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The Complete Picture of Hisbodedus.

In the last 11 chapters we explained the *avodah* of *hisbodedus*, step after step. Each time we added on another step, but we were missing the full picture. Now that we have seen all the pieces, we need to see how all of the details come together, and then we can see the '*sof maaseh*' (the end of actions) which began with our "*machshavah, techilah*" (first with thought). In this chapter, we hope to conclude and summarize all that we have discussed.

Until now, the picture has been incomplete. Now we need to see the complete picture - to see which of the stages we explained must come in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end.

The essence of our entire *avodah* is not about working on another detail and then on another detail. It is about seeing how the details come together and become a structure. So we need to see how all the details we have learned can come together to form a certain picture.

Until now, we were missing pieces of the puzzle. So the final step is to review all of the steps what we have been through, not just for the sake of seeing the details, but so that we can put them all together and see how the details connect, to form the complete picture. We will then receive a whole new understanding towards these details.

Each of the Stages Takes Time

It's possible that until now we've only been working on various 'steps' of this process, working on each stage of *hisbodedus* month by month, without seeing the bigger picture of it all. The truth is that it takes much more than just a month to work on any of these forms of *avodah*. Whether one has worked on the *avodah* of all of these months, or only part of them, in either case, we now have to see how all the details connect, from beginning until end (and forever).

It is impossible to give a specific amount of time that must span in between each of the steps that were laid out in the previous chapters; this is because the growth in between each of the stages depends on each personal soul. Some people can gain levels quickly, while others take longer time, depending on the nature of the stage and how each person relates to it. It can take even years to acquire one of the steps in the process.

So, we need to review all of the steps we've learned until now, and see how all of the steps connect. It

will take a long time to actually work on each of the steps, but we need to at least see the general picture of it all, from beginning until end.

The Confusion Caused By Hearing Shiurim On Other Topics of Self-Improvement

Each person is used to listening to *shiurim* on various topics. In addition to hearing these *shiurim*/reading these chapters, one is also used to hearing other *shiurim*, on many various topics. What happens from all of this? A person becomes a mix.

He has heard various details he needs to work on, and it all comes together in his head, forming a certain mixture in his head of what he needs to work on. If he's working on a current *avodah*, he loses focus on the current *avodah* and begins to work on another point. He begins to work on one kind *avodah*, and then he's onto another *avodah*, before he has even spent enough time trying to acquire the first point.

In fact, with most people, there is no *mehalech* (path) to work on any one point in *avodah*. People are mostly jumping around to other topics before they've even completed the other topics. Although we certainly need to learn about other things and to amass much knowledge, at the same, we have to make sure not to lose focus on our *avodah* at hand, which is *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus: Our Main Avodah

As we have explained, we must realize that *hisbodedus* is not just time every day for meditation, but **a way of life**. Therefore, *hisbodedus* must always be our main *avodah* in life, and everything else we encounter in our *avodah* should be seen as secondary to *hisbodedus*.

Of course, there are other ways of *avodah* that exist. But once you are going with this *derech* (way) here that we have been presenting throughout all of the previous chapters – the fact that *hisbodedus* is a way to live life- make sure to stick with it. It should be the basis of your life! Within it can come other levels as well that you wish to acquire, but you need to view *hisbodedus* as being the main *avodah* of your life; it is a *derech* (way) with which to live life with.

Think about this, and decide if *hisbodedus* is a *derech* for you, or if it is not. If you come to the conclusion that the *derech* presented here is not for you, then you will need something else. But once you are choosing this *derech*, understand that this is the basis of your *derech* in life - and not just another aspect of *avodah* in life. It takes the work of a lifetime to acquire, so it is not just another level or detail that you learn about. It needs to become the basis of how you grow in serving Hashem.

If you recognize that, let it become your foundation - and not just as another random detail in your life that you have heard about.

