

# SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

*by Rabbi Raymond Beyda*

Penal codes around the globe vary as to which punishment is meted out for which transgression. The severity is matched to the crime based on the mores and sensibilities of each society. Once within the penal system jail keepers and wardens have authority to invoke penalties on those prisoners who do not comply with prison rules. The one punishment that heads the list in severity worldwide is solitary confinement. Isolation away from human interaction is the severest of all disciplines except for capital punishment. (The Talmud says: "Or a learning partner or death" i.e. companionship is life.)

In today's fast-paced wireless society interaction is a constant. The need to be in touch with people and information has been satisfied by a variety of ingenious wireless devices from beepers to cell phones to wireless internet devices that can fill you in on the latest breaking stories in the world of news, weather and sports. One is never out of touch and never alone.

In a day filled with unwelcome intrusions one barely has time to think. One cannot plan a simple schedule without an interruption. Where ever and when ever there is someone calling your number and bidding for your attention. Private time -- a minute with yourself -- is a rare commodity. The Mesilat Yesharim suggests that one spend a few minutes each day evaluating self-improvement. "How am I doing?" is a question one MUST ask oneself each and every day AND one must find some solitary time to answer the query.

You may not realize it but very often you prevent yourself from cashing in on valuable time alone. How often do you get in a car and instantly invite a radio personality into your life to occupy your mind and pass the time? How impatient do you become while waiting for a bus or train? Does time sitting in traffic get your goat? Do you cancel free thought time in a doctor's waiting room reading a newsmagazine that is 6 months old? If you answer yes to any of the above you are "killing" the most valuable time of the day -- your time in solitary confinement. Next time use the time for productive self-evaluation and concrete planning. There is nothing so valuable as a minute with yourself. Don't waste it!

## DID YOU KNOW THAT

One who drank wine and recited the blessing "Boreh peri ha-gefen" -- "Who creates fruit of the vine"--and then decides to eat grapes -- must still recite the blessing "Boreh peri ha-etz" -- "Who creates fruit of the trees" -- before eating the grapes.

If the quantity drunk of the wine and eaten of the grapes requires a final blessing -- the combined blessing of "Al hagefen " and "Al ha-etz" is said. [Source: Yalkut Yosef, O'H, siman 208:31]

### **CONSIDER THIS FOR A MINUTE**

*Make for yourself a teacher and acquire a friend*

Pirke Abot 1:6

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