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## **Bilvavi Part 1 - Section 7 Closeness to Hashem**

### **171**

After a person has merited that his soul clearly feels the mutual love, both conditional and unconditional, between him and Hashem, his avodah is to reach the inner essence and purpose of avodas Hashem, which is closeness and deveikus to Hashem.

### **172**

First of all, a person must fix deeply in his mind a very powerful belief that Hashem is really present in every place. This can come about either through simple contemplation based on an unquestioning faith in the words of Chazal, or, if one's soul needs it, through studying the inner wisdom of the Torah, which deals with this matter in detail. In any case, every person's avodah is to fix in his mind with total faith that the absolute truth is that Hashem is present, right near him, at all times. He must repeat a great many times the words of the Rama in the beginning of Orach Chaim, which are taken from the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim. He should also read the words of the Mesillas Yesharim in the section about Yiras Cheit (ch. 24-25), and review them literally thousands and tens of thousands of times, and even more, until the concept is firmly fixed in his mind. He should accustom himself during any free time he has, such as when walking in the street or waiting for something, to review this concept that Hashem is present right nearby. While working on this matter, he should not work on anything else. He should accustom himself to remind himself of this on awakening, when walking, and at all times, until it is fixed in his mind, and he will naturally recall it at very brief intervals.

This avodah must definitely be accomplished both in thought and through speech, saying, "Hashem is present right next to me," and so on, each person according to his mode of expression. The main thing is to remember at all times, both through words and thought, that Hashem is right nearby. Without this avodah, a person may feel that Hashem is only in the high Heavens, while "I" am on the Earth. But this is not at all true. Hashem is everywhere, including next to each person at all times. This avodah will help one remove the erroneous thought that Hashem is only in the Heavens.

### **173**

After one has merited to have his mind fixed on the thought that Hashem is present near him at all times, he is ready for an extremely lofty kind of avodah. This entails not living with Hashem as "He" - something hidden - but as "You." In other words, although a person may believe that Hashem is right nearby, he may nevertheless relate to Him as "He," as if He is hidden, "for no man can see Me and live" (Shemos 33:20). No being has a perception of Hashem, and so He is perceived as being hidden.

But our teachers have said, "He is hidden from their intellects, yet revealed in their hearts." In other words, although He is hidden from the intellect of all beings, and He cannot be grasped mentally in any way, He is revealed in the hearts of the Jewish people, as it says, "Hashem is the Rock of my heart and my portion" (Tehillim 73:26). In the heart, one can feel that he is relating directly to Hashem. This is the depth of the inner essence of a person's avodah here in this world - to live with Hashem, relating directly to Him at all times.

## **174**

One must first internalize in his heart and mind that this is the true inner life. As the Gr"a writes in the beginning of Orach Chaim, "This [awareness] is the entire greatness of the tzaddikim." One must fix in his mind and heart the basic concept that the whole purpose of our involvement in Torah study and fulfilling mitzvos, with all their details and minutiae, and the purpose of every spiritual and material endeavor, is only for this end. The goal is to bring a person to a way of life in which he lives with Hashem, relating to Him directly, literally each moment.

## **175**

Once it is clear to a person that this is the true inner life, he must train his thoughts and language to speak to Hashem in the second person ("You") at every opportunity, on awakening, when walking, and so on. During anything he does, he should communicate with Hashem, saying, "You," and ask for His help. This is not primarily for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvah of prayer, but mainly, in order to get used to saying "You" to Hashem at all times. Prayer is a means of achieving a direct connection with Hashem in the second person.

## **176**

Besides praying, one must accustom himself to say things like, "You, Hashem, are with me," "You are near me," "I am not alone here, because You are with me" ("Even when I go in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear not evil, for You are with me." [Tehillim 23:4]) He should employ various different phrases appropriate for the occasion. What the statements will have in common is that they will enable him to focus on the fact that Hashem is really, really present next to Him. He must do this many times, both during brief free moments and during designated times. This must continue for a very long period, for months and for years. In this way, he will break through the barrier that blocks the Creator from him, and he will feel at all times that Hashem is with him. His life will be focused on this idea, and every action will be directed toward this reality.