In this series, we have been explaining *hisbodedus* according to the Rambam, specifically through his son, Rabbi Avraham *ben* HaRambam, in the *sefer* which is called "*Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem*"^[1], in which there is a section there about *hisbodedus*. Much of his work has been lost, so we don't have all the details about *hisbodedus*. But what we do remain with from that work is to be aware of the general attitude towards *hisbodedus*, and it is that perspective which we have been presenting in these chapters that ***hisbodedus is a way of living life***. It is a certain kind of lifestyle. It is not limited to 'doing *hisbodedus*' for an hour a day – it is a mindset with which to live life with.^[2]

That being the case, all other ways of *avodah* which we strive to acquire, need to be incorporated into a lifestyle of *hisbodedus*, as opposed to viewing all other point of *avodah* as being separate from that of *hisbodedus*. Rather than striving for many different aspects of *avodah* to work on - with *hisbodedus* being included – instead, we need to see all other forms of *avodah* as being incorporated into

hisbodedus!

Examples of Remaining Focused On Hisbodedus

We will give some examples which illustrate what we mean.

(1) For example, a person hears a *shiur* about *chessed* (kindness) – which is called one of the ‘pillars of the world’, and that it is the trait of Avraham Avinu. At the same time in his life, he is also working on *hisbodedus*. He encounters a contradiction: should I mainly do *hisbodedus*, or should I mainly be involved with *chessed*...?

He hears about how important it is to do *chessed*, so he works on it, but then he loses his *avodah* of *hisbodedus* in the process. He is taken out of his state of *hisbodedus* as he grows in his acts of *chessed*. He gains the *middah* of *chessed*... but he loses his state of *hisbodedus*.

In our times, there was a great Jew who lived, Rav Shimshon Pincus zt”l. You can be awed by his *chessed* when you read about his life. On the other hand, he also practiced *hisbodedus*. He didn’t see it as a contradiction. He was very extending towards others and involved with others, even to the point of *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice toward others), but in a way that didn’t make him lose his state of *hisbodedus*. How? All of his *chessed* was considered by him to be part and parcel with *hisbodedus*, rather than apart from it.

(2) Another example we can use is the concept of *zikuy harabim* (benefitting the public). *Zikuy harabim* is a great *mitzvah*, and the *Chovos HaLevovos* even says that it is called the main task of man on this world. However, although it is great to be involved with *zikuy harabim*, a person might give up everything in his life for the sake of *zikuy harabim*. He might lose his own personal world in the process of always striving to help others. There are many people, in fact, who lose their entire inner world from all their *zikkuy harabim*! They lose their state of *hisbodedus*.

So although *zikuy harabim* is wonderful, a person needs to see it as part of his *avodah* of *hisbodedus*, and not as something that is apart from it. Otherwise, a person does *hisbodedus* and he also does *zikuy harabim*, and then he loses all his gains of *hisbodedus* as he’s immersed in *zikuy harabim*.

(3) Here is another example, from a different angle, of how other points of *avodah* can hamper *hisbodedus*. Until now, we have been explaining a lifestyle of *hisbodedus*, which is based on a life of quiet and calmness. Sometimes, we encounter a kind of person who considers ‘saving time’ to be number one priority in his life; a person who is very careful with his time, never wasting a moment, using every spare moment to do something purposeful, with absolutely no time to relax. According to this person, ‘saving time’ is the most important *avodah* of life, and it must come at any cost.

Although it is wonderful to save time and always be maximizing every moment, if this becomes the main *avodah* in life to a person, he might always feel proud that he’s using every moment of his life to “cram it all in”, but at what price? It contradicts a life of calmness. By always doing something every moment, a person never has any calm and quiet, which will mean that he will lose any *hisbodedus* that he has acquired.

(4) Here is another example of the concept, from the materialistic side of life. There are homes in which the financial strain has caused *parnassah* (livelihood) has become the main thing, and because the couple wants to live a more comfortable kind of life, they (or one of them) takes an extra job on the side, to be able to bring in some more money. What happens? Although it brings in more money, it often comes at the expense of the calmness in the home. It brings in physical comfort, but at the expense of a tranquil life; when juggling between so many jobs, it is not possible for a person to feel calm and tranquil.

(5) Another example: Many times a person is drawn after the crowd to think a certain way and to desire certain things, or he is drawn after reading certain kinds of books, which makes him focus on external things, and this take him out of his calmness. There might be nothing wrong with those people he is involved with and nothing wrong with the material of the books he is reading, but even so, becoming too involved with these external factors can draw a person out of his inner world and hamper him from inner progress.

