faces issues in his livelihood, health, and in raising children. But, the more a person reaches *bitachon*, the more serene one

becomes in his soul. This is an outline of what brings a person to internal calm – which is the basis for *hisbodedus*. There is external and internal *hisbodedus*.

Until now we have explained external *hisbodedus* – to silence the soul from outside stimuli until one reaches internal silence.

REACHING THE STATE OF ALONE

When you become totally internally calm and you reach your inner silence, you feel the state of being **alone** (*levad*).

When most people today find themselves alone, they get busy connecting to their devices to know what's going on in the entire world. But the true alone is to experience your state of inner silence. You begin to enjoy being alone and gain deep pleasure from it. If you don't yet enjoy it, it is a sign that you haven't yet reached it. The Chovos HaLevovos describes the "love of solitude." Being alone is not a morbid state (*for those who understand what it is*), but a truly and deeply enjoyable experience.

Most people have difficulty understanding this. When I came to America now, I was telling someone that my plans are to eat alone on Shabbos. I was told, "Everyone's going to think you are crazy." How indeed can it be? But when you know how to live in the state of "alone", not only aren't you afraid of being alone, but you even enjoy it.

Of course, a person still has to make sure not

to insult anyone in the process, we can't allow it to compromise on our obligation to be kind to another Jew. But one has to gain the ability of being alone. Being alone is resembling Hashem, Who was alone, so to speak, before He created the world. Alone is not merely a tool to use, it is a way to come to resemble the Creator. We are not the Creator, but we have to resemble Him. The most fundamental way of resembling Him is that just as He is alone, so should we learn how to be alone. This is the closest way to resemble Hashem.

The proper way of living is to learn to love being alone and to find enjoyment in it. This doesn't mean to be alone all day. Nor does this mean to learn Torah all day alone without a *chavrusa* – Chazal say that is endangering for oneself to do this. The true way to live life is to live part of the day with others, and part of the day alone with yourself. Rav Hutner said on himself that he would have a half hour a day alone and a half hour a day with talmidim. Not only was he practically involved with his talmidim, he cared about them deeply. He said that he is very connected to all his talmidim – to Klal Yisrael as a whole, and to his talmidim especially - but he also said that if his half hour a day of being alone gets taken away from him, then he can't be a human being.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* spells out that if one lives totally alone, this is wrong, but if one only lives in the presence of others, he is not being a person and he is just being a sheep following the flock. “Therefore a person

was created alone.”¹ This has to become the simple way of living life – to have part of our lives being alone with ourselves and the other part being with people. This is Hashem's will. Before Creation, Hashem was alone, and after Creation, there were others besides Him. These two states of existence are really two halves of our life. A person was created for companionship, and that's one part of him, but there's also a part of him that can be alone from others, just as when Adam was first created. One needs the balance of both parts – to be with others, and to be able to be alone. This is the true way of living.

UNIQUENESS

Now we can move on to explaining the second step of *hisbodedus*, with Hashem's help – the step of reaching *yichud-iyos* (*your unique self*). When you are alone, who are you alone with? It doesn't mean you are now secluded with your hands and feet. What does it mean to be “with yourself”?

You are now being alone with your unique point. Hashem created a subtle and unique point in you which no one else can know of, which no one else can be included in. No one will be able to understand it, no matter how much you try to explain it to others.

Most people search for someone who will understand them. People today go to a psychologist or therapist in the hope that

¹ Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 38a

they will be deeply understood – they want someone else to understand the deepest part of themselves, but the truth is that it's not possible to include someone in this private part of yourself. You are the only one who can understand it. People go from one therapist to another, hoping each time to be more understood, and sometimes they do get a little further, but can anyone include another person in all of his deepest and subtlest feelings and in his entire reality? One cannot succeed at doing this. Every person has his uniqueness, and that point is so unique that it can't be understood by anyone else.

As long as a person hasn't reached his unique point, he can never be truly alone. He can quiet everything down and everything becomes silent, he has disconnected from everything, but to what he is truly connected to? If he doesn't have what to connect to, then he is not really alone with himself. For example, if someone has a hundred dollars in his pocket – he's connected to that hundred dollars. If a person can't be alone with himself, he's still with the rest of the world.

Hisbodedus and quieting down is the way to separate from the world, and it is only the external part. The internal part is to find your unique point. After separating from others and from the world, he must now reach his unique point where he can be alone from the world. In order to reach it, it is a lifelong task. It cannot be taught in one lesson, it's a long process. The external process can be worked on already now, but this part – connecting to

your uniqueness - requires a long process of learning self-awareness, until a person reaches the subtle point of his uniqueness, the point in you which no one else in the world can reach.

