



פרשת לך לך

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Higher Solitude

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Part I. Alone With Your Mind

Avraham Arrives, Avraham Hides

Among the many lessons that we can learn from studying the life of Avraham Avinu, there is one detail that sometimes goes unnoticed but actually it deserves our attention. Because there's a question that should come to mind when we learn about Avraham's arrival in Eretz Canaan with his family: **וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן** - *They came to Eretz Canaan* (Lech Lecha 12:5) the land that Hashem commanded Avraham to settle in. And what's the first thing Avraham did? Did he buy a house? Did he buy a field? Did he settle down? No. **וַיַּעֲבֵר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ** - *Avraham began to pass through the land* (ibid. 6).

Now to my mind at least, that's a question. Avraham had plenty of money after all. He wasn't a nobody. He could have found a place to settle; he would have been admitted into a city. The truth is the question is even bigger because even to the city of Shaleim he didn't move. You know, in Eretz Canaan lived Avraham's great grandfather,

Malkitzedek, and he was the king of an exceptional community called Shaleim. And we know that Avraham respected Malkitzedek very much. He even recognized him as a *kohen*. It says **וַיִּתֵּן לוֹ מֵעֶשֶׂר מִכָּל** - *he gave him a tenth of all the spoils that he captured in battle* (Lech Lecha 14:20). So if he looked up to Malkitzedek, if he respected him, why didn't he stop and settle there in Malkitzedek's town? He would have had a community, people.

If it was me, if I was Avraham, the *possuk* would have said **וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן** - *And Avraham and his family came to Cannan*, **וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בְּעִיר שְׁלֵיִם** - *and they settled in the city of Shaleim*. But no, it doesn't say that. Instead **הָלֹךְ וְנִסְוֶע הַנִּגְבָּה** - *he started going southward* (ibid. 12:9), away from others. He was careful always not to live among others, not to be encumbered by too much company. He was a shepherd, a *roeh tzon*, and that type of job means that you'll spend a whole lot of time by yourself.

The Extroverted Introvert

Now, don't misunderstand; it doesn't mean Avraham was an isolationist, a hermit. This we know

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that Avraham spoke to others. וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה' – Wherever he went he proclaimed in the name of Hashem (ibid. 8.) Avraham was constantly talking, explaining, teaching, convincing. And he did it with finesse; he served refreshments and he was lavish. And people came just to enjoy his hospitality. And when he found righteous people who would listen to him, who sympathized with his ideals, he went out of his way to share with them his thoughts about a Borei and about the wonders of nature and about following in the ways of Hashem. And the good ones, he adopted. Avraham had *baalei bris* in Eretz Canaan; *baalei bris* means they were his covenant people. They lived nearby and they came to Avraham to study his ways. Anybody that was a good *talmid*, he was willing to accept.

But otherwise, he remained aloof. וַיֵּצֵאתוֹ מִן הַהָרָה – he removed himself from the crowds and headed toward the mountain area (ibid. 8). Except for what was needed, his policy was to set up camp in the distance and stay away from the populated towns and villages

And the question is why is that so? I think it's an important question because if Avraham chose that way of living it's important to understand that, after all, *maaseh Avos siman labanim*; we're expected, to a certain extent, to follow his example. And therefore it's worth investigating, at least according to our limited understanding, what Avraham intended to achieve by having as much time as possible to himself.

The Lonely Brooklynite

Now, in order to appreciate this subject let us first read the Chovos Halevavos *Sha'ar Cheshbon Hanefesh*, the *cheshbon* number seventeen.

“The seventeenth *cheshbon* – it means the seventeenth mode of thought that a person should acquire for himself – is how a man should meditate, what he should think about, when he has an urge to seek the company of people.”

It means when he's by himself and feels lonesome. Let's say it's Motzei Shabbos; the family

went out to visit the relatives in Boro Park and he's left all alone in the house. He looks through the window and sees cars crowded with people speeding to some destination and he imagines their good times ahead. Or maybe he's stuck in the yeshivah Motzei Shabbos. He's an out of town boy and everybody else is home with their families and he's alone in his dormitory room. Or he's just an unfortunate fellow who didn't marry and he's all by himself wherever he is. And he yearns for the company of people; and he thinks how much fun it would be to be together with people.

