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1. Introduction

Often, when people learn of something new, there is a general tendency to jump to what the practical outcomes of the ideas are going to be. However, it is said, "*Sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah*", "The end of actions, is first with thought" – before we learn about what to do in the practical sense, one first needs to go through a preliminary stage, of learning and understanding the concepts well, before learning of how to apply it practically. We must see what the structure is, what the details are based on, and then we can get down to the practical aspects.

It is written, "*With wisdom, a house is built.*" In order to build a house, you need careful planning, and then you can build it, now that you have understood how to build it.

Therefore, before we learn how to do **hisbodedus** [to meditate in solitude and thereby bond with the Creator] – we must first know what *hisbodedus* is on a conceptual level, and where it came from.

2. The Roots of Hisbodedus

Hisbodedus is not a new idea that started some twenty or thirty years ago, or even a hundred years ago. It has been around for a very long time.

The first *sefer* to mention *hisbodedus* is *Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem*, which was written by Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam – one of the *Rishonim*, who lived over a thousand years ago. There, he writes that all of our forefathers practiced *hisbodedus*; they were all shepherds who sought solitude out in the quiet fields as they tended to their sheep. Our *Avos* (forefathers) led lives of solitude, looking to be in quiet places, where they were free to reflect on their Creator.

Thus, *hisbodedus* is not a new idea. If we think that *hisbodedus* is only for certain types of Jews, we will be limiting the gains from it. We have so far learned here that it is the way of our *Avos*, our prophets, and our earlier leaders. Let us go in their footsteps and search to get back to the ways of old, which our holy *Avos* took, and which Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech and other great *tzaddikim* took.

Certainly, there are many 'colors' to *hisbodedus* – all different kinds – which have been recently introduced in the later generations. But the concept itself of *hisbodedus* is not new at all; it is the way which our holy forefathers traversed.

So let us be clear, before we start, that we are not coming to say anything new here about Judaism.

We are not coming to involve ourselves with something that is only for certain types of Jews in the world, and we are not talking about anything novel that has been introduced at different stages of Judaism.

That is the very basic point to know, before we begin.

3. External and Internal Hisbodedus

The concept of *hisbodedus* is a multi-layered matter. As we know, the Torah is “*longer than the earth in measurement, and it is wider than the sea*”; there is layer and layer within the Torah’s words. So too, *hisbodedus* is an all-inclusive matter.

The first layer of it is **external seclusion**, which we will soon explain. When we enter deeper into *hisbodedus*, we reveal depth within depth to it, with the more we uncover; until we eventually get to the innermost point of all, which will be the true goal of *hisbodedus*. This will also be explained here as we go along, with Hashem’s help.

Let’s first explain the two ends of the spectrum here: what the external *hisbodedus* is - physical seclusion - and what the inner level of *hisbodedus* is.

Hisbodedus, on its most **external** level, is when a person leaves the noise of civilization and he secludes himself from all the noise. The very fact that he has left noise and that he is alone is already the first, external stage of *hisbodedus*. By contrast, **inner** *hisbodedus* is when a person feels completely alone with the Creator.

So, [in short], the external level of *hisbodedus* is physical seclusion from noise, and the inner level is when a person is alone within himself, connected in a very real way with the reality of the Creator (within). These are the two ends of the spectrum, and in between these two points will be all of the other steps of *hisbodedus* that we will explain here.

4. Why Do We Need To Do Hisbodedus?

Now that we have explained, with *siyata d’shmaya*, what the concept of *hisbodedus* is we will explain why we need it, what we are missing without it, and how it indeed perfects a person.

Why do we need *hisbodedus*? We were created for one purpose: to bond with the Creator of the world. On this world we are found in, there is so much taking place [and hence so many stimuli which bombard us and distance us from going inward]. All of the things we know of, on one hand, can be a tool to help us get closer to the Creator and reveal His existence within our heart; on the other hand, everything on this world can greatly deter us from our purpose. We have the Torah to guide us and show us how to use Creation as a tool to reveal Hashem; at the same time, the Torah also tells us to stay away from many things that distance us from our purpose.

