BILVAVI

Hisboddedus

22 GATEWAYS

to Developing Solitude (Hisbodedus)

"as an ideal path to intimacy with God"

according to Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam

& Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia

Adapted from hebrew shiurim of

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1 | Introduction: The Need For Solitude

You Are Unique

These classes [which will discuss *hisbodedus*, Jewish meditation] are describing the power of "uniqueness" ("*yechidiyus*") that is in a Jew's soul.

Our Sages tell us that there are five names of our soul: "*Nefesh*" (basic life-force/lower level of the soul), *"Ruach"* ("spirit"/intermediate level of the soul) *"Neshamah"* (G-d's "breath of life" placed in us/higher level of the soul) *"Chayah"* (source of vitality), and our "*Yechidah*"[1] ("uniqueness"/essence of our soul). Generally speaking, the deepest part of our self, our *Yechidah*, has two applications in our life's mission.

One manifestation of our *Yechidah* is in how each person is "unique": What are my unique abilities that no one else in the world has? How am I unique in the world? That is one aspect of our *Yechidah*. Another role our *Yechidah* plays is: How do I unite with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in a unique way that no one else can?

Both these aspects of our *Yechidah* need to become revealed within us, and they are interrelated. I cannot have a unique connection with Hashem unless I reveal my own individual strengths, and I cannot really reveal my individuality unless I develop a uniquely strong bond with Hashem.

We have 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah, and these *mitzvos* are the general mission of the entire Jewish people. That is our "general" role, but in addition to the *mitzvos*, each Jew's soul has a unique role as well. Besides for the fact that you have to keep all the *mitzvos* of the Torah, you also have your own personal mission – unique only to you, which no one else can fulfill.

Hisbodedus: Solitude – The Way To Reveal Your Unique Self

One of the ways how we can reveal our uniqueness is through our power of *yechidus*, through being "individual" – an ability which is also identified by our holy *sefarim* as the power of *hisbodedus*, "solitude." *Hisbodedus*, simply put, is when a person is alone with himself, away from people.

People need time alone to themselves, and there are many reasons for this. One reason is because when you're not around people, it's easier to focus on internal matters. Also, it's easier to concentrate when you're alone, since it's quieter. There are also more reasons than these.

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[1] *Devarim Rabbah 2:37*

But there is also an *inner* reason why there is a need for solitude. Many people realize the need for solitude, but they are often missing the inner reason why we need solitude, which we are about to address. The inner need that we have for solitude is *because we must reveal our inherent uniqueness* [present in each of our souls]. Being around people too much doesn't let us reveal our uniqueness, and that is why we need to be alone sometimes with ourselves.

Others devote time for solitude as a means for self-introspection, or to do *teshuvah* (repentance), or to *daven* to Hashem about everything they need in life, down to the last detail. This is all wonderful, but it is still not the inner reason why we need solitude. The inner reason why we need solitude is because we need to reveal how we are each unique, and this can only be done when one is alone.

Our Dual Nature

According to one opinion in our Sages, Adam was first created alone, and only afterwards was Chavah created. This shows us that a person by essence is alone. That is one view. However, according to a second opinion in our Sages, Adam and Chavah were created back-to-back, and their bodies were separated afterwards[2]. This shows us that there are two sides of the coin to human beings. On one hand, we need to be together with people. On the other hand, we also have a need for individuality.

Some people by their nature love to be around people. They are naturally friendly, or it can be that they simply love social companionship. It can also be because they love to get involved in exciting conversations. Others don't enjoy the social scene and are instead reserved, preferring to spend their time immersed in their thinking, and they love the quiet. These are two different kinds of natures that people can have.

If one is only social and he never has quiet, though, then he is living in one extreme, because he lacks quiet in his life, and he is neglecting a basic need of mankind – the need for some quiet. Yet, if someone goes in the other extreme and he only spends time alone, and he is never around other people, he is lacking social connections, which also isn't good. No one should be extremely social, nor should anybody be extremely reserved. These are both extreme ways of living. We need to be balanced – we need to be both around people, as well as to have in ourselves an inner solitude, even as we are amongst others.

Most people, though, are either this way or that way. People are either living for companionship and they dread being alone with themselves, or they are instead craving solitude, totally avoiding social situations.

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[2] *This is referred to by our Sages as "dav-partzufin" – "double faced."*

If a person spends too much time alone and he is never around people, he is not practicing true *hisbodedus*/solitude. True solitude is based on a person being able to live with people and to love other Jews, yet retaining a deep inner silence in his soul, even as he is amongst them.

If a person doesn't love other Jews, he will never be able to succeed in revealing his uniqueness through practicing solitude. All of our great leaders, although they had reached a deep inner silence in themselves, also had a tremendous love for all Jews at the same time. The two sides of the coin – love for others, and solitude – must be present at once.

If someone tries to work on having his solitude but he doesn't have a deep love for other Jews, then he will not see any gains from his solitude. On the other hand, when a person only loves to be around people, he is living a superficial kind of life. He feels empty inside, and he seeks to fill his emptiness by always hanging around other people. By always seeking companionship, he is really self-absorbed and only concerned to enlarge his private ego.

The real way to live is that a person is able to connect to others from a deep love for Jews (*Ahavas Yisrael*) – and this actually can become uncovered through having solitude. Solitude is thus not about becoming more self-absorbed and to worry for oneself; it is actually a way for one to reveal his true self, and thus come to connect on a deeper level with others.

The Dangers Involved With Hisbodedus

There will be some concerns, though, with being involved with this subject. The first danger we should be aware of is that it has the potential to make us become disconnected from our family, since we will need to be alone sometimes. Another danger with solitude is that is can make a person become more self-absorbed, and instead of revealing one's true self, it will just serve to enlarge the ego. Usually, as a person gets used to solitude, he will enjoy it and derive great pleasure from it, and this can often lead to an inflated sense of self-worth. This is a bad personality trait, and it called *gaavah* (arrogance).