“At that time,” the Chovos Halevavos says, “let him consider the advantages of solitude and how good it is to be separate from people, how fortunate he is. And he should take the time to consider, in detail, the harm that comes from the company of people.” Of course he's talking about the company of fools but the company of wise men is hard to find because the wise ones don't make a habit of mixing – that's why they're wise.

The Leaky Faucet

Now the Chovos Halevavos spends time there dilating on the problems of company. First of all, he quotes the *chacham* in Mishlei (10:19): בְּרֹב דְבָרִים לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ פֶּשַׁע – when you talk much it is impossible to avoid doing sins. Now, usually, if you're in the company of others, you're going to eventually speak. After all, you're not going to sit there like a dumb mute. You'll join in; that's human nature.

Now once you open your mouth, it usually comes pouring out like a faucet and when people talk volubly they're going to commit sins. It's impossible to avoid it. Even when you choose your words it's not easy to avoid it but when you turn on the faucet then there's no question that לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ פֶּשַׁע.

You can imagine the scene on your own. You sit down on a bench in the courtyard of your apartment house with somebody and a full hour elapses in conversation. And it's not quiet philosophical discussions with measured words; it's lively. It's

wordy. It's gushing forth. In that hour you can imagine how many times *pesha* was committed.

But of course if you don't think about that, if you never spent time on this *cheshbon*, so you're not aware, and you blithely and innocently continue to seek the company of others. And you continue to produce *peshaim*.

That's one problem with company and that's one of the benefits of solitude that a person should consider from time to time: the more time I spend alone, the less *aveiros* I'll probably do. Of course, if you go into solitude with a radio or a telephone or some other devilish machine or even with the Sunday Times, that's not solitude. No, that's called company, the worst kind of company, and there will be *לא יחדל פשע* there too. But if you'll be alone, actually alone, then one of the benefits to consider is that you're saving yourself a lot of Gehenom.

The Constant Critic

And now the Chovos Halevavos continues: "Another disadvantage of being in company with other people is the fact that then you're obligated to reprove them when they do or say anything wrong. It's a Torah obligation. The *possuk* (Vayikra 19:17) says *הוֹכַח תּוֹכֵיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ* - you have to criticize your fellow man when he does wrong. That's the *halachah* by the way; even in the privacy of your home; a husband, when he hears his wife speaking on the telephone *lashon hara*, it's his job to interfere. Or if she hears him, she has to intervene and tell him to stop.

But it's a much bigger problem when you're in company because it's much more constant. It means that if you hear people saying something which is *assur* to say, like something belittling another person, or any other sin, if you see someone doing something that's forbidden, you must, *al pi din Torah*, speak up and tell that person to desist. And you understand that it's uncomfortable - it could lead to quarrels because company means that everybody is affable and everybody is agreeable. If you're going to sit at the family *melaveh malkah* and

you're going to criticize this one and tell the other one to stop - "don't say this," "don't say that" - you realize you won't last long in that company.

Higher Solitude

Now, the Chovos Halevavos there, dilates at length on these two benefits of solitude - less *aveiros* and less of a burden on the conscience - but we won't go further in that subject right now because it's a very big subject with many branches and sub-branches and we don't have time right now. I'm only saying it over in its general aspect because I want to get to our subject for tonight, the higher benefits of the solitude that Avraham chose. So we're going to skip some of the details in order to get down to our subject, to the higher benefits of solitude.

To appreciate the benefits of being alone doesn't mean merely that you should be alone in order to save yourself from sin or from the burden of conscience; it means you're alone for a much higher purpose. A person has to learn the habit of being alone with himself in order to accomplish the creation of a mind, a Torah mind filled with Torah ideals and attitudes. That's the solitude that Avraham Avinu was seeking and that's what we have to study tonight, the solitude that allows a person to think, to think about Hashem.

Enjoy Yourself

Now, it's easier said than done. It takes practice because most people never learned the trick of enjoying their own company. They're unthinking people and therefore it's impossible for them to be happy unless something comes in to cause them to fill their minds with something, to fill the vacuum between their ears.

Those are the types of people who line up in front of a movie theater waiting to be admitted. They have to go someplace where there is something taking place. Their lives are so empty of achievement of thought, that they'll stand in line and pay admission to get something that's a substitute for their own thinking.

What kind of achievement is it? Ach! When they leave the movies the money remains behind and they take along with them nothing except mixed-up ideas, silly unrealistic pictures that never happened. Sometimes worse, immorality, perversion. It's a tragedy what some people are doing today with their minds.