Hisbodedus is only “one side of the coin” in how we serve Hashem. One of the big errors that people make is that they think that *hisbodedus* is a goal unto itself. But the true perspective, as viewed by the Jewish people, is that *hisbodedus* is not everything. On one hand, the Jewish people are “*a nation that lives in solitude*”, but on the other hand, many converts have joined our nation. So while we are “alone” from the other nations, we are also “united” with them [via the righteous converts].

This is true in the general sense, and it is also true in the individual sense, that each individual Jew has two sides of the coin in his service to Hashem: one part of us is meant to bond with other Jews and love them (within the bounds of *halachah*), and the other part of our *avodah* is to be “alone.”

If a person is extreme in either of these two sides of the coin, he is misguided. If he only is social with others and he never has any solitude of his own, although it is wonderful that he loves other Jews, he is missing recognition of Hashem in his heart, for he lives solely around people, and he has no time spent with Hashem. On the other end of the extreme, if a person only does *hisbodedus* and he does not love other Jews, then although he recognizes Hashem in his heart, he is missing another part of the equation, which is to unify with the world.

We are made up of two layers: one part of us is alone from others, to feel Hashem in our heart. The other part of us is meant to unify with all of *Klal Yisrael*, with a strong love.

Although Hashem certainly wants the world to be populated with people, we know that people can either be a valuable tool to reveal Hashem in this world – or they can be very hampering to us sometimes. When we are always around everyone, the noise doesn't let us have any inner peace. So we need to *hisbodedus* to get away from all of this noise.

But that is not the purpose; that is only one side of the coin. Although we have to be away from all the noise, we must also get along with people, because we must have *Ahavas Yisroel* (love of all Jews)!

So we have two opposing layers to our being. On one hand, we are “*a nation that lives in solitude*”, and on the other hand, there is a part of us that must be used to connect outward, to the rest of the Jewish people, to love all other Jews. We must have both.

If a person only has *ahavas Yisrael*, but he never has *hisbodedus*, he might be a wonderful person, but he is lacking a major part in his *Avodas Hashem*. He is lacking a basic awareness of Hashem. Yet, if a person is only alone and he has no involvement with people, he has no *ahavas Yisrael*, and he cannot either reveal Hashem on this world, because he has no unity with others.

Generally speaking, people gravitate towards either of these two extremes of *avodah*. Some felt more of a pull towards *ahavas Yisrael*, with no attraction towards *hisbodedus*. As a result, they do not come to a greater sense of recognition of Hashem, and they can become so involved in their *ahavas Yisrael* that they come to forget about Hashem and the *mitzvos* in Torah, *chas v'shalom*. Others naturally crave the solitude of *hisbodedus*, but they are not that interested in *ahavas Yisrael*. As a result, they may do a lot of *hisbodedus*, but they detach themselves entirely from others, both in the social sense and in the emotional sense.

Either of these paths is a mistaken approach. The true way, as we have begun to explain, is to take the “middle” path: to integrate *hisbodedus* and *ahavas Yisrael* together. One must have times of the day (or in his life in general) of practicing *hisbodedus*, separated from others and alone with Hashem, and to also have times of the day (and of his life in general) where he can connect outward to others Jews and love them.

We see this from our holy prophets. The prophets reached a deep level of inner silence in their souls, but at the same time, they were receiving their visions for the benefit of the Jewish nation. It was they who worried about the spiritual situation of the Jewish people.

The words here serve as an introduction to the entire matter of *hisbodedus*. When we speak of *hisbodedus*, we must remember throughout that this is only one side of the coin, and therefore, **we are not implying here that one must live a life of complete *hisbodedus***. A “life of *hisbodedus*” is therefore only one side of our life, because in conjunction with our *avodah* of *hisbodedus*, we also have an *avodah* to fully connect to the Jewish people with love (*ahavas Yisrael*).

The bulk of this *sefer* will discuss the *avodah* of *hisbodedus*. But in order to clear up any misconceptions about this matter, we had to first mention that the *hisbodedus* we are discussing here

in this sefer is not implying that one live a life of absolute *hisbodedus*. For, as we have explained here, *hisbodedus* is only one side of our life.