Any *adam gadol* reached this point. If he didn't reach it, he may be greater than others, but he cannot be called an *adam gadol* because he hasn't reached his intrinsic greatness.

This is not about realizing how you are better than anyone else because you have something unique that no one else has. You're not better than others, since every person also has something unique that you don't have, so you are no better than them and they are no better than you. Rather, reaching your unique point is to connect to your uniqueness which no one else has, and that is how you become truly alone, because no one else can be there.

People have marital problems and they want their spouse to understand them totally, each of the spouses wishes the other would totally feel and understand them, and although this is a valid complaint, it simply isn't possible for any of the spouses to completely be included in the other's private, unique aspect. Hashem created each person unique and another can never fully understand the other. If a person was able to be fully understood by another, he would lose his uniqueness, since someone else is able to perceive it and then it's not unique any more to that person. This is the way Hashem made the world – a person is always alone in his unique point.

It is written, “*Stay away from evil, and do good.*” The external ways of *hisbodedus*, of separating, are all essentially ways of how to separate from the bad of the world, it is the stage of “stay away from evil”, but one also has to fulfill “Do good” – to reach your unique point, where you are alone.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that one can be in the company of many others yet he is still in his solitude. How can a person be alone when he is surrounded by others? Does he have a problem of being too aloof or anti-social? The *Chovos HaLevovos* is referring to one who is connected to his true self, to his unique point, even as he is with others, and therefore he is truly alone even as he is with others.

Reaching one’s true self, one’s state of alone, is reached slowly with the further one gets in his self-awareness. When one reaches his unique point he can be connected to his true self and be in a state of alone even as he is with others. His body is found with others, but in his soul, he is found with his true self. This is not a conceited, self-conscious state, but a state of being connected with one’s true self, his unique share that Hashem has created him with, his unique point which is connected with his unique soul-root - the inner root of his soul, which is his *yichid-iyus* (*uniqueness*). It is also called the *Yechidah* point of the soul, it is a space where one is individual because no one else can be exactly like him when it comes to this unique space.

Chazal said, “Therefore, man was created individual” – but isn’t this obvious if Adam was the only person in the world? It means something deeper. It means that every person has a space where he is alone and individual and unique. This is the true, inner *hisbodedus*.

The next step is to come to the purpose of Creation. One cannot remain in his unique self – if he does, he has only gotten halfway towards the purpose. The next half, after reaching one’s unique self, is to go above the I, to become connected with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Simply speaking, all of us have to get to this point. But to say it more deeply, each of us does not get to the same place – rather, each of us must reach our own unique bond with Hashem.

“*You are children to Hashem your G-d*”, “*Take your only son, the one whom you love*”, and *Raboseinu* teach that every person is an only child to Hashem. How can that be, if there are 600,000 souls in Klal Yisrael then how can each of us be an only child to Hashem?! It is because each Jew has a unique point that no one else has, and in that aspect, he is called an only child to Hashem.

What is the depth of becoming connected to Hashem? Generally this is through keeping the Torah’s mitzvos. But to say it more precisely, a person has to become connected through Torah and mitzvos to reach his unique point, and from that place he can connect to Hashem. His recognition

of Hashem will be a unique recognition that no one else can recognize! Chazal taught on the verse “*This is my G-d and I will glorify Him – each person will point to G-d and say This is my G-d that I awaited*” that each person has his own recognition of Hashem.² From that deep space in oneself, one can connect to the Individual One of the world and it will be his own unique recognition of Hashem that no one else has.

This is all the outline of *hisbodedus*. In summary (*working our way upwards from below to the upper stages*), it is to first have external separation from our surroundings, then separating from our thoughts, then separating from inner noise and reaching a state of inner silence. Then we can connect to our unique point – and it is a long process to get there, and for this we are given a long life to reach it. That is how we can always live in the state of alone even as we are amidst people, and from amidst that state of alone, we can be connected in a unique way to Hashem that no one else has. That is how we reach recognition of Hashem – which is the entire purpose of Creation.

This is obviously an expansive topic, and this is just an outline. It is like when the convert came to Hilel and Shamai and asked to be taught the entire Torah on one foot. This short lesson was an attempt to summarize this topic all on one foot. What we all need to take out of this is, how to have a more inner perspective

on life. Certainly we need to understand it more and to act upon it, but if we want to first have the general picture towards life – it is this.