The Holy Lonely Mind

The greatest achievements a person can make are the achievements of the mind – that's how a person creates his future in this world and the Next World – and it's only possible by means of solitude. You just can't do it successfully when you're with others. People are talking, and doing, and so on, and it clogs up the mind. The mind becomes cluttered up with all kinds of useless thoughts.

And therefore it's the person who learns to enjoy his own company and to live a happy and fulfilled life even without frequent contact with others, he's the one most capable of making something from himself. And that's the answer to our question – Avraham was a seeker of solitude because it afforded him the opportunity to think and become great thereby. All of the greatness that we know Avraham achieved for himself and his progeny, he accomplished because of his time alone, time to think about Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Part II. Alone With Thought

Lonely Nature Walks

Now, my mind is too poor to try to follow the system of Avraham, to explain it, but in general, we know what he did – he studied nature and thus acquired, slowly but surely, a tangible awareness of Hashem, a real *emunah*. Now, I know if you say that today, some people might sneer at that, but the Rambam says it. He explains that Avraham busied himself with studying the world and seeing the Hand of Hashem in all the details of nature!

Not just once or twice; not even a thousand times. He never stopped admiring the Handiwork of

Hashem. Not like people who see something, a *chochmah*, and they say "Oh, isn't that interesting? The seed is this, the seed is that," and immediately he forgets about it and the effect is gone. No; Avraham wasn't fickle. As much as he was busy with people he made it his business to spend hours and days and weeks in solitude with himself for the purpose of repeating these great truths to himself. And that's how he became Avraham Avinu; he became great because of that.

The Great Shepherds

Now the truth is that's how great people live. Not only Avraham. You know, it's no coincidence that many of the great men in our history were shepherds. The *Avos* were shepherds; the *shevatim* were shepherds. Moshe Rabbeinu was a shepherd for forty years. Shaul Hamelech was a shepherd; Dovid Hamelech was a shepherd. And they all walked in the way of Avraham Avinu.

One of the best examples of someone who lived that way was Dovid. Our *Chachomim* tell us that when Dovid opened up the Torah and read about Avraham, he understood what we're talking about now, and he began to think, "Maybe I could aspire to such a thing too?"

Actually, the Gemara says that *everyone* should say, "When will my deeds reach the level of the deeds of our fathers?" But while we might say that *ma'amar*, Dovid *lived* that kind of a life. Remember that Dovid was a *roeh tzon*, a shepherd, and in those days a shepherd used to go far away from home; for days and weeks he would be alone in the wilderness. And so even as a young shepherd boy he was thinking, "I have so much time alone for myself. Why should I waste the opportunity? Maybe I can mold my life in such a way I could become a thinker like Avraham Avinu, someone whose mind is dedicated to Hashem?"

And it was there, in that solitude where there was nobody there to trammel him, nobody to waste his time chewing off his ear, that's where Dovid planted the seeds of his greatness. He lived by

himself in his own environment, his own mind, and he trained himself to make use of solitude to think, to contemplate, to ponder.

A Different Type of Solitude

And most important, he trained himself to achieve the benefits of solitude *even when he would be among others*. That's an ideal that the Chovos Halevavos introduces us to. He calls it הַתְּבוֹדָרוֹת בְּתוֹךְ הַהֶמְנוֹן - *solitude in the midst of company*. It's his expression but the idea is something our ancestors fulfilled. It's possible to be in solitude even in the midst of a multitude. And it's an important function because we live to a great extent among others.

And that's why if we peek into the private life of Dovid Hamelech – in many people's private lives it doesn't pay to take a peek but in Dovid's life we could do it – if we peek into his life we see how a great man lived in solitude, creating a mind, even when he was living among others.

We'll take just one verse that everybody knows and we'll see what he's saying there. אֶתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי ה' בְּאַרְצוֹת הַחַיִּים - *I wish to walk before Hashem in the lands of the living* (Tehillim 116:9). You know when Dovid said this *possuk*? When he was hiding from his pursuers who wanted to kill him. He was in the thickets, in the forest, and he was praying to Hashem to be saved.

Now, what's this expression 'the land of the living'? So the Gemara (Yuma 71a) explains it as follows: "*Zeh makom shevakim* – a place where there are markets, where there are stores. "Oh Hashem! Please save me and give me the opportunity to once more walk in the marketplaces of Yerushalayim, to walk down the street with stores on both sides."