Having made that clear, we can proceed to the next step.

5. Solitude and Silence: A Tool To Reach Our Souls

Why we do we need to do *hisbodedus*? As we have already begun to explain, it is because we lack quietness in our life.

To give an example of what we mean, there are many wonderful people who do countless acts of *chessed* throughout the day, but they are anxious inside, and they don't have any inner peace. If they are doing *chessed* all day, which is clearly a spiritual act and the will of Hashem, why doesn't this automatically bring them to feel closer to Hashem?

It is because man is made up of body and soul. The soul functions well when it has quiet solitude to reflect, but the body thrives amidst action and noise. Therefore, when a person is involved heavily in the world of action – even if these actions are acts of *chessed* – usually, it is only the body which becomes involved, with the soul only in the background. The involvement in all of these actions awakens the body, not the soul. So while a person may be performing a positive act, even if it is a *mitzvah*, the person will be more connected to the “bodily” aspect of the act, but he lacks the “soul” of the act, which is a sense of inner quiet and calm.

However, if a person does the opposite, and he lives all the time with inner quiet and silence, and he is disconnected from the physical side to life, it as if he is disembodied. This is the opposite kind of problem, and it is not either what Hashem wants from a person. If Hashem would have wanted a person to be like this, He would have let all of our *neshamos* remain in Gan Eden and not make us come down here. But He didn't want it like that. So if we are here on this world, we cannot ignore our body or the need for outward connection to others.

That being the case, we must learn the Torah and do all the *mitzvos*, and along with this, we also need inner quiet in our life.

Solitude and quieting is therefore a tool that one needs to use, in order to reveal one's inner worldview, which comes from the *neshamah* within him. When a person is always around other people, this noise does not let him concentrate on his *neshamah*, and it will be out of reach. In order for the *neshamah* to be revealed, one first has to quiet the body.

The external act of *hisbodedus* is therefore not meant to be a simple act of disassociating from civilization and going to a secluded place such as a forest or desert. Rather, the purpose of this first, external part of *hisbodedus* must be **to reveal a more inner layer in one's being**. Revealing a more inner layer in oneself is the beginning of the revelation of the soul. **The greater purpose of it all is to reveal the Creator, within.**

So the first part of *hisbodedus* is the physical [seclusion], the intermediate stage of *hisbodedus* is to reveal the soul, and the final stage of *hisbodedus* is to reach the goal, which is to reveal the Creator of the world. Therefore, we will first explain how to quiet the body, and then we will explain how to slowly go about revealing the G-dly soul within us, until we can reach the inner point in the soul, which is connected and attached to the Creator, as it were.

In summary, the bulk of *hisbodedus* is about revealing the soul, and its end goal is to reveal [the Presence of] Hashem [within man].

6. The Preliminary Stage: Quieting The Body

At the first stage of *hisbodedus*, we need to work upon revealing the soul through quieting the body. Since man is comprised of a soul and a body, and the body conceals the soul, due to its noisy and gruff nature, and usually a person is tied down to the materialism of this world, making his body the dominant force in his life. When the body is the main driving force in a person's life, the soul goes into hiding.

Therefore, in order for one to reveal his soul, he will need to separate from the body's hold - from the physical noise of the world - and in that way, he gives place for the soul to be revealed. In this preliminary stage, there is not yet *hisbodedus*. It is to simply quiet the body. When the body has been calmed, the soul can come forth. So we are not yet using any inner approaches to expose the soul.

We can compare this to two items that are taking up the same place. There isn't enough space for both items to be there at once, so what do we do? We push away one of the items to the side, so that the other item can remain in place. It is the same with *hisbodedus*. Man contains a soul and a body. When a person is found within the noise of the world, his soul cannot be revealed. When one silences the body, he allows a place for the soul to be revealed. He can do so by going to a place where the body doesn't have a hold upon. However, it does not directly reveal the soul.

