

Hitbodedut (Prayer) Study Guide



Taken from the teachings of Tau Malachi in the Sophian tradition (www.sophian.org)



Produced by Magdalene Circle (www.magdalene-circle.org) in Austin Texas.

Hitbodedut: Praying in Seclusion

“When ever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard because of their many word. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”



(The Sermon on the Mount)

The most powerful spiritual practices are often the simplest ones – practices anyone can do if they wish to. Adonai Yeshua’s teachings on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount reflect this very well – coupled with the advice given above, he teaches his famous prayer that we likely all know, the “Lord’s Prayer.”

Hitbodedut is the Hebrew word for meditation, literally meaning self-isolation or seclusion. This may imply a literal spiritual retreat, akin to the way of the navim (prophets) in ancient times, who were prone to going out into the wilderness to seek their visions and to commune with Ha-Shem, or it may imply an inward turn of our attention and awareness – a going within to pray and meditate to commune with Ha-Shem.

Essentially, in one way or another Hitbodedut means praying and meditating in seclusion – and it implies a very intimate and private communion with the Holy One, the source of our being. Understanding this, we will understand that Adonai Yeshua is teaching the practice of hitbodedut in the Sermon on the Mount as it appears in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Indeed, very specifically he tells us to go into seclusion and pray in private. Although we can take his instruction literally and have a special room set aside for this purpose – something very good to do if we are able to do so, we can just as easily go out into the garden or some place in nature, or go to a tranquil park, or anywhere that inspires us and that we are unlikely to be disturbed. In fact, we could sit amidst people in a coffee shop, bookstore or library, stare into an open book, looking to others as though we are reading, and go within to pray and meditate. The key is that we go within, and go deeper still, secluding ourselves to speak with the Holy One and listen to the Holy One – we do this in whatever way we can, and we can do so almost any place, at any time. It is just that, naturally, a tranquil and inspiring place is most conducive and helpful, especially when we are first learning to pray and meditate.

Now, when we go within, secluding ourselves in this way we may wonder what to do or what we should say. So Adonai Yeshua gives us a small prayer to begin with – once we turn within and let ourselves settle, if no prayer comes to us, we can always pray the Lord’s Prayer and then abide listening to that Great Silence the Holy One is.

Hitbodedut, however, isn’t really a scripted prayer, but rather it is prayers from the heart, completely uncontrived and spontaneous, unadulterated, free from any self-consciousness whatsoever – it is prayer in the fullness of faith, completely candid, open, honest, sincere, as though speaking with the Holy One as with a very close and dear friend, or as though speaking with a beloved Father or Mother, or as those speaking with one’s lover.

Such prayer is Hitbodedut.

Essentially, praying from the heart in this way, we praise and give thanks, and we pray about whatever arises in our heart and mind, and whatever is transpiring in our lives and the lives of those we know – and our prayer assumes the form of a very intimate and private conversation with Ha-Shem.

When we have a conversation with someone, as much as speak we must also listen, and this is especially true when we have a conversation with the Holy One – as much as talk we need to listen, and, in fact, if we are wise, we may be inclined to listen more than talk when we entertain a dialogue with the Holy One. Our thoughts and words in prayer are like an outer chamber of hitbodedut, the deeper settling into silence to listen is like passing into an inner chamber – and with time and experience we find that we can go deeper and deeper into this stillness and silence, while remaining completely awake and alert. As this happens there is an experience of profound peace and sublime joy – it is truly amazing.

Of course, in hitbodedut we can dance in-between these two chambers, passing back and forth in-between speaking and listening, and the experience of conversation with the Holy One can be a great delight, providing all manner of insights and illuminations, granting all manner of blessings and boons.

At times, hitbodedut assumes the form of a self-evaluation or life review in which we consider our life and how we are living, looking to see if we are spending our days wisely, or if there is anything in need of change, and looking into our character, our virtues and vices, and considering if there is anything we need to change or improve upon – whenever we find things in ourselves or our lives in need of change or improvement, we pray about them and we ask the Holy One for empowerment to bring about the changes we need.

It is very wise to enact a self-evaluation or life review in this way often in our spiritual lives – many masters of the tradition have advised their companions to do so daily, or at least weekly. In so doing we cultivate self-awareness and self-knowledge, and we are able to enact a conscious growth and development in our lives – it is a cause for the generation of greater happiness, success and satisfaction in life, and will help make us a better person, a true human being.

Along a similar line, we may also pray about potential plans for the future, or we may seek the guidance of the Holy One, seeking direction in our lives – just as we are able to review our past, we can also envision our future as we commune with the Holy One.

In the midst of the play of the past and the future in prayer it is important not to forget about the present, where you are and God is, and where you are innately connected with God, the source of your being – it is important not to give way to the delusion of lack, but to abide in the awareness of life abundant in the Holy One, and to give praise and thanks for all of the blessings the Holy One is bestowing upon you, most especially the blessing of the direct and intimate communion you have with the Holy One, anywhere, anytime.