Q&A

QUESTION 1: *How practically speaking do we reach this place of Yechidah which is a high level and we are so far from it?*

RAV'S ANSWER: There is the collective level of *Yechidah* and there is the private level of *Yechidah*. Only Mashiach reaches the collective level of *Yechidah*, and there are *tzaddikim* in every generation who reach the private level of *Yechidah* in their souls. The goal of every person, and the outline described in this lesson, is to strive to get to one's personal *Yechidah*. Our goal of all our *avodah* must be that we are trying to direct ourselves to eventually reach the personal revelation of *Yechidah* in our soul.

But you are asking: How can we strive to reach it if we are only at the beginning of our way? There are 2 attitudes how a person can live life. One way is, “This is what I'm commanded to do, Hashem said I have to do, so I have to do it”, and he goes and does it. A subtler perspective, though, is that we need to do as best as we can within our capabilities. This doesn't mean that one should try to take upon himself to do everything as best as he can, which isn't realistic and is impossible. Rather, a person should take one area and work on it as best as he can, within his

² See *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Part IV, Chapter 1, Recognizing Our Father*

capabilities. And if a person fails, he can tell himself, “Next time I will do it better.” Without this attitude, a person finds comes to all failure. With the right attitude, a person does his best, and calmly and happily. Like this, we are directing ourselves to reach our unique point. This doesn’t mean we are trying to reach as much as we are able to (*that leads to all failure*), rather, the attitude has to be that “I am doing the best that I can do, calmly and happily”. If a person can’t do something calmly and happily, it is an indicator that he shouldn’t do it.

There is a concept of “light” and “sparks”. The light is the *Yechidah*, and the “sparks” – the sparks of the *Yechidah*’s light - can illuminate our way for us, when we do our best within our capabilities, happily and calmly. This will allow one to receive sparks of his *Yechidah*. One can get sparks of the *Yechidah* (*and he will get bigger sparks according to the effort he puts in*) along the way, until he reaches the goal to reach his personal share.

QUESTION 2: It seems too stressful to do this *avodah* of *hisbodedus* that the Rav is saying. Does a person feel resistant to do this because it’s like being afraid of death?

RAV’S ANSWER: This is a more basic issue that has to be addressed, about something more external. This question is only because it sounds strange to most people when they first hear about it. If a person would grow up hearing about this concept and everyone around is doing it, if every Rav and every

community does this, then it wouldn’t be looked at as strange. But since we grow up in an environment where we see that no one is even trying to do it, it seems strange to him when we hear about something like the state of being “alone”. It feels uncomfortable to hear about it. So, understandably, with that attitude, a person will develop the mistaken notion that being “alone” means something sad and depressing. Feeling alone even for a moment reminds him of death, and death is unpleasant to think about.

But the truth is that alone doesn’t mean loneliness and being anti-social. If a person truly feels “I’m alone” in the simple sense, then of course he is sad, because this is how people are used to thinking. But if a person would learn to see that it’s enjoyable to sit alone in the quiet, it wouldn’t be looked at as something that reminds them of death. A person who gets used to enjoying the alone and quiet won’t be afraid of dying. He can certainly be afraid of the judgment for the soul that comes after death, but he is not afraid of death itself. A person who hasn’t gotten used to the quiet will be afraid of death and he’ll also be afraid of Gan Eden – he is wondering what kind of experience it will be so he’s afraid of that too. But if a person knows that death is about going to an eternal place of being alone with HaKadosh Baruch Hu where there is only Hashem, he can then know what the *Chovos HaLevovos* means that a person can love the quiet, and therefore a pious Jew awaits the day of death – not because he wants to die so

that he can go free from all of his problems – but because death is the ultimate state of quiet, and he has come to love the quiet.

QUESTION 3: But the Torah says *“It is not good for man to be alone”*, so being *“alone”* is a bad thing.

RAV'S ANSWER: Hashem said this after Adam sought a companion, after he met with every animal and then wanted a companion. But before this, it was good for man to be alone.

The true answer is that a person has to realize “I am not alone” even when he finds himself alone. When a person realizes he is with Hashem, he knows he is not truly alone. Why does a person feel “alone”? Because he doesn't feel that he is with Hashem. It is not good for man to be alone, and the true solution to this is to be alone with Hashem. But Adam didn't seek this, he wanted a soul-mate, so Hashem made him a soul-mate. But if Adam would have sought only to be alone with Hashem, he wouldn't have needed a soul-mate. Now with a soul-mate he won't feel alone.