Here is another example that illustrates the above idea. Deep in the earth, there are diamonds, and in order to uncover the diamonds, the earth must be dug into very deeply, and then the workers can go underground and search for the precious stones. Digging into the ground is not directly exposing the diamonds, though. It is just enabling the workers to get into the earth and be able to search from there. People dig into the earth all the time, not always for the purpose of uncovering precious stones, such as by laying a foundation for a building, and other purposes. So while the act of digging into the earth certainly paves the way towards reaching the diamonds, it is not directly exposing the diamonds and it is not specifically meant for that purpose.

Contrast this with the use of a microscope, which is used in order to see microscopic cells, atoms, or bacteria, which cannot be seen with the human eye. A microscope is designed specifically for this purpose. Seeing through a microscope, in contrast to digging the earth for diamonds, is for the purpose of directly revealing what we want to find.

Let's use the above parable to understand the external and internal parts to *hisbodedus*. The external part of *hisbodedus* is like digging in the ground for diamonds. The body conceals the soul, and by quieting the body through going to a quiet place, the soul is allowed to be exposed. The quieting of the body is not, in and of itself, the tool that actually reveals the soul. Compare this to two people who are constantly bickering, and in order to silence them from fighting, we place each of them in a separate corner of the room. The same is true for the body and soul. If the body isn't allowing the soul to become revealed, we need to go to a quiet place, where the body will be quiet and won't get in the way, and then the soul will come.

That is all but the external side to *hisbodedus*. The inner side to *hisbodedus* is to use the *hisbodedus* as a tool to reveal the soul. Let us now explain this.

7. Internal Hisbodedus: Reaching The State of "Alone"

In the soul, there are many layers. The innermost layer in the soul is called the "*Yechidah*" [lit. "individual"]. The absolute, inner level of *hisbodedus* parallels the concept of the *Yechidah*.

The *Yechidah* is a reality where there is only oneness, and nothing other than this oneness. The inner root of *hisbodedus* lies in the part of the soul that is called "*Yechidah*". Lower than the "*Yechidah*"

level of the soul is the "*Chayah*", below that is the "*Neshamah*" level, and below that is "*Ruach*", and the lowest level is called "*Nefesh*", and each of these levels certainly requires *hisbodedus* to reveal them. But there is a fundamental difference between the *hisbodedus* used to reveal the *Yechidah*, with the *hisbodedus* to reveal the lower levels of the soul. They are not the same kind of *hisbodedus*.

In order to understand the difference, we can use the above analogy about digging to get to the diamonds. The *hisbodedus* that is needed in order to reveal the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* and *Chayah* is like how digging the earth makes it possible to search for the diamonds underneath. Here, the *hisbodedus* is not directly revealing these soul levels. Rather, the "noise" of the body is silenced, and then we can slowly go about revealing the parts of the soul.

But when we do *hisbodedus* in order to reveal *Yechidah*, it is like using a microscope to see atoms. The *hisbodedus* here is a tool that is used specifically to reveal the *Yechidah*, in the same way that a microscope is designed specifically to see microscopic cells. The *Yechidah* is an inner dimension where there is only one reality alone, and nothing else other than this reality. When a person is with other people, he is not an individual, and then he cannot become a tool to reveal the *Yechidah*, which is an individualized state. When one is secluded and alone, he is an individual, and he is then able to reveal the *Yechidah* within him.

We will expand upon these words with an additional parable. There are generally three situations which a person can be in: Either he is amongst people who are not spiritual, or he is amongst people who are devout, who serve Hashem and who are connected to spirituality and G-dliness, or, he can be alone. When a person is among non-spiritual people, he is likely to be influenced by them and connect to their lifestyles, and his physicality will take over. In order to overcome this problem, it seems that he should place himself amongst spiritual people, who serve Hashem, and he can thereby become connected to the Creator. Why, then, does a person need to do *hisbodedus*? Wouldn't it suffice to just be around spiritual people?

The answer to this is, that if the purpose of *hisbodedus* was to become separated from physicality and materialism, then it would indeed suffice if a person is surrounded by spiritual, truthful people, and then we have solved the problem. But that is only the lower level of *hisbodedus*, which is used to get to the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* and *Chayah* levels of the soul. In order to reveal the level that is "*Yechidah*", however, even being in the company of spiritual people isn't enough, because there will always be some level of disturbance, even if all of these people want to serve Hashem.

