

Hitbodedut as a Learning Environment

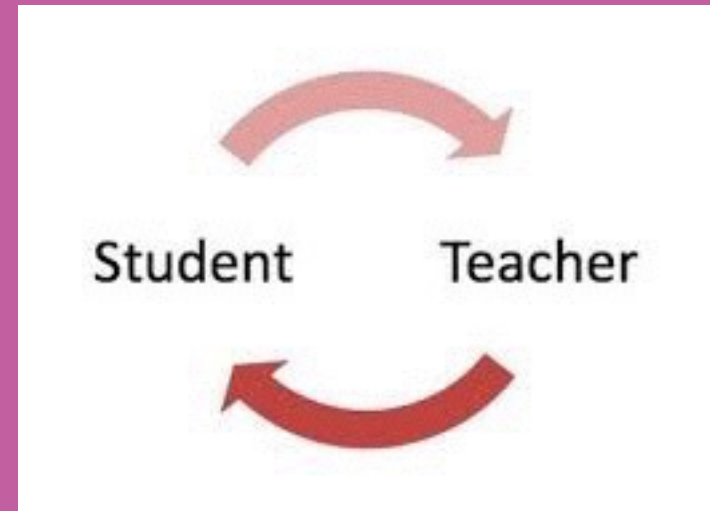
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A safe space begins at step 1...

Students took responsibility for their learning from the moment we began our adventure together.

Groups of students were assigned to different aspects of Hitbodedut (Who, What, Where, Why, When, or How of Hitbodedut). Those groups were then charged with the task of teaching their students in a fun and creative way that would highlight text and share information.

By beginning Hitbodedut in this way, students felt like an expert on a given topic, which provided them with more accountability as well as comfort with this new topic.



Evaluating our actions, the beginning steps of emotional growth

Students used thoughts from Rebbe Nachman, such as the one below, to spur their evaluations and take stock of past choices.

Make every effort to set aside time to review your life calmly. Think about all your different activities and interests and how you behave. Consider carefully if this is how you should spend your days.

Sichot Haran #47

Creating a culture of vulnerability

- * We discussed how difficult hitbodedut is/can be.
- * We also shared “what went well” and “what was hard” after each session.
- * Those who found it too hard to participate had the privilege to stay in the room, but it was a non-negotiable agreement that they did not prevent any one else from making connections. 100% Kavod, respect, was required (and received) for all classmates in the room.

Setting the Stage...

Each intention/Kavvanah began with a whole-class chant of: “If yesterday was good, I hope that today will be even better. If yesterday wasn’t the way it should have been, well today is a new beginning and it will be good “ (Tzaddik 437)

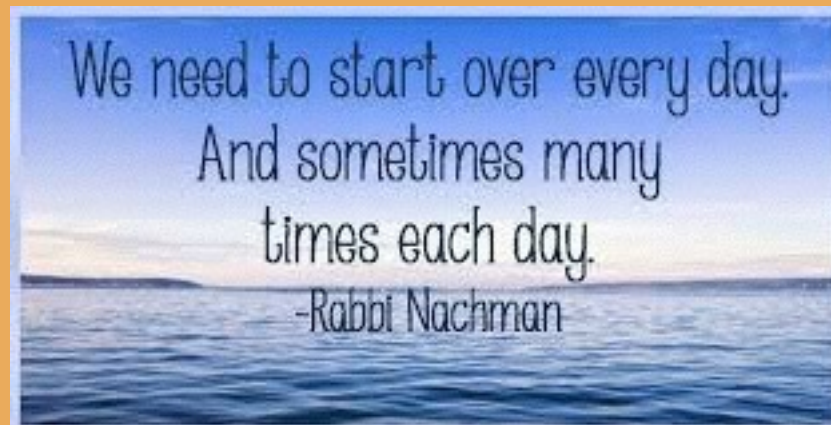
Each student also made their own personal “intention trigger” where they placed a photograph or memory on an index card that helped them focus on their spiritual goals. This way they had a tangible and familiar object to help them begin their process.



Sample Intentions/Kavvanot

- What is the first thing you think about when you wake up in the morning?
- Is there something else you would like to think about when you wake up in the morning? Why?
- What do you not want to think about when you wake up in the morning and why?