Window Shopping

What's so special about the marketplace? What's so special about Kings Highway or Thirteenth Avenue in Boro Park? So Rashi explains that it's the place where various things, many various commodities, are available to purchase. Not because you need things; just to walk on the avenue, in the

solitude of your mind, and see the various things that are being sold there and to study them is an opportunity that is unmatched for thought, for creating a Torah mind.

Now that might seem strange at first but let's take it seriously because this is a model for how we can live too. After all, sometimes you take a walk and walking is a form of solitude. Solitude doesn't mean you have to be in a cave on a desert island. When you walk down the street you're all alone; nobody is talking to you. And it's a glorious opportunity to talk to yourself. Only you have to know what to say.

Fig Facts

And now we see what Dovid said. As he was walking down the streets, let's say, of Yerushalayim, and he saw a market where they were selling potatoes – well, they didn't have potatoes in Yerushalayim in those days. Potatoes are an American invention, South American, so we'll switch from potatoes to, let's say, figs. That he surely had in Eretz Yisroel. And when Dovid saw baskets of figs in the bazaar he was thinking; he wasn't hungry, he just finished eating his meal in the palace, but now he wanted food for the mind. And so he was thinking, "What a sight! What a *chessed* Hashem!"

They weren't the figs that we buy that are on a string, shriveled by smoke. No. They were fat figs, bursting with syrup and Dovid was looking at them and he was thinking, "How luscious those figs are. What a great gift Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving us. They're bonbons that grow on trees. And they're healthy too. Figs are full of energy, they're nourishing; and they're good for digestion too."

The Fig Factory

Now as he was walking there – as much as possible he walked alone, in the quiet of his own mind – he was thinking, "How is it that the fig came out of the wood of the fig tree?" He remembered how when he was a shepherd in the wilderness he had thought about that too. "Maybe if I made an incision into the branch," he had wondered, "into

the twig just underneath where the fig comes out, maybe I'll find little tiny figs there inside of the branch; and these little figs finally extrude from the hole someplace, a pore, and they swell and become a big fig."

So he took his penknife and cut into the twig but there was nothing but liquid, a little bit of sap. How is it that sap turns into that?!

So Dovid is in the marketplace and he's thinking to himself, "There must be something in the tip of the twig, a factory that's able to take the materials of the juice and transform it into a fig!"

Now a fig is not simple at all. A fig is a very complicated product with very many components. And they're all encased in a skin that protects it. And inside when you get through eating the fig you find coupons for more figs! The seeds! You spit out the seeds, the seeds fall to the earth, and the miracle begins again.

Now, Dovid had thought these same thoughts hundreds of times already. But that's exactly it. Time to think means time to review all of these great ideals of *emunah* and *yiras Hashem*. That's called living! That's called 'walking in the land of the living'.

Moving Along In The Bazaar

And so Dovid spent his time in the marketplace thinking about the miracle of the fig until his eyes were attracted to some woolen cloth that was being displayed in a different place in the bazaar. And so he shifted his thoughts now: "What a wonderful thing this is, the wool. Where does it come from? It's produced on the backs of sheep."

The backs of sheep are able to produce wool? Does that mean that the sheep are feeding on wool and therefore the wool comes out through their backs eventually? No. They eat nothing but grass and water.

"Oh," you say, "it's not from grass and water. It comes out of materials on the sheep's back." Where does a sheep get its back though? It got its back from its mother. Where did the mother get this

sheep's back? It ate grass and water. The mother ate grass and water and produced a sheep, and this sheep ate grass and water and it's producing wool from its back.

"What a wonderful system", Dovid was thinking. "A brand new material that results from grass and water. It means I'm looking at the Handiwork of Hashem now, a miracle just as big as Kriyas Yam Suf; bigger even!"

Emulating Dovid

Now we have to know our poor little minds are not catching up with Dovid. He's walking very rapidly through this marketplace. He's thinking so fast that we are only picking up a few crumbs of his thoughts. I'm certain that he thought much more and much more deeply than my poor words. But whatever it was, in the solitude of his mind he was becoming greater and greater with every thought.