Each person needs to be alone and separate from others, in order to reach the *Yechidah* part of his soul. This is what "*Yechidah*" implies - it is about the concept of "*yachid*", "individual", to be alone and individuated from others. If there are two spiritually aspiring people in the same room, they are not alone as individuals, and they will each be prevented from accessing the *Yechidah* level.

That is why, generally speaking, there are two kinds of *avodah* of *hisbodedus*. One kind of *hisbodedus* [the lower level], is to separate from materialism of the world and reveal the spiritual, the soul. For this, it will suffice just to separate from materialistic people and to be in the company of spiritual, truthful people. But in order to reach point of "G-dliness" in the soul, the *Yechidah*, even being around very spiritual people will not accomplish this. There is only one way - to be separate from others and go into a deep, inner solitude.

Therefore, *hisbodedus* includes two kinds of *avodah*. It includes the aspect of separating from bodily materialism, thereby revealing the soul; and it also includes revealing the "individual" aspect of man, whereupon a person can become a container for the "Infinite Light" (*EinSof*) to be revealed within him.

It is particularly important to understand these words, so that one can gain the most out of *hisbodedus* and its desired purpose. Because even if a person reads *sefarim* and books about *hisbodedus*\meditation, he may not know how to use these *sefarim*. He will come across many different concepts and erroneously label them as “*hisbodedus*”.

But this is like referring to every doctor in the world with the title of just plain “doctor”, without naming specifically what the doctor specializes in. There is a doctor for internal surgery, there is a doctor who specializes in treating the heart, etc. The title “doctor” is therefore misleading, unless a person knows exactly what the doctor specializes in. The same is true for *hisbodedus*. There is a general term called “*hisbodedus*”, which has many applications, but it is only a general term.

When we explain the details of *hisbodedus*, we will discover that there are two general kinds of *hisbodedus*: One kind of *hisbodedus* is in order to reveal the soul (the *neshamah*), and another kind of *hisbodedus* is in order to reveal G-dliness (*elokus*).

8. Two Paths In Hisbodedus: Methodical, or Skipping

The above can also be explained in different terms. The two different paths in *hisbodedus* can be described as: One path of *hisbodedus* that follows a methodical, step-by-step manner, and another path of *hisbodedus*, which skips and jumps over the lower levels [and goes more directly to the higher levels].

The first approach, which is a methodical and step-by-step, is to remove the body’s holy and slowly go about revealing the soul; and after a person reveals the soul, he can then reach the inner point [the G-dly part of the soul]. The second approach skips over the lower levels, because it involves directly meditating on the presence of the Creator, thereby revealing the “*Yechidah*” level of the soul with relation to the Creator.

We will explain this in simpler terms. A person might begin approaching *hisbodedus* by isolating himself from others and living totally alone. He may go into a forest, or a desert, or any other isolated place, wherever he can find total quiet in order to have quiet mental reflection. He may do this for a year, for two years, for three years, or more – but without ever revealing the presence of the Creator. He is not doing anything wrong, because for a certain amount of time, there is validity to his approach. But it is only the first step. He is embarking on the path of revealing the “I”, which is the first level of *hisbodedus* – to quiet the body, and to thereby reveal the soul.

Another kind of *hisbodedus* is where a person reflects and meditates on the presence of Hashem, Who resides in one’s heart. This kind of *hisbodedus* involves the higher, “*Yechidah*” level of the soul.

For every matter, there are always two different angles of approaching it, and there is always a third, middle point which connects the two paths together and harmonizes them. The “middle point”, when it comes to *hisbodedus*, is that a person is involved with his own self, but he also turns to the Creator and prays that whatever he lacks be filled. He discovers his shortcomings and things he is lacking in, and he asks the Creator to complete what he is missing. This is essentially bridging together the two kinds of *hisbodedus* [because it involves both the “I”, as well as the “G-dly” part of the soul which focuses on the Creator].

9. The Three Levels of Hisbodedus

In summary of the above, we have defined altogether three kinds of *hisbodedus*.