In hitbodedut we can empower our prayers with the Names of God, and with the invocation of the spirits of tzaddikim and maggidim – but more than anything, it is all about prayers of the heart in our own native language, an intimate and private conversation with our Good Friend, our Beloved, the Holy One of Being.

Hitbodedut can and does, indeed, lead to some very deep states of meditation, and it can lead to experiences of higher consciousness; likewise it can lead to experiences of Ruach Ha-Kodesh, vision and prophecy, and the arising of all manner of spiritual gifts. Yet, when understood, it is a very simple practice – so simple that even a very little child can be taught to do it.

Go within and pray to God from your heart, and as much as speaking, remember to listen! This is how we would teach this to a little child, and to adults too!

This is the essence of hitbodedut.

Here we may point out that this is the one spiritual practice, other than the breaking of bread and pouring of wine, taught by Adonai Yeshua in the gospels – these two practices, joined to the single commandment that we

“love one another,” are the very essence and foundation of the Christian life. There is no doubt that Adonai Yeshua taught other spiritual practices to his disciples – but this is the essence and foundation, and all other practices extend from this.

Here we may say that this foundation alone is enough for a very full spiritual life and practice – there is nothing lacking in it; and likewise we may say that this hitbodedut is perhaps among the best practices for these times in the fullness of faith, enacting an active and dynamic surrender, relying upon Divine Grace.

When we pray in this way and then abide in silence, listening, it corresponds directly to the practice of “going within and holding the conscious intention of the reception of the Light from above” – that’s hitbodedut in a nutshell!

If you practice this daily for about an hour you will be doing very well and make good progress in your interior life, and likewise you will find a flow of many blessings in your life – an unimaginable flow of grace.

Of course, it is wise to begin with a shorter duration of practice and build it up over time – an hour being the basic goal after a little while.

Ingredients of Hitbodedut



If we are going to practice hitbodedut there are some necessary ingredients. First and foremost we must have faith:

Faith in God

Faith in ourselves

Faith in the tzaddikim

Faith in the Gospel – the teachings and practices

Faith in hitbodedut

Faith in the process

Along with faith, we will need qualities such as hope, determination, commitment, courage, patience, enthusiasm or joy, perseverance, love and trust.

Faith in God

Obviously, in order to go within, and pray and meditation, and commune with the Holy One, we must have faith in the Holy One – we must believe that there is a God and that we can have a personal relationship with God or intimate interaction with God, and that God loves us and desires to relate or interact with us; if we did not believe in God, we certainly would not be inclined to prayer or communion with God. Prayer would be impossible!

When we speak of faith, however, this has nothing to do with dogmatic creed and doctrines – it is not based on a theology, but rather it is an intuitive sense and conviction that there is a Supreme Being, who is the source of all being, according to our own knowledge and understanding, according to the Truth and Light that has been revealed in our own experience.

We may conceive of the Holy One, the Supreme, in any numbers of ways – as Being-Consciousness-Force, or Energy-Intelligence, or Presence and Power of no specific form whatsoever, or we can relate with God as Father, as Mother, or as the Beloved, or we may focus upon a specific partzuf, divine personification; it is all a question of how we best relate with God and our own experience of God. However, for the practice of hitbodedut faith in God is indispensable.

Faith in Ourselves

In order to entertain a relationship or interaction with God, and to take up a conversation and communion with God, we must also have faith in ourselves – we must have spiritual self-worth.

As a spiritual or mystical Christian we have faith in Adonai Yeshua as the Messiah, as the Son of God, yet as mystics, to have faith in him is to have faith in ourselves, faith that we also are sons and daughters of God, and that the same Light-presence and Light-power embodied in him, the Messiah and Holy Spirit, is also within us.

To speak with God and befriend God we have to believe in ourselves, believe in our humanity and potential divinity, and as much as cultivating spiritual humility before the presence of Ha-Shem, we must also cultivate spiritual self-worth, some confidence that we are, indeed, good enough and worthy enough to abide in the

Shekinah, the Divine Presence and Power. If we do not have faith in ourselves, how could we possibly draw near to God, the Infinite, Ain Sof?

Here we may say, God believes in us even when we do not believe in God or in ourselves – in this we are wise to trust in God and remember God's faith in us, allowing it to bolster our faith in ourselves.

Faith in the Tzaddikim

We also need to have faith in the tzaddikim, in the holy ones, in the prophets and apostles who have been able to draw near to God, and who have become realized individuals, more or less, acquiring knowledge of God through direct spiritual and mystical experience, and experiencing conscious unification with God and Godhead to various degrees. Naturally so, for if we do not believe in the tzaddikim why would we take their advice, or follow their teachings, or take up the practices they share with us?