- What are 3 things you wish people would understand about yourself that you feel sometimes is hard for people to notice?



- Did you ever have a day where you wanted to start over? What happened?

"How wonderful it would be if one could only be worthy of hearing the song of the grass." Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, 19thC



Student spiritual growth questions:
How do you hear the sound of the grass? What makes someone worthy?

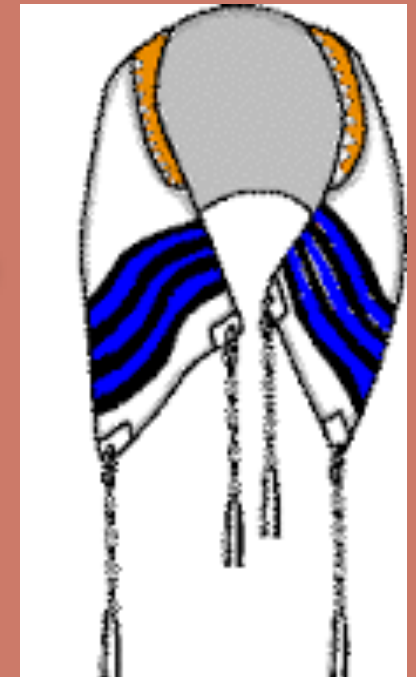
What do you need to do to prepare yourself to hear this?

Are there things you can hear the sound of, but others cannot?

Creating props to aid the environment...

Since these students are pre-bar/bat mitzvah age, we examined the Yehudi Amichai poem, A Tallit Poem:

Whoever put on a tallis when he was young will never forget: taking it out of the soft velvet bag, opening the folded shawl, spreading it out, kissing the length of the neckband (embroidered or trimmed in gold). Then swinging it in a great swoop overhead like a sky, a wedding canopy, a parachute. And then winding it around his head as in Hide-and-Seek, wrapping his whole body in it, close and slow, snuggling into it like the cocoon of a butterfly, then opening would-be wings to fly. And why is the tallis striped and not checkered black and white like a chessboard? Because squares are finite and hopeless. Stripes come from infinity and to infinity they go like airport runways where angels land and take off. Whoever has put on a tallis will never forget. When he comes out of a swimming pool or the sea, he wraps himself in a large towel, spreads it out again over his head, and again snuggles into it close and slow, still shivering a little, and he laughs and blesses.



Students created "Hitbodedut Snuggies" and decorated them with words that reminded themselves of a peaceful time or moment.

The goal was to create an environment where everyone in one space could feel separate and comfortable sharing their inner thoughts aloud.



Some chose to envelop their whole bodies so they could have the space to say their thoughts aloud!

We looked at this source when studying Hitbodedut:

Sichot Haran #274-5

You can also sit down with some book and let others imagine you are studying when in fact you are speaking to God. There are many other methods you can use if you truly want to practice Hitbodedut .

You can also seclude yourself with God when you lie in bed under the covers. This was King David's custom, as it is written: "Each night I converse from my bed" (Psalms 6:7) .



Student Impact

- 1) Students became familiar with the idea of spontaneous prayer and connecting to something larger than themselves.
- 2) Students practiced how to speak without hearing an answer. This was a very difficult skill that students were exposed to.
- 3) Students demonstrated sensitivity to others. If they had trouble practicing hitbodedut, they were able to show respect for those in the room who wished to try.
- 4) Students reflected aloud about their actions in the past and set goals for themselves to achieve.
- 5) Hitbodedut was a seamless supplement to meditation and yoga as a form of mindfulness.

What should be re-developed in this model:

- * The learning began to take place when the weather grew colder outside, and the large aspect of nature was lacking from our practice. In the future, I hope to incorporate more outside learning experiences to enhance the critical thinking.
- * The spiritual experiences that were done aloud were not recorded in a journal. This would have enabled us to return to our thoughts and analyze or evaluate them later in the year.
- * We did not expand this idea to multiple subjects, which could have the potential to increase our students' learning and connections.
- * It would make the experience more meaningful if the students taught others, family members, or older/younger peers, the power of hitbodedut.