Often, it is the very attitude of his friends which are focused on trivialities and superficialities, which are not leading toward a life of inner calmness. It causes a person to lose his own inner quiet. If a person is always around friends who are not necessarily an evil influence, and they are merely into various hobbies, or trips, or other things, although they are not directly causing him any negative influences, a person loses his inner calmness when he is around such friends, because they pursue external things.

Reading books also brings a person into a different world that isn't his. He will lose his own inner world in the process, as he pursues the various external stimuli found on this world.

Even Spiritual Work Can Get In The Way of Hisbodedus.

We have given several examples of the concept, and you can add in your own. The point is that we must understand, that our life contains *gashmiyus* (materialism) and *ruchniyus* (spirituality), and each of these factors can hamper us and takes us out of our inner world of *pnimiyus*.

I will say it very clearly: even our *ruchniyus* can take away from our *pnimiyus*! It is clear that materialism makes us lose focus from *pnimiyus*, but even *ruchniyus* can take us away, by making us lose focus on our main *avodah* at hand.

If someone chooses this *derech* of *hisbodedus* that we have presented here – to see *hisbodedus* as a way to live life, rather than as just another *avodah* on our list - then he must see all aspects of his life as being part of *hisbodedus*.

Therefore, whenever one comes across any aspect of *ruchniyus* that he would like to work on, it must be analyzed and weighed with thought, to see if it will hamper one's *hisbodedus* or not. There are no exact definitions of how to apply this concept, because each situation has to be weighed on a personal level, and each person is different. For example, some people will do *chessed* and it doesn't take them out of their *hisbodedus*, while others do *chessed* and lose focus of *hisbodedus*.

So it's hard to say exactly what takes a person away from his state of *hisbodedus*. But the general idea is, that in whatever you come across, even if it's *ruchniyus*, you need to see if doing it will hamper your *hisbodedus* or not.

Of course, this does not apply to any of the obligations of *Halacha*, such as doing any of the *mitzvos* and fulfilling *halachos*, which you must do no matter what. But if it's something that's not an obligation and it is rather a level of personal growth, you need to question it and see if it will hamper your *hisbodedus* or not. It is only those areas which we are discussing here that we need to question.

Knowing Your Specific Path of Hisbodedus

'*Hisbodedus*' is a general term that describes many different paths of *hisbodedus*; it includes many details. To illustrate, there are many kinds of bread. There is whole wheat, rye, barely, etc. You can't just walk into a bakery and ask for 'bread'; you need to specify which type of bread you want. So too, there are many kinds of *hisbodedus*, and you need to identify which kind of *hisbodedus* you are doing.

The path that we have taken here is only one of the paths of *hisbodedus* which our Rabbis describe. The approach here is based on the words of the Rambam, and of his son Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam [1186-1237]; and we also mentioned some of the methods of Rav Avraham Abulafia [1240-1291].

But there are other approaches that exist. Since there are other approaches to *hisbodedus*, many of the writings of our Rabbis that we come across are in fact not geared towards the path elucidated here. Therefore, a person can get very confused when he hears *shiurim* about other topics of *avodah*, because he is hearing words that come from a different root of *avodah*. So there is much confusion that can enter a person when he's doing *hisbodedus* with our path here, if he is also hearing *shiurim* that are based on other paths.

The gain in hearing these *shiurim* is that we will hopefully have trained our soul to get used to the approach here and to stick with it, so that even if we come across other approaches, our soul will be inclined to fall back onto the approach here.

But there is an additional problem, though [which the above will not solve]. If a person is hearing other approaches about *hisbodedus*, and he is aware that others are practicing *hisbodedus* in a way that is very different from how it was presented here, he will find himself being pulled after how other people are doing it. He will end up mixing around the information from all the many different paths he comes across, with the approach here and with the other approaches, and this can lead to much damage to one's *avodah*.

Who Can Gain From This Series, and Who Can't

In fact, the way of *hisbodedus* that was described in these chapters is **only** meant for people who are deeper in **intellect** and **emotion**, as well capability of understanding subtleties ('*dakut*'). So it is a path that is clearly not for everyone. The path of *hisbodedus* that we have described here is only for those individuals who possess depth of intellect and emotion [who require this deep path we have taken].

Most people, who prefer a simpler approach, need a different path of *hisbodedus*.