1. The lower level of *hisbodedus*: The goal of this *hisbodedus* is to reveal the “I”. Man is comprised of soul and body, the body conceals the soul, and by doing *hisbodedus*, the hold of the

body can be bypassed, in turn revealing the soul, which includes the “I” itself, in all its parts and layers. This is done slowly and in steps.

2. The higher level of *hisbodedus*: The goal of this *hisbodedus* is to reveal the presence of the Creator within man.

3. The intermediate level of *hisbodedus*: The goal of this *hisbodedus* is to serve as a bridge between the above two levels. It is for a person to reveal the self via bonding with the Creator. It involves prayer: asking the Creator to complete whatever you lack, so that the “I” can be completely rectified.

Each person needs to examine himself and figure out what the proper order of the three levels should be. The normal approach is to begin with the first step, revealing the “I”, and to then turn to the Creator in prayer to fix the deficiencies of the “I”, and then the final step, which is to reveal the presence of the Creator, within man.

10. Being Aware of The Structure of Hisbodedus

Without being aware of these introductory points about *hisbodedus*, a person will not know how to work his way through the steps of *hisbodedus*. He will be like a person who is pressing the buttons of a machine without knowing what each button does.

Usually, when people feel an inner need to do *hisbodedus*, and especially if they have read or heard about it, they pursue *hisbodedus* without guidance, approaching it from a different direction each day. This is like hiring a constructor to build a house, and one day he builds some of the floors, the next day he places sinks on the other side of the house, and on the third day he decides to put up the roof, before putting up the beams. Clearly, he will not succeed.

It is the same with people who want to do *hisbodedus* and who have good intentions, but who lack the proper understanding and direction of how to do it. Each day, they will just go with their gut feeling about it. They will use *hisbodedus* to fulfill something that they are missing today, and tomorrow, it will be about filling a different void, and the next day, something else. But this approach will not last. With *hisbodedus*, it will not work if a person just follows his natural feelings about what he wants to accomplish through *hisbodedus*. Any sensible person knows that in order to build a structure, there must be a specific order to follow.

For example, if a person wants to learn Chumash, it will not work if he learns one *possuk* on Sunday, and on Monday he learns the seventh *possuk*, and then he goes back to the second *possuk*, and then jumping to the third *possuk*. A person cannot either keep switching what he learns. He cannot learn Chumash one day, *sefer* Yeshayahu the next day, then some Zohar at night, and then two days later he is learning different *sefarim*. This is not the way to do things. Anyone who wants to learn in a sensible way understands that there is a certain orderly approach that must be followed.

The soul, in the way it is structured, is not just a random mix of internal forces, nor is it a mix of internal problems. If we want to go about *hisbodedus* properly, we must know its structure. This cannot be done one day by praying to Hashem a specific thing and on the next day to pray for a different thing. It cannot vary based on the person’s feelings, moods, or events that have happened, on that day. Rather, *hisbodedus* must always be approached each day with the same consistent rules.

Therefore, the first thing a person needs to figure out, before attempting *hisbodedus*, is to see which of the three kinds of *hisbodedus* he wants to enter into. In order to do this, one needs to learn *sefarim* that explain that particular kind of *hisbodedus*. A person may be attempting to do a certain kind of

hisbodedus but he is reading *sefarim* that are describing a different form of *hisbodedus*, and then he will run into trouble and confusion.

For example, a person cannot know what *hisbodedus* is just by learning “*Sefer HaMaspik L’Ovdei Hashem*”,^[1] a sefer that describes *hisbodedus*. This sefer only speaks of the beginning and advanced levels of *hisbodedus* – connecting to the soul and revealing the presence of Hashem – but it does not address the intermediate level, which is to pray to Hashem during *hisbodedus*. In contrast, the *sefarim* of Bresslov, which discuss *hisbodedus*, only deal with the intermediate stage, which is praying to Hashem. But if a person is unaware of this, he may confuse it with other elements of *hisbodedus*.

When a person lacks awareness to this, he may be doing *hisbodedus* for 40 or 50 years, and all of *hisbodedus* consists solely of different prayers to Hashem, and he never comes to reveal any sense of the Creator in the heart. He will relate to the Creator only in terms of asking for things that he wants, filling what he lacks, etc.