There is something more to our faith in the tzaddikim, though, for they embody something of a higher consciousness, something of the Divine Presence and Power, and we can receive blessings and empowerments from them, and all manner of spiritual assistance, and they serve as midwives to the Mother Spirit as she gives birth to the Messiah and Shekinah of Messiah in us.

To the extent that we have faith in the tzaddikim we receive the blessings or transmissions of helpful spiritual energy they impart, and hearing teachings or instructions on practices from them we are empowered to take them up and bring them to their fullest fruition.

Faith in the tzaddikim, however, also corresponds to faith in ourselves – for having faith in holy people, in realized individuals who embody something of Divine or Enlightened Being, we know and understand that it is possible for us to do so as well; we know that we are also destined to embody Divine or Enlightened Being, to know and unite with God.

Faith in the tzaddikim is faith in our own potential – our own destiny!

Faith in the Gospel

First and foremost as spiritual or mystical Christians, faith in the Gospel is faith in Yeshua as the Messiah, and it is faith in the essential points of his life story – understanding Yeshua Messiah as a historical figure, not merely mythical, and having faith in his teachings and the wonders he performed, and most especially faith in the crucifixion and resurrection, the advent of the Risen Messiah, Hayyah Yeshua.

Indeed, if the Divine Incarnation is nothing more than a myth, then our aspiration and hope in the Messiah is in vain; if Supernal or Messianic Consciousness was not realized and embodied in him, then it is an effort in futility for us to labor for self-realization in the Messiah!

Like our faith in God, however, this is not faith in dogmatic creed and doctrines, but rather it is our own intuitive sense of the mysteries of the Gospel, and it is our own knowledge and understanding of the Gospel as revealed in our experience of the Risen Messiah and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Gospel, of course, extends to become all manner of teachings and practices shared by the tzaddikim or apostles of light – believing in the Gospel, we take up the teachings and practices, and live the Divine Life, living in the Messiah, seeking to be like the Messiah, and yet more, seeking to become the Messiah, the Anointed of God, fulfilling our human destiny.

Obviously, unless we believe in the Gospel – the teachings and practices of the Christian stream, it would be useless to take them up!

Faith in Hitbodedut

This is an extension of faith in the Gospel, faith in the teachings and practices.

In terms of faith in hitbodedut, however, there is something more to be said.

As we have shared, hitbodedut is an essential spiritual practice taught by Master Yeshua himself – according to the masters of the tradition it is the heart and core of the spiritual life as taught by him. Thus, this practice holds a special blessing and empowerment from the Master and when we take it up we receive something of that blessing and empowerment from him.

As such, it is a spiritual practice that has been taken up by literally millions and millions of his disciples for thousands of years, including many holy ones or tzaddikim, and it is a practice taught in Judaic tradition as well, so it was also practiced by the patriarchs and matriarchs, and all of the prophets, and many more millions of faithful before the time of Adonai Yeshua and dawn of the Christian stream. Thus, this practice is charged with the blessings and power of every single soul that has practiced it before us, and we receive something of those blessings and power when we take it up.

According to several holy tzaddikim in recent times in the Christian and Jewish traditions hitbodedut is among the most powerful and effective practices for spiritual progress in our times – it is the most easily accessible and best possible practice for an aspirant in the West.

There is great merit or light-power in the practice of hitbodedut!

If you have an intuitive sense of this, having faith in hitbodedut, it will be an extremely powerful practice for you – you will experience many blessings and wonders in your life through it!

Faith in the Process

This is very important. Quite naturally, as in everything in life, there is a flow and ebb, or experience of progress and regress, in our spiritual life and practice – there are highs and lows, and it is normal and unavoidable. It is a process, and it is a way of life, and when the ebbs come, when there are regressions in the development of our interior life, when we experience the lows or “dry-spells,” we must remember that it is all part and parcel of the process, and we must have faith and trust in the process – otherwise we are unlikely to get very far in our spiritual journey, for we will get discouraged and give up.

There is something more to be said of faith in the process though – although at the outset we may think of illumination as some sort of fix or static state, it is not; rather it is a dynamic state, fluid and flowing – it is not a noun, it is a verb, an action, movement or process!

In the experience of divine illumination what we find is that it is a flickering between clarity and confusion, knowledge and ignorance, but free from attachment and aversion it becomes a very rapid flickering so that there is an appearance of constant illumination. In order to experience this we must be willing to the flows and ebbs, clarity and confusion alike, no longer grasping at clarity or avoiding confusion – we must have faith in the process.

Here we may say: “There is no goal but the path” – the process.

Having explored the key ingredient of faith in the practice of hitbodedut, next we can explore some of the other essential ingredients – but, no doubt, this is enough for one session.