Therefore, whoever wants to practice the path here, first needs to review all of these chapters, seeing the total picture of it all; and then, he/she needs to decide if it is for him/her or not. If you conclude that it is not for you, you must look for a different path of *hisbodedus* - explained by Torah sources, that is. If you see that you are succeeding with the path here, then continue with it and keep trying to implement the steps. **And if you have any questions, you must find a Rav who knows about these matters, whom you can discuss it with; especially if you are encountering confusion.**

Additionally, if you see that you are succeeding with *hisbodedus*, that doesn't mean that you should tell others about it and teach them about your approach. This is because since there are different paths of *hisbodedus*, what worked for you might not work for another.

And certainly, even if you are seeing success in *hisbodedus*, praying to Hashem for success is always needed along the way.

In Conclusion.

I thank you all for sticking it out for many months as you listened and participated in this series. In addition, as I went along, your many questions have refined my own understanding about these matters.

I hope that all of you find the path that is meant for you; may all of us here merit to reach the perfection of our souls, and may we all have *siyata d'shmaya* in doing so. And, through all of this, may we merit to properly go through the coming festival of Pesach that will soon be upon us.

Questions and Answers With the Rav

Q1: In the beginning of the series on *hisbodedus*, the Rav explained that we need to shut out the whole world from our thoughts when we begin *hisbodedus*. However, in the end of this series, the Rav has said that *hisbodedus* must begin with loving acts towards others [as explained the previous shiur].

A: There are two steps. The first step is to disconnect from the world, both in regards to giving and receiving from others. In that first step, the point was to disconnect from thoughts of people. The later stage, which we have addressed in recent chapters, is that after a person has reached deep *hisbodedus*, the *avodah* is to increase love towards others, both in thought and in deed. We explained that after a person has disconnected from the need to receive from others as well as the need to give to others, the next step of our *avodah* is to awaken love for others, using the depth of the *hisbodedus* we have hopefully acquired by then.

Q2: How do we practically implement the path of *hisbodedus* presented here? How can I wake up early in the morning to do *hisbodedus*, if I went to a wedding or a Sheva Berachos last night? What is the Ratzon Hashem - that I go to simchos and thereby lose out on *hisbodedus*, or is the Ratzon Hashem that I do *hisbodedus* and ignore going to simchos? How do I reconcile the contradiction between *hisbodedus* and the various mitzvos of chessed I have to do in my life? What exactly does Hashem want from me?

A: It is never possible to know exactly what Hashem wants from you. We can know the direction we need to take and to slowly align ourselves with what we know we need to do.

If you are faced with something that you must take care of, then you have no choice, and you have to do it, even if it will take you away from *hisbodedus*. But if it is question of doing an act of chessed vs. not being able to do *hisbodedus* properly, then it depends. If any act of *chessed* you are doing is taking out of *hisbodedus*, then it is a sign that the act of *chessed* you are doing is above your level^[3]. If it is an event which will cause you to lose focus on *hisbodedus* for a day or so, then it is fine for you to do such acts of *chessed*, because you will be able to return to your concentration the next day. But if it's an act of *chessed* that's disturbing your *hisbodedus* for a long amount of time [such as more than a day], such *chessed* is above your level and you should not engage in it, because it is not worth losing your state of *hisbodedus*.

I want to add that the point is not for you to remain forever in a state of *hisbodedus* and never engage in *chessed*. Rather, there are times in which you must temporarily avoid certain acts of *chessed*, so that you can be able to hold onto your *hisbodedus*. The eventual goal should be to be able to do *chessed* in a way that doesn't take you out of *hisbodedus*. As we explained^[4], if you have reached the depth of *hisbodedus*, doing *chessed* and having *ahavas Yisrael* doesn't ruin your concentration on *hisbodedus*. It is just that in the beginning stage of *hisbodedus*, when you haven't yet acquired a deep level of *chessed* and *ahavas Yisrael*, the *avodah* is instead to keep the focus on *hisbodedus* and to avoid doing acts of *chessed* that will make you lose your concentration.

Q3: In previous generations, did women do *hisbodedus*?