In more extreme cases, he skips over even the first stage of *hisbodedus*, which is to uncover the self. He will be praying and praying for all of his life, but he has out of touch with his own self. One must be aware of what the role of prayer is, when to use it, and at which times it is appropriate to prepare for prayer. Prayer is a tool to enable a person to complete what he lacks. But before he asks Hashem to complete what he lacks, he must become a proper “container” in the first place that can receive what Hashem has to give him.

This can be compared to a person who asks his friend for a cup of water, and his friend pours water into his hand, without the cup. If a person only does *hisbodedus* through prayer, but he has not yet revealed his soul, it is like pouring water where this is no cup to hold it.

There are people who have been doing *hisbodedus* for a year, for two years, for ten or twenty years, having prayed hundreds of special *tefillos*, yet they don’t succeed in getting anywhere. They are forced to conclude, “We must believe in our Sages, that this is the way to go in.” Although they are right that we must believe our Sages, what they don’t realize is that the words of the Sages must be learned and understood well, in order to know how to implement them. If the “I” is not solidly built, one’s prayers will not be complete.

We are not coming here to say that a person should not begin *hisbodedus* with the intermediate stage of *hisbodedus*, prayer. Rather, what we mean is that a person must understand that at a certain point, he must go back and build the first step, which is to build his “I” [reveal his soul].

Clearly, the more sensible and fundamental approach is to *hisbodedus* is to begin with the first step, then the second step, and finally the third step. But in addition to this, each person must choose other, additional methods that will enable him to traverse all of these three steps.

If a person remains only with the first step of *hisbodedus* [revealing the soul], he will definitely reveal more spirituality, but he will stop there, and he never reaches a greater sense of recognition of the Creator’s presence. He may be able to identify himself as a *neshamah* and to reveal a spiritual light within him, but he will not form a bond with the Creator through it. The same is for a person who only practices the second step of *hisbodedus* (prayer). He may be deluded his entire life, simply speaking, because he only prays, but he has no self-awareness.

So there is a fundamental difference between those who are truly serving the Creator, who learn how to have a developed and well-built approach towards a matter, with those who learn *sefarim* without any guidance and without understanding, who attempt to actualize the words they learn. Even if a person has good intentions and is well-meaning in *hisbodedus*, and even if he invests time in it, he

will not succeed, because he will always be involved with the intermediate stage, of consistent prayer, of noticing more and more of the things that he lacks and what he needs, and this is what he will pray for throughout all of his *hisbodedus*. He has never built the first step, which is revealing his own "I" as a *neshamah*. His prayers will therefore not stand on any basis, because he has no "container" for any of these prayers to settle upon – he has no revelation of his own "I".

If a person spends all of his days only in the second step of *hisbodedus*, we can say that for the most part (and possibly for the entire part), that he is living his entire life in a delusion, and his approach will not last. And if a person tries to only involve himself with the third step, he is attempting to jump to the highest levels, which he is not yet ready to enter, and he will attempt to reach the level of revealing Hashem's Presence in the heart. Even if he is ready for this revelation at the start, often he is being unrealistic and delusional, with his head in the heavens, and he doesn't feel the reality at hand.

There are people who are very spiritual and much attached to the Creator, but as far as they are concerned, there are no other people in the world. They live in their own lives and they are completely self-immersed. This is not the goal of *hisbodedus*. Just as one must be a bond with the Creator, so must one bond with all of the Jewish people and love them all, and to be connected to the reality of the many creations that are on the world.

In Summary and In Conclusion of Chapter One

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we have defined the three parts of *hisbodedus*:

1. **1.** *Hisbodedus* for the purpose of revealing the "I".
2. **2.** *Hisbodedus* for the purpose of completing any deficiencies of the "I", via praying to the Creator.
3. **3.** *Hisbodedus* for the purpose of revealing the presence of the Creator in one's heart.

[1] Authored by Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam

Source: <http://bilvavi.net/english/torah-way-enlightenment-001-concept-hisbodedus>