

Bringing It to the Heart

I know Hashem loves me. Does my heart feel it yet?

Based on a class by Chava Shmilovitch · Adapted and edited by Ahavya Halevy

"Enter the Ark and be saved from the flood." With these words Chava Shmilovitch opened the second meeting of the Chiburim series, and she asked us to understand: this is not something that happens after the Zoom. **It is already now.** In this very moment we are practicing how to enter, how to connect to ourselves and to Hashem.

Every year, she says, brings a flood of its own: confusion, tests and challenges whose whole essence is to disconnect you from yourself, from your true mission and from Hashem. And just as Noach built an Ark, you too are building an Ark for yourself. Chava shares that she has been building her own Ark for more than twenty years, and that this is what keeps her sane. It is also the place where she feels joy, delight and rest.

In the first meeting we talked about connecting to ourselves and to shefa. This time we went to the root: our connection with Hashem, "the most important, most basic and most fundamental thing."

Light in the Middle of the Darkness

Chava brought the testimony of Omer Shem Tov, who shared that in captivity he spoke with Hashem "the way you talk with the person closest to you." He didn't only ask Him for things; he truly talked with Him. And out of that great darkness he felt his heart expand and a smile rise on his face. "Though I sit in darkness, Hashem is my light" (Micah 7:8).

But most of us, Chava says, never learned to work with the heart. "They taught us a lot about working with the mind. So here, we are going to work with the heart too."

When the Prayer Stops at the Ceiling

Before she began teaching, Chava invited us to open a notebook and answer honestly:

> Do you find yourself waiting for someone close to you to understand you without your having to say a word, and when they don't, something inside you breaks?

> Are you always giving, seeing everyone's needs, and feeling that no one really notices what you give or what you feel?

> Is there a fear in you that you have never said out loud: that maybe if people really knew you, they wouldn't love you?

> And the hardest question of all: do you pray, maybe for years already, and feel that your prayer rises to the ceiling **and stops there**?

If something in your heart tightened at these questions, Chava wants us to know: there is a source for it, and there is a way out.

One Person Who Will Come When I Cry

About seventy years ago, John Bowlby developed attachment theory. He discovered that a baby doesn't need
only food and warmth. He needs one person, an **"attachment figure,"** who will see him, notice how he feels, come when he cries and soothe him. This is a survival need, just like air and water. In Chava's words, this science anchors what the Torah taught us thousands of years earlier.

When a baby girl cries and her mother picks her up and says, "I'm here, I see you," something is recorded in the body, in the nervous system: The world is safe. When I need, someone comes. I am worthy of love and attention.

But when Mom is tired, busy, in survival mode, or simply doesn't know how to respond, something else is recorded. My feelings bother the people I love most, so I'd better hide them. My needs are a burden, so I'd better not need anything. This is how **attachment wounds** form.

Chava stresses that it doesn't take a disaster for this to happen. Women tell her, "But I had good parents." And she answers: "It's enough to have a mother who was in survival mode herself, a father who didn't know how to talk about feelings, and a home where no one cries." And all of this is recorded before we even have words.

> "What gets recorded there is:
> I am alone in the world."

The Body Remembers

In adulthood it shows up almost everywhere. In marriage, as fear of abandonment or as pulling away. In motherhood, when a child's crying stirs something in us that we don't understand. In friendships, when I am always the one who gives. In the body, in tension, fatigue and sleep. And in an inner voice that follows me everywhere and says: "You're not good enough, you're not loved enough."

The Deepest Wound: Before Hashem

And here is the heart of the meeting. What we experienced with our parents we copy in two directions: to how we treat ourselves, and to how we relate to Hashem. Without noticing, I project onto Him what I knew:

Mom didn't come when I cried	→	**"He doesn't hear my prayers"**
Dad was critical	→	**A critical gaze from Above**
I was loved only when I was good	→	**"I have to be a perfect tzaddekes"**
I learned to manage on my own	→	**Believing with the mind, not feeling with the heart**

"And it is very important to know," Chava says, "that Hashem is not flesh and blood." He loves you with an infinite love. The reason you don't feel this love is not that it isn't there, but that there is a wound. An attachment wound.

This is the great pain Chava meets in believing, G-d-fearing women: "I know Hashem created the world, but I don't live with Him in a felt, sensory way. My nervous system hasn't yet learned to calm down in His presence."