When a person feels that is with Hashem, he will never feel alone. When I come to America, I don't know a word of english, in the airport at JFK I couldn't talk to anyone, I felt totally alone. When I got to the airplane I felt, I have nothing, no one I know, no way for me to call my family – I have nothing here. I'm not in Eretz Yisrael and I'm not really in America now, I have nothing now here but Hashem. Usually no one recognizes me, and I daven that no one should recognize

me so that I can have quiet. But it doesn't always happen, and sometimes a person does recognize me. But throughout the airport, no one recognized me and I didn't know anyone - so here in JFK I found the true kind of life! Certainly we always know in the back of our mind that we have a phone to call with, we're not totally disconnected, but generally we are disconnected.

In a country where you are all alone, it's not pleasant, but you can think to yourself, “This is exactly the tool that Hashem is giving me, so that I can feel alone with Him.” When a person finds himself in an unpleasant or uncomfortable situation, like in the terminal where he doesn't know anyone, naturally he immediately gets busy with his phone or finds ways to ease his boredom, but the true reaction would be, to realize that he now has a tool to become alone with Hashem for some time. It's not easy to be alone for so long, we don't want it to go on for too long, but if we find ourselves alone we have to realize that it's not a problem or issue that we have to get rid of, rather it's a tool that Hashem has given us, to find the power of alone. Certainly it's an avodah to learn how to enjoy it and find it pleasant. But when one feels that he is with Hashem, he doesn't need a soul-mate or spouse in order to quell his loneliness, because his need for companionship is filled with Hashem, and this is the meaning of how Hashem and Klal Yisrael have a husband and wife relationship.

QUESTION 4: How do we teach this to our children?

RAV'S ANSWER: There are 2 parts - what the attitude should be, and also, what to do practically. The attitude has to be taught to them since they are children, it should become a normal thing that's spoken about regularly in the home. It should become normal for children to hear in the home that we need to become close to Hashem, just like a child knows that we keep the mitzvos, learn Torah, etc. About what to do practically – if the whole world was doing hisbodedus then we wouldn't have to explain it to young children, but when it's not practiced and not spoken about, even when a person later grows up and does hisbodedus, it's a whole different language to him, it's going to a forest and talking to Hashem there, but it's not viewed as a regular part of life. When people grow up as children without hearing about hisbodedus regularly, they don't have the tools to start doing it when they are older. So it needs to be spoken about in the home as if it's a regular, normal part of life.

QUESTION 5: When a person is sitting alone with himself, does he need to get to the Yechidah level of the soul and according to the steps laid out in this lesson? Or can he do it all at once?

RAV'S ANSWER: There are always steps to take. One cannot immediately jump from his Yechidah level of the soul to being totally connected with Hashem. By skipping over

the previous stages, he will make it harder for himself to get to his Yechidah. One's Yechidah is the tool to get to the Yechidah of the world, Who is Hashem. One cannot do it all at once, so he has to get there in stages.

QUESTION 6: Should a person do this before or during davening?

RAV'S ANSWER: Rabbeinu Yonah says that before davening one should prepare his mind, this is hisbodedus. It is better to do it before davening. By davening you are talking to Hashem, but the step that should precede that is disconnecting from the world. If you walk into a brightly lit room you get blinded. You first have to get used to the light in stages.

QUESTION 7: If a person is talented in a number of areas, like if he is unique in doing *chessed* and he is also good at playing music, how can he find his unique point?

RAV'S ANSWER: There are many people who do *chessed* and many who are good at music. Every person has similarities to another, but every person has a different pattern of 4 elements, every person has a strongest element and a weakest element, and that is how a person can come to know his unique point. First you have to learn about the 4 elements in general, then you need to know which is your main element. It's impossible to answer you clearly because it is a long learning process to learn about the 4 elements and there are hundreds of classes on the subject [refer to 4 Elements series].

QUESTION 8: How much of this can we start to do now?

RAV'S ANSWER: The external layer of hisbodedus (*separating*) should be done already now. The internal layer (*finding your unique point*) though is a long process, which can take no less than a few years. There is what you can reach now, but it will take years to get deep into your unique point. A person can't know it right away. It's just like how a person can't start Daf Yomi today and hope to be finished Shas by tomorrow. It takes a few years. It is the same with knowing your unique point.

One's entire *avodah* is to come to recognize his unique point, and then he needs to utilize its potential.

QUESTION 9: Yaakov Avinu found himself in danger with the angel of Esav when he was alone. So being alone can either make a person depressed, or it can be dangerous for him. So how can a person be able to enjoy being alone?

RAV'S ANSWER: You are bringing up a good point, so let us explain the depth of the concept. If a person is simply alone (*all by himself*) then nothing is more dangerous than this, not simply because there can be problems such as what happened to Yaakov that the angel of Esav showed up, but because merely being alone is dangerous. Either a person is with others, or he is with Hashem - but to just simply be alone (*all by yourself*) is the worst danger for a person.

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