This avodah should not be separate from one's other acts of avodas Hashem, whether they are Torah, prayer, or acts of kindness. One should understand that the purpose of everything is the awareness of Hashem's presence nearby, and he will always cleave to this direct relationship, never ignoring it for a moment (except while studying Torah). He will continue in this manner throughout his entire life, until his day of death, and merit being attached and "wrapped in the bond of life" - in other words, with Hashem - both in this world and in the next. He will be able to testify about himself, "All my days, I was tied with a single bond to Hashem" (Zohar 3:288a). He will be a person totally attached to the Living G-d, the life-source of all worlds.

Beyond all this is the higher aspect of integration in the Infinite, of which it says, "I speak to him mouth to mouth," but the meaning of this passuk cannot be written.

One should know that this avodah is not as difficult as it may seem to many at first. It is a matter of habit. If one will just accustom himself to follow our instructions with simplicity and consistency, he will definitely earn the privilege to live this way.

The following are a few excerpts from the sefer, *Toras Hamagid [of Mezeritch]* (practical guidelines,) which complement the ideas discussed.

## **1**

One should make a point of being alone with one's thoughts (hisbodedus) every day, thinking about Hashem. One will thus draw upon oneself fear of Hashem's greatness. One should do this until he is so accustomed to this that even when he talks to people, he will not forget the Creator, blessed be He.

## **2**

One should constantly think thoughts that will attach him to the Creator with complete love. He should think to himself how he loves Hashem more than anything else in the world, etc. His thoughts should always be attached to the upper world - with Hashem. This concept is alluded to in the passuk, "He should not leave the Mikdash" (Vayikrah 21:12). When he needs to discuss worldly matters, he should picture himself as descending from the upper world, like a person who leaves his home to go outside with the intention to return immediately. Whilst he is walking, he is thinking about when he can go back to his house. Likewise, one should constantly be thinking about the upper world which is his main abode with Hashem, even during the time he is talking about worldly matters. He should immediately return his thoughts to attaching himself to Hashem as before etc.

Furthermore, the entire earth is [a part of] Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as is well known. Just as when describing Hashem's revelation [to the angels] the passuk says, "The chayos ran to and fro" (Yechezkel 1:14), so should be one's involvement in worldly matters. [He should do what has to be done] and return immediately to his place. This is a very lofty level. One needs to first have refinement of one's thoughts and neshamah to be able to be constantly focused on the upper world with Hashem.

## **3**

When learning one must contemplate to oneself before Whom he is learning, because one can sometimes distance himself from the Creator, blessed be He through one's study. One has to therefore settle one's thought at all times.

## **4**

When speaking words of Torah [in public], one should imagine that he is not talking to people, but talking before Hashem and he should attach his thoughts to Him.

## **5**

A person who is attached to the Creator properly is able to look at anything he chooses to, and it will appear [to an onlooker] that he is looking at that thing, but in reality he is looking only at Hashem.

## **6**

It is a great achievement for a person to contemplate and think to himself constantly that he is with Hashem, Who surrounds him from all sides. He should be so attached [to Him] that he doesn't need to remind himself each time that he is with Hashem. He will see Hashem in his mind's eye. He should contemplate that Hashem is the "Place of the World", meaning that since He preceded the creation of the world, the world is contained within the Creator, blessed be He.

Such a person merits that the "husks" [the forces of impurity] will be removed from him. It is these forces that darken and separate between Hashem and people. They blind the intellectual vision of people from seeing Hashem. One should think Hashem emanates [influx] from the upper [world] to the lower [world] through viaducts from above to below in all the worlds. We are therefore walking [so to speak], in the Creator, blessed be He. One should also contemplate that he is constantly with Hashem as stated above. He should [persevere at this] even though at times he will be without that much [feelings of] deveikus and at other times he may be greatly ensued.

## 7

A person can sometimes be lying on his bed and it appears to others that he is asleep. Yet he is actually at that moment confiding with Hashem. This is a high level to constantly see Hashem in his mind's eye, as if he was looking at someone else. He should think to himself that Hashem is looking at him also, just like another person may be looking at him.

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