And the Good News: The Wound Can Heal

Even a woman who never had a single secure attachment figure can build a corrective relationship, "and there is no relationship more corrective than the one with the One who was always there, is with me now, and will always be with me." "Though my father and mother abandon me, Hashem will take me in" (Psalms 27:10).

Hitbodedut is the "green" that wraps around the "red" we talked about in the previous meeting: Hashem's presence, His love, surrounds me, comforts me and calms me.

One tool Chava gives us to ask during *hitbodedut*: **"What knowledge can redeem me from all sorrow?**

What understanding can widen the area of security in my life?"

Four Ways to Attach

Chava described an experiment conducted by Mary Ainsworth, a student of Bowlby: a mother and baby in a playroom; the mother leaves and comes back. The researchers looked specifically at what happens **when she returns**. That is how four patterns were discovered, and each of them also shows up before Hashem:

Secure: The baby calms down in his mother's arms and goes back to playing. Before Hashem: I can cry, be angry and laugh, "and I know that He stays together with me."

Anxious: The baby clings, gets angry and doesn't calm down. Before Hashem: a lot of prayer, but out of fear, searching for signs, and a feeling that His love depends on my effort.

Avoidant: The baby seems indifferent, but his pulse reveals a storm. Before Hashem: I know all the answers, but my prayer comes only from the head. "*Rachmana liba ba'i*": the Merciful One wants the heart (Sanhedrin 106b).

Disorganized: The baby approaches, stops and freezes. Before Hashem: longing alongside alarm, and even the words "Father" or "King" can flood instead of comfort.

Most of us, Chava says, have several attachment wounds, and usually one pattern stands out. She asked us to listen to the descriptions "not only with the head, but truly with the body, with the heart."

Prayer Is Connection

"The very essence of prayer is connection… the mouth comes to reveal the heart." A relationship is built through conversation, and the more we share of what is hidden, the deeper it grows. By Torah law, prayer came from the heart: "serving Him with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 11:13). What is service of the heart? This is prayer (Taanit 2a). The Men of the Great Assembly established a fixed text because they saw that hearts had diminished.

Service of the heart, Chava explains, is an emotional effort, just as learning to drive is an effort of the mind and baking a cake is an effort of the hands: "that my heart should be connected to Hashem." But first we need to ask an honest question:

> "Which heart will I connect to Hashem,
> if I myself am disconnected from my own heart?"

That is why the work is **"lehashiv el halev," bringing it to the heart**: bringing the heart out of the darkness it is in, for example a feeling of loneliness, into a feeling of closeness and togetherness. "I am together with Hashem; Hashem is together with me." "I want to bring it to my heart that Hashem loves me… that He is present with me, no matter what I'm going through."

What the Heart Needs from Hashem

Hitbodedut heals because it gives the heart what it always needed. **Being seen:** feeling that "Hashem sees me; He truly cares about what I'm going through." **Protection:** knowing that "even if hard things happen to me, He is still watching over me." **Comfort and soothing** when it hurts. And **loving presence**: someone who stays with me no matter what.

And why specifically with Hashem? Because people have egos, needs, dependence and helplessness. Hashem has none of these. He knows me "fully and perfectly, from within," and His ability to help is infinite. "Once I know that I am talking with Hashem, who has no ego, I can tell Him everything, all my feelings, even what I feel toward Him."

Like a Weaned Child with His Mother

"Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; my soul is with me like a weaned child" (Psalms 131:2). Our heart is reactive; it is constantly stirred by what happens. "Quieted" means calming that storm, until the soul is at peace like a calm baby in his mother's arms.

A woman who is securely attached interprets even what is hard from a place of trust. Chava calls it "a laboratory for producing light... like the seed that rots in the earth, and in the end something amazing grows from it." "My interpretation is not childish. I don't cling out of fear, I don't run away out of shame, I simply rest within Hashem."

What Blocks Hitbodedut

Why is there sometimes no motivation and no delight? Chava listed a few common mistakes:

> **A distorted picture of Hashem:** projecting our parents onto Him, or the way I treat myself. "And knowing how to recognize this is an art."

> **Repetition:** reading a text I know by heart, or a fixed list of requests. "Do not make your prayer fixed" (Pirkei Avot 2:13). *Hitbodedut* is speaking with Hashem as with a true, good friend, and each time we can look for a new path of connection. "It's not that it bores Hashem, but it bores us."

> **Not speaking from where I really am:** speaking "because I have to," like a good girl.