A: You ask a proper question. All of our prophets did *hisbodedus*^[5]; Chazal say there were seven women prophetesses^[6], and there were others who came after them too. So there were definitely women who did *hisbodedus*. Is it for all women to practice? The answer, clearly, is no. It was not for all women; it was only a way for the women who were prophetesses. This was the case in previous generations.

In recent times, however, women are much more involved with the materialistic side to life, in addition to being bombarded by running the home and raising the children; therefore, in our times, if a woman wants to truly serve Hashem, it is necessary for her to know how to disconnect from the world and connect to an inner place in herself.

Again, to emphasize, the way of *hisbodedus* that was presented here is not for all women. I have only given these shiurim because it has been requested of me to give shiurim on this topic. But this does not imply at all that *hisbodedus* is meant for all women to practice. I have said many times in the past that there is never any one way to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*; there are many ways to serve Him.

The main purpose in giving this series was because there are many people who are in any case doing *hisbodedus*, so there is a need for those people to hear what the inner way of *hisbodedus* is. And I will say this again: is **not** the only way that exists to serve Hashem.

Q4: What factor determines this? If I feel in my heart that this avodah is for me to do, does that mean it is for me?

A: It is only a true feeling from the heart if it comes from the actual heart, but not if it comes from the 'foreskin of the heart' (*orlas halev*).

Q5: How can I know this?

A: By cleansing the heart from bad *middos*, slowly but surely a person can begin to feel the truth coming from his heart - a "heart that desires holiness".^[7]

Q6: In the material of these classes, are there any sources in Chassidus, and it seems that the material here is a synthesis and combination of many different paths. If so, what is the danger in learning about other paths of hisbodedus that the Rav has mentioned about, being that all of the material here is anyways a synthesis of many paths?

A: There are different kinds of mixes. A mix (*taaruvos*) can become either *bilbul* (confusion) or *balul* (filtered). One has to know how to avoid confusion, and therefore we have stressed that learning about *Avodas Hashem* from other paths can mix a person up and cause confusion.

Q7: But it is definitely possible to learn other paths and to gain from it...?

A: Yes, but a person has to know each of the paths very well and to know which details to connect to and which details he should not connect to. Most people do not recognize the differences between the many paths of *Avodas Hashem*, therefore they get confused when they become a mix of different points they have heard about.

Q8: I have read other sefarim on hisbodedus, in addition to hearing the approach here on hisbodedus. Now that I've read all this information anyway, how do I avoid becoming mixed up between all the different paths of hisbodedus that I have read about?

A: If a person reads many *sefarim* and attempts to practice everything he's read in it, like if he's gone through the *sefarim* of Chabad and Breslev, and the *sefarim* of Reb Yisrael Salanter, and another 7

sefarim after that – although each of the above *sefarim* are all the true words of our Sages, the problem with reading so many *sefarim* is that it creates tremendous confusion. Compare this to mixing together a bunch of ingredients that should not be mixed. Although each ingredient is fine, mixing them together creates a horribly tasting food.

Let me emphasize the following so that this point should be very clear. Generally speaking, the deeper that a person becomes and the better he understands deep matters, he will be able to read many *sefarim* and hear many paths of *Avodas Hashem* without becoming confused, knowing how to properly combine the information that he has learned, without damaging himself. If a person does not possess deep understanding, though, the more he reads and hears [about serving Hashem], the more he will become mixed up, confused, and he damages himself.

I cannot determine for each person how well he/she understands things. All I can say is this general idea, that if a person does *not* have deep understanding, it is detrimental for a person to read/hear about many different paths in *Avodas Hashem*. It is this point which I emphasized here, so that you should be made aware of it. (And of course, if someone *does* possess deep understanding and he goes through all the information found in the many *sefarim* and *shiurim* that are out there without getting confused, and he knows how to properly combine the many details he has heard about - this is wonderful and praiseworthy.)

[1] Editor's Note: English translation of this sefer is available as "Sefer HaMaspik" (Feldheim publishers).

[2] See Preparing For Hisbodedus, chapter #05 (Lifestyle of Hisbodedus) and chapter #06 (Essence of Hisbodedus).

[3] This idea is further elaborated upon in Search For Serenity (דע את מנוחתך)

[4] See previous chapter (GTYK Hisbodedus Practice_021)

[5] The source for this is Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem

[6] Megillah 14a

[7] This concept is further elaborated upon in Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 8

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