You should try it yourself. As you pass by the stores and you see a shoe store – you don't need any shoes. Despite what your wife has been telling you that you need to have three pairs or four pairs. You have one pair for the weekdays and one pair for Shabbos and that's all you want. If you're a poor man you have one pair for both but you polish it for Shabbos; that's good too. And so you're not buying any shoes. But as you pass by the store you see a window full of leather shoes. Now sometimes today you'll see plastic shoes but the best material, even today, is still leather. Leather is unbeatable so far for foot gear. And where does leather come from? From the back of a cow!

Leather comes from grass and water because the cow was eating grass and water and its hide was growing because of that – at the same time that it was using those same ingredients to produce milk. And after a while it produced calves and the calves turned into oxen and cows and that's how we get skin, leather, and more milk.

Market Greatness

And so you're doing now on Kings Highway what Avraham did as he walked in the meadows of Canaan and saw goats munching away, or what Dovid thought about in the marketplace. Even today nobody is capable of creating these natural wonders. The DuPont plant which is five blocks long and there are two thousand cars parked in front of the plant every day, all together they can't make wool or leather or a fig. It's remarkable! And so, in the solitude of your mind you're becoming greater and greater by means of marveling at the demonstrations that Hashem is putting on in this world.

Now I'm not saying that's the only way by any means – if you want to review Mesichta Bava Kama while you're walking in the marketplace, very good – but it's one of the more important ways, the way that our great men, starting with Avraham Avinu, utilized for greatness.

Part III. Alone With Him

Alone With Your Friend

But now we're going to talk about an even higher level of *hisbodedus*, the most important reason that Avraham and all of the great ones made sure, as much as possible, to live separate from the crowds. The best result of solitude, the greatest benefit, is not that you'll be alone by yourself, with your thoughts, but that you get to be alone with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Ooh ah! That's already an entirely different subject! Not only that your mind is available to think thoughts about Him but that you actually feel like you're alone with Him. There's nothing in life as great as this kind of solitude, the noble career of being alone with your Best Friend.

You know, the Chofetz Chaim's son, when he writes about his father he notes an interesting point. He says that his father didn't have *yedidim*. He didn't *chaver* with anybody.

Now that's a queer thing to hear because we know that the Chofetz Chaim was a friend of everybody. He traveled around, doing *mitzvos*, helping people everywhere. All kinds of *gemilas chassodim* he was busy with. He traveled to help Jewish soldiers, establishing kosher kitchens for them. And he was very kindhearted too; he was sweet and friendly and he always took in guests. But still, he never associated with people. He didn't have cronies with whom he spent time together.

The Recluse Kohen Gadol

You know why the Chofetz Chaim didn't long to be in the company of anybody? Because he loved the company of only One Friend. רַעַךְ וְרַע אָבִיךָ אֵל תַּעֲזֹב – Don't forsake your Friend and the Friend of your father (Mishlei 27:10). אֲלֶיךָ וְאֶלְקֵינוּ וְאֶלְקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, that's the One Friend that you have. And it's only when you're alone, that's when you realize it most clearly.

The *mishnah* (Yuma 1:1) tells us that שְׁבַעַת יָמִים לְפָנֵי יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים מִפְּרִישֵׁן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל – seven days before Yom Kippur we separate the *kohen gadol* from his family and from everybody else and we put him in *Lishkas Palhedrin*. There was a special chamber on the Har Habayis and there the *kohen gadol* remained in seclusion for seven days. Certain times he was visited by the *Chachamim* of the *Beis Din shel Kohanim* who taught him and gave him instruction in the *avodah* of Yom Hakippurim but otherwise he was alone most of the time.

So the question is posed, why is it necessary before Yom Kippur to have solitude for the *kohen gadol*? And Rashi explains (Yuma 4b s.v. *liayeim alav*) that the purpose was to make him aware of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Because he is going now, on Yom Kippur, into the Mikdash to do the *avodah* and it's necessary for him to acquire Awareness of Hashem before that.

Lonely Awareness

The question is, what does solitude have to do with Awareness of Hashem? Let him walk in Yerushalayim among the *nezirim* and *tzaddikim*. Or better yet let him stay in the *beis medrash* among

his *chaveirim*, *talmidei chachomim*, and learn Mesillas Yesharim.

So Rashi there makes an important statement. Everything in Rashi is important but this statement is something that we need for our subject.