> **A mask:** "Instead, I bring masks, and then... that is not secure attachment."

Like a Muscle

At first, Chava reminds us in the name of Rebbe Nachman and the tzaddikim, it can feel like standing before a wall, as if no one is listening. That is natural. *Hitbodedut* is a new language, and the attachment system is like a muscle. Persistence brings up the old projections, and that is the cleaning we do inside the Ark, until we reach secure attachment.

"I very, very much recommend writing and speaking," she says. "That is what I do inside my own Teivat Noach." And no magic: one meeting doesn't change patterns that were built over years. It is a process of repetition, like a gym. Even one minute a day.

The Attachment Triangle

The repair before Hashem doesn't stay only between us and Him. Chava describes a triangle: secure attachment to myself, to Hashem and to His creations. "Each side of this triangle affects another side." When the heart learns to calm down in Hashem's presence, something also changes in marriage, motherhood and friendships.

On the other hand, she warns: "It is possible to use the relationship with Hashem as an escape, if we don't have the right tools for doing it the right way." True *hitbodedut* doesn't take me away from the people around me. It brings me back to them with a more open heart.

The Meditation: Your Heart Is the Baby Girl

Toward the end of the meeting, Chava guided us through a deep exercise. We sat comfortably, closed our eyes ("you are always, always in control"), placed the left hand on the heart and the right hand on top of it, and breathed. "Beneath all the walls that were built, inside each of us there is a heart of flesh, a living heart, a sensitive heart." The heart, she said, is the gateway to Heaven.

First we asked our heart for forgiveness, "for all the moments, maybe months, maybe years, that I ignored you, that I abandoned you, that I didn't listen to you." Then we imagined holding a newborn baby girl, tiny, soft and pure, and felt the natural desire to wrap her up. "Imagine that your heart is this baby girl... and you say to her: I am with you, you are not alone, I see you, I love you unconditionally."

"If you, flesh and blood, feel this way toward a baby girl you don't even know, all the more so does Hashem relate to you this way, and so much, much more." The hand on the heart is Hashem's hand: "As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). "In all their troubles He was troubled" (Isaiah 63:9).

From there we moved to writing in two colors: with one pen, a sentence of His presence with us. With the second pen, our own sharing. And then a soft, kind answer from Him. (The full exercise is in the practice sheet.)

Four Signs of Secure Attachment to Hashem

At the end of the meeting, Chava described what the relationship looks like when it is secure:

Seeking closeness: not only in times of trouble; "in touch with Him all day long." "I have set Hashem always before me" (Psalms 16:8).

A safe refuge: in a moment of distress, "I turn to Him right away."

Not dependence, but courage: "the strength to take healthy risks, to open a business, to set boundaries, to be honest." "It is He who gives you the power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

The relationship survives: even unanswered prayers, even *hester panim*. "I don't collapse... the relationship survives this period and even grows stronger through it."

And one more thing: a message from Hashem "never darkens the heart." A threatening or darkening message, Chava says, "is not from Hashem; it comes from projections."



"As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you"

Isaiah 66:13

Practice for the Coming Week

Small steps for building the Ark

01 A decision for the month

Set a regular time to meet with yourself and with Hashem. Even one, five or ten minutes a day, *bli neder*. "I am taking time for myself for my Teivat Noach."

02 Four questions for your notebook

Go back to the questions from the start of the meeting and write honestly: Where am I waiting to be understood without words? Where do I give without being seen? What fear have I not said out loud? And where does my prayer stop?

03 Recognize the projection

Ask: When I imagine Hashem, do I see Mom or Dad? The way I treat myself? Then correct the picture according to what the Torah teaches: Hashem, who sees, protects, comforts and stays.

04 Hand on the heart

Left hand on your heart, right hand on top of it. A long inhale through the nose, an exhale through the mouth. Ask your heart's forgiveness for the times you didn't listen to it.

05 Hitbodedut in two colors

One pen for a sentence of Hashem's presence with me, a second pen for my own sharing, and then a soft answer from Him. No judgmental sentences, and nothing invented in His name.

06 A new path

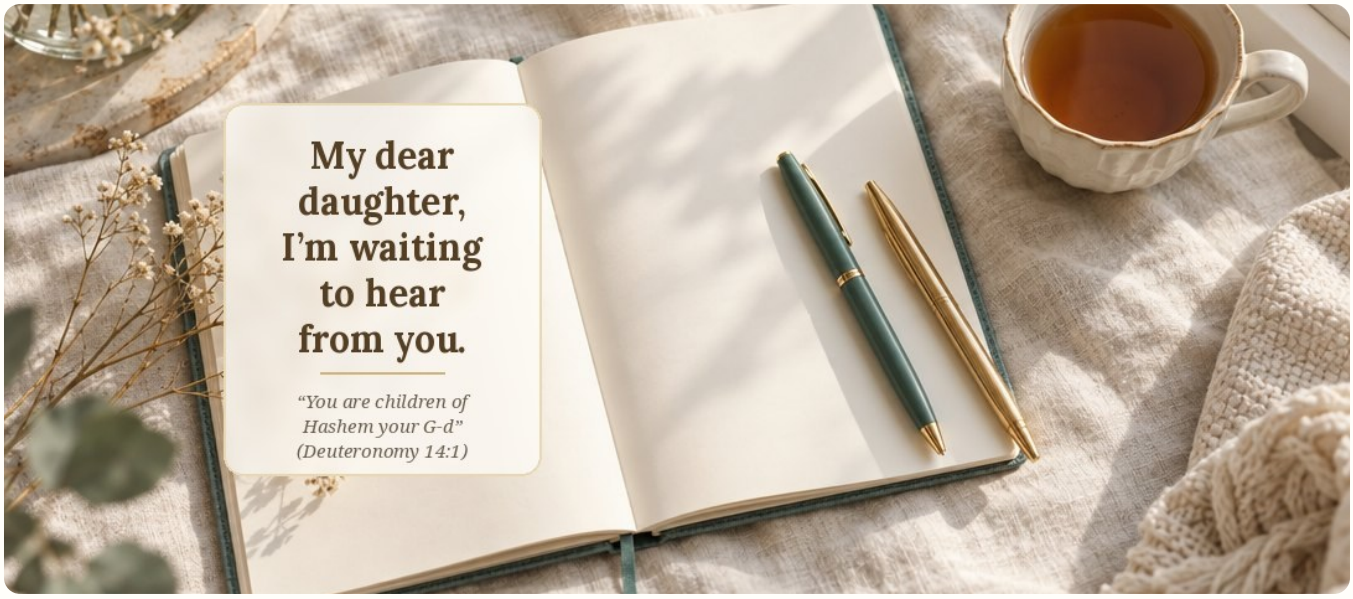
Don't repeat the same text. Talk with Hashem as with a true, good friend, tell Him what happened today, and sometimes turn to Him as the One who comforts you "as a mother comforts her son."

07 A question to carry this week

"What knowledge can redeem me from all sorrow? What understanding can widen the area of security in my life?"

08 Write and speak

After *hitbodedut*, write down one sentence that came up. What did I feel? What did I hear? This is how the heart slowly learns the new language.



What Hashem Says to You

Four messages from the meditation to carry with you all year

Availability	"I am here 24/7. You never bother Me or weigh on Me."
Attention and constancy	"I hear you, even if the answer doesn't come right away." His love doesn't change with your mood or your successes.
Acceptance	"You can bring Me anger, and jealousy, and doubt, and fear. You are worthy of love even when you fail."
Strength	"And I have placed My strength in you," so you can bring your strengths from potential into action.

A Prayer: Building My Ark

Master of the World, I want to build myself an Ark. A small, quiet place within the day where I meet myself and You, even when a flood is pouring down outside.

Father, sometimes I pray and the words stop at the ceiling. Sometimes my mind knows everything about You, and my heart doesn't know it yet. Help me bring to my heart what I already believe.

Let me see when I put on You a face that is not Yours. You are not flesh and blood. You never grow tired of me, and I never bother You or weigh on You.

I ask my heart for forgiveness, for all the times I didn't listen to it. And I ask You for forgiveness too, because when I disconnected from my heart, I disconnected from You as well.

As a mother holds her baby girl, hold me. As a mother comforts her son, comfort me. And in every trouble of mine, let me feel that You are troubled too.

Give me the courage to come to You as I am. With the anger, with the fear, with the doubt and with the loneliness. Without masks and without being a "good girl." Because there is no feeling I need to hide from You.

And let me hear You answer me gently: "My dear daughter, I am here. I see you. You are not alone."

Help me quiet the storm. "Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother." May my heart learn to rest within You.

And out of this security, may I have strength: to open my heart to the people I love too, to set boundaries, to be honest and to bring my light into the world.