Rashi tells us that the company of people is a contradiction to *yiras Hashem*. You hear that? Company, friends, associates, it causes you to forget about Hashem. Solitude, on the other hand, enables a person – of course the right kind of person, if he knows what he wants to accomplish – to gain an awareness of Hashem, what we call *yiras Hashem*. לְהַבְרִיחוֹ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם שֶׁתַּחֲוֹל עָלָיו אֵימָה בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ לְבָדוֹ – *by means of separating from people and being alone, that allows for yirah to come upon a person* (ibid.)

Now that needs an explanation. What's the connection? Why is company a contradiction to *yiras Hashem*?

Natural Awareness

So we have to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu breathed into man an innate instinctive wisdom. וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו – *He breathed into his nostrils a wisdom* (Bereishis 2:7). And included in this wisdom that every man harbors within himself is an instinctive awareness of a Borei; he feels Hakadosh Baruch Hu in his heart. It's natural; it's inborn in man. Only that if you're a busy person and if you mingle with people then this thought is driven out of your heart.

Pay attention to that because you're hearing now a *klal gadol baTorah*, a very important principle. Company, people, friends, cousins, it's all a contradiction to the achievement of *yiras Hashem*. It can't be helped. The more you mingle with people the more you forget about Hashem.

Uncle Sam Makes You Forget

Even if you go for a mitzvah; you go to a *bar mitzvah* or a *chasunah*, same thing. Any place where there is a *chaburah* of people – even good people – you have to know you're losing *yiras Shamayim*. Unless, of course, the subject that's being discussed is *yiras Shamayim*; if you're together with *chachamim*

who are reminding you that's something else. But otherwise it's “Uncle Sam said this” and “Aunt Fanny said this” and he did this and she did that, and your mind becomes all cluttered.

Not only speaking; just being around people is already a problem because people have a magnetic influence on you. The face of a human being, the personality that plays out on the screen of his or her face, is the most engaging phenomena in the universe.

And therefore when you're among people then you're almost guaranteed that there's nobody else except them; in your mind it's the relatives and the neighbors, the foreman and the boss and the customers and the co-workers. That's all there is in the world and Hakadosh Baruch Hu is expelled from your heart. Solitude, on the other hand, even without any external stimulus, is an opportunity for the natural feeling, the natural awareness to assert itself. Naturally you come to feel the Presence of the Borei.

Ancient Solitude

That's why the old *nevi'im*, the prophets of old, used to go out in the wilderness. Even the *gedolei acharonim*, the Baal Shem Tov, went into a forest for weeks to be away from people. Rav Yoizel Novardoker had a hut hidden in the forest. He had two huts. One that his wife knew about. He was unlisted. Nobody else knew how to get him. But there was another hut that even his wife didn't know about. Only his *talmid*, Rav Yoel Boronsik, knew about that second hut, the second one. He had two degrees of *hisbodedus* because that makes a man great.

Now you'll tell me, my wife won't let. Maybe your mother won't let. And anyhow, if we would go out to the forest like the Baal Shem Tov so we'd just lie down and fall asleep. Like I was once talking to a big *rosh yeshivah* in Europe. I said to him, “The Gra used to close his shutters by day and be alone in his room.”

So he said, “If we would do that, we would fall asleep.”

So how to get solitude, that's the problem. You're in the office or the factory all day. Or maybe you're in the yeshivah, you're busy all day learning in the yeshivah. What solitude? How can you go in solitude?

Modernishe Solitude

And so we come back again to that important principle that the Chovos Halevavos taught us: הַתְּבוֹדָרוּת בְּתוֹךְ הַהֶמְנוֹן – *solitude in the midst of company*. Like Avraham when he was teaching his *baalei bris*, or Dovid when he walked in the marketplace – in the midst of company they were alone with Hashem.

So let's say you're at Cousin Chaim's bar mitzvah party in Boro Park and everybody is chatting. All around you all the tongues are clacking and you're like a fish on dry land and you're sitting among them. So close your eyes for a moment. They'll think you're dozing off but actually you have retired into your cave and you're talking in your thoughts to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

You are acting like you're listening but your mind is someplace else. You are in a forest now like the Baal Shem Tov went in the forest. And when somebody asks you something, so you come out of the forest to answer.

And if they'll say that you're absentminded, so say "I'm sorry. I was thinking about something." They think you're thinking about your business or something. Let them think so.