"I have set Hashem always before me." Today too, even for one minute. I am entering the Ark, and You are with me. Amen.

❧ The Ark is built in the moment I place a hand on my heart, speak to Hashem from where I truly am, and let myself be held. ❧

4 Needs the Heart Asks of Hashem

Hitbodedut is the place where they are filled

I am with you.
You are not alone.
I see you.

From the meditation by Chava Shmilovitch



🕊️ Secure attachment: the heart learns to calm down in Hashem's presence

A baby girl needs one person who will see her, come when she cries and soothe her. When that didn't happen, the body recorded: "I am alone in the world." And without noticing, we carry that same picture over to Hashem.

But Hashem is not flesh and blood. In *hitbodedut*, the heart can receive from Him what it always needed. Let's get to know the four needs, and learn to meet them before Him:

01 Being seen: "Hashem sees me"

The need to feel that someone truly sees me, notices how I feel and cares about what I'm going through. Not only in times of trouble, but throughout the day, like a little girl telling her mother what happened to her today.

What does the heart need? To feel that "Hashem sees me; He truly cares about what I'm going through."

How do we practice? Turn to Him as you would to a true, good friend: "Hashem, I want to share with You what happened to me today." Tell Him the little things too, and the things no one else sees.

Hashem Is Not Flesh and Blood

He knows me “fully and perfectly, from within”

02 Protection: “Even when it’s hard, He watches over me”

The nervous system keeps asking, “Am I safe?” When the answer is no, it goes into fight, flight or freeze. The heart needs a safe refuge, a place to run to.

What does the heart need? To know that “even if hard things happen to me, He is still watching over me.” “See, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!” (Psalms 121:4)

How do we practice? In a moment of fear or distress, turn to Him first. Don’t wait until you feel better to come to Him; come exactly as you are.

03 Comfort and soothing: “As a mother comforts her son”

The nervous system does not learn to calm down on its own. A baby girl calms down in her mother’s arms, and only after hundreds of times does she learn to soothe herself. In the same way, our heart learns to calm down in Hashem’s presence.

What does the heart need? To be comforted and soothed when I’m hurting. “As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13). He is not only a King and not only a Father; He is also like a mother.

How do we practice? Left hand on your heart, right hand on top of it. A long inhale through the nose and an exhale through the mouth. Imagine that the hand on your heart is Hashem’s hand.

04 Loving presence: “No feeling needs to be hidden”

Hashem has no ego, so you can tell Him everything: anger, jealousy, doubt and fear, and even what I feel toward Him. He isn’t offended and doesn’t pull away. He stays with me no matter what.

What does the heart need? Someone who is present with me in everything I go through: “You’re angry? Let’s hear your anger, without fear.”

How do we practice? Speak from where I really am, without masks and without being a “good girl.” And remember: “You are worthy of love even when you fail. All your feelings are legitimate.”

“Hashem loves you with an infinite love.
If I don’t feel it, it’s not because it isn’t there; it’s because there is a wound.”

Hitbodedut in Two Colors

The exercise from the meeting's meditation

Prepare a sheet of paper and two pens in two colors. Sit comfortably, close your eyes, place a hand on your heart and breathe deeply.

1. **One moment.** Recall one difficult moment, one that feels safe enough for you to touch. Imagine Hashem coming in to you, like a compassionate mother who walks into the room of a crying little girl and sits down beside her. "In all their troubles He was troubled" (Isaiah 63:9).
2. **The first pen.** Write one sentence of His presence with you, in the words your heart truly wants to hear, grounded in the Torah. For example: "My dear daughter, I am here with you now." Read it and breathe it in.
3. **The second pen.** Share with Him in one sentence: What is my heart feeling right now? What is hard for me? What do I need from You most right now? (Resistance, fear or loneliness are sharing too.)
4. **His answer.** Close your eyes and imagine the softest, kindest response, without any criticism, that answers exactly what you wrote: "I heard you. I see. You are not alone in this." Write it down, read it and breathe it deep inside.

No judgmental or critical sentences, and nothing invented in His name: only what the Torah teaches about Him.

💡 "When I imagine Hashem, whom do I see? Is there something of my parents in the picture: distant, critical or busy? And which of the four needs (being seen, protection, comfort or loving presence) is my heart asking for most right now?"

"My decision for the coming month, *bli neder*: ___ minutes a day inside my Ark, with Hashem."