The truth is you don't have to say much because they're willing to do all the work themselves. He doesn't want to hear what you say. You say 'yes,' 'yes' and act like you're listening attentively; meanwhile your mind is on the hill and the dale far away from here, with Hashem.

Yeshivishe Solitude

Let's say you're in the yeshivah and you have a Gemara in front of you. A *tzaddik* once said that during the day you can take your gemara, he gives permission to take your gemara and hold it like this in front of your face and now you're shut off from

the surrounding world. You're transported to some far off isolated place where it's only you and Hashem.

And once you're there you can get busy; you can say some words to yourself about *mora Shomayim*. You can think about Hashem. You can say, "Hashem, You're my best and my most trusted Friend." Under your breath you can say that.

Even on the subway; it's jam packed and you're hanging on the strap, being pressed on all sides by a mass of humanity – there's an excellent opportunity. Close your eyes and think that now you're all by yourself on one of the Harei Yehudah in the days of the *nevi'im*. Immediately you're transported there; you're on a mountain and there's nobody else there. It's deserted except for you and Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You're in solitude in the midst of a multitude.

The Pure Heart

Try it and you'll see that it works. All around you is a storm of humanity with all their little interests, their little worries, their conversation, their little minds, while you are now on the Harei Yehudah and you're *misboded im Boro*, you're alone with your Creator. I'm not saying it's easy; it takes some training. But everyone can do it. And the results are remarkable. The Chovos Halevavos says that solitude is the הַעֲמוּד בַּר הַלֵּב, the pillar of the pure heart. It means it's the foundation, the supporting pillar, of the greatest achievement, awareness of Hashem. That's the most pure-hearted person, someone who understands that he's alone with Hashem, the One upon Whom you want to concentrate all of your interest, all of your love.

Now, for many of you listening here, I know that it's a waste of time telling you all this; it's only said for exceptional people. But in every group there are exceptional souls. Especially here; a lot of exceptional people come here and therefore I know that it's fertile ground for some seeds to fall and sprout.

And when it sprouts, it grows into unlimited *shleimus*. Even if it's just for a minute, it's excellent. Solitude doesn't mean a lifetime of being isolated

from humanity. One minute is also a very big achievement. And every additional minute is another achievement in itself. And the more you do it, more often and for longer periods of time, that's the way to greatness. It's the greatness of solitude with Hashem and there's nothing better! You're walking in the footsteps of our first father, Avraham, and Dovid Hamelech and all of our other great men. And I give you my guarantee, the more you do it, the greater you'll become.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

The Lamppost Project

The following is from tape #317: Let's say you're walking in the street. So you say to yourself "I'm going to make a project that from this lamppost to the next lamppost I'm going to think only about Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It's me and Him, alone together. Challenge yourself. "If I could think about Hakadosh Baruch Hu from here to there to there - it's only twenty paces in between." At the end you relax. "Ah! I did it! I made it! For twenty paces I was alone with Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

The next day try it for one minute straight. Then relax. Try that once a day the whole week and next week increase it. After a while, increase it again. If you make it for five minutes straight then you're a man who is a head taller than the rest of the world. If you can think five minutes about Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the solitude of your mind without any externality to force you to think then you have become great! You're an exceptional ovoid Hashem.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

317 - Benefit of Solitude | 361 - Greatness in Little Episodes | 428 - Solitude Versus Togetherness | 478 - Avraham | 760 - Ways of Avraham
E-34 - The Craving to Excel

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Many times the Rav has advocated here that a person should demonstrate good character, even though he doesn't really have good character. You said tonight that a man should always act like a fine gentleman even though he isn't. But isn't that just plain wrong because we're deceiving people?



Keep on deceiving them! If you can deceive your wife for the next seventy years into thinking that you're a nice fellow, then deceive her. You do whatever you can, all day long, to make her think that you're a wonderful fellow, a gem of a person.

And when it comes to the next world, she will say, "Oh, he was such a wonderful husband." So they'll say, "He wasn't such a fine fellow." So she'll say, "No! He was wonderful, a wonderful husband!" And Hashem will take her word for it. Hashem will say, "I'll take your word for it."

So you keep on deceiving everybody - and not only your wife but everybody - and Hakadosh Boruch Hu will reward you for it. Now, that doesn't mean that you should say that you're a fine fellow, no. But you should always act like a fine fellow, and Hakadosh Boruch Hu will reward you for that.

TAPE # 920 (July 1993)