The non-Jewish world actually encourages that a person should use meditation and solitude for purposes that are self-focused, which has nothing to do with our goal here. Their approach focuses on uncovering one's individuality as a goal unto itself, which in reality is only a *part* of our larger goal. Uncovering one's own individuality is not our *ultimate* goal.

The ultimate goal we have here is: **to try to reach a calm place within ourselves that will enable us to better understand our life's mission.** When we enter deep within, we can reveal our uniqueness, but this is not the *goal*. The *goal* of being involved with solitude is so that we can reveal *a whole new world* to us through our solitude; a whole new kind of life than the kind of life we presently see now. The non-Jewish methods are not trying to reveal this; they are simply trying to give a person a satisfying feeling of just being alone and self-focused.

Inner Solitude – A Whole New Kind of Life

Hisbodedus can reveal to a person a whole new kind of life that exists, much different than the life we now recognize. There are certain people in this world who have succeeded in using solitude as a way to live a totally spiritual kind of existence, even though their physical bodies are found on this earth. The more a person enters this inner world, the more he will be able to understand this.

This is the introduction to our discussion. These are not ideas; they are a description of an inner kind of life, a totally different way of living. If we succeed in revealing it, it will feel to us as if we are living in Heaven already on this world!

When someone reaches true solitude, it's not that he's living amongst people and deeply immersed in his inner world; he is actually living **in a totally different world** than anyone in his surroundings. His whole life becomes a reality of inner solitude, and he is in a different world altogether, although his physical body is here on this earth.

Again, as we mentioned earlier, *hisbodedus* is not about doing *teshuvah.* This doesn't define *hisbodedus*. True *hisbodedus* means that a person has revealed his uniqueness in order to enter deep into himself and discover his true self.

An Investment for Life

Practically speaking, what we need to ask ourselves is: How much time are we willing to expend on practicing *hisbodedus*?

We spend a lot of time taking care of all our various responsibilities. A person has to take care of his spouse, his children, and he has to learn Torah. We spend a lot of time as well on other things, such as eating, and what clothing to wear and buy, etc. How much time are we willing to spend on *hisbodedus*, which we have explained is the whole essence of being human?

Shlomo *HaMelech* says, *"A man is measured according to his praise."* If we understand the worth of something, we can connect to it. *Hisbodedus* is not a one-time event in our lifetime. It is something which has to become a part of our life. Are we prepared to give up a little of our life for it? Are we prepared to give up our time – as well even some of our *ruchniyus* (spiritual matters) for it?

If one is ready to take *hisbodedus* on as a part of his life – a total, definite decision – then he will succeed with *hisbodedus*.

Therefore, sit down and think calmly: "How much time am I willing to give up from my life to be able to discover my inner world within myself?"

We will give an example of what we mean. If someone would come to you and tell you, "If you want to discover your true self, you will have to give up half your apartment." Would you be willing to do this?

We all have to ask ourselves this question, because we all have families to take care of, and it's not so easy to just find time. We have many responsibilities. So we need to really ask ourselves if we are willing to take out time to work on this. Each person must ask himself this question.

In the coming months, with Hashem's help, we will learn more about the great, lofty concept of *hisbodedus*- the inner solitude which the *Rishonim* spoke about.[3]

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3 The source for practicing hisbodedus is Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem, which was written by Rav Avraham ben HaRambam

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *What are the limits to how much we need to disconnect from social life?*

A: First of all, you need to make sure that you have a deep love for other Jews before you attempt to have more solitude. Secondly, you need to make sure that you actually feel pain over other Jews' problems and that you are able to cry about other's problems. Thirdly, see if you're doing things for other people. If you have met all these three conditions, then you are able to work on *hisbodedus*. How much time does a person need for *hisbodedus*? It depends on each person, and it depends on each personality.

Q2: *If this is so important, why isn't it written in the Torah?*

A: It doesn't state in the Torah that you have to have good *middos*, and it doesn't state in the Torah anything about reward in *Olam HaBa*. Our great rabbis of the past already asked this question, and the answer is because the Torah speaks to us in our language. When a person lives a more inner kind of life, he sees more things in the Torah.

Q3: *Is it possible to learn about hisbodedus from any sefer, such as learning the sefarim of Breslev, or other recent sefarim?*

A: The problem with learning *sefarim* is that when people learn them, they usually do not know what the author means, and they end up easily making mistakes. Of this, *Chazal* say, "You shall not learn Torah from *sofrim* (scribes), and not from *sefarim*." We need the "*sofrim*" (teachers) in addition to the *sefarim* we have, because the material contained in our *sefarim* needs to be taught to us in order for us to understand what to do.

Q4: *What practical point can we work on as a result from this class?*

A: Think how much time you are willing to take out from your day to work on this.

Q5: *If a person doesn't feel a will to set aside time for hisbodedus, what can he do to awaken himself to want it?*

A: By thinking about it more and more, you will be able to awaken a desire for it (by deciding to work on it). But if you never think about it, the will to work on it will not come by itself.

Q6: *The Rav once suggested that listening to music can help you attain inner quiet; how can such a superficial action like listening to music help you reach your soul, which is a totally inner world?*

A: Excellent question. The answer is that there are two ways to reach our inner worlds: either through working directly from within the inner world itself, or by using our outer, physical world as a portal into our inner world. Thus, we are able to use external, superficial tools (such as listening to relaxing music) as a way to lead ourselves into our inner world.

2 | Preparing To Be Alone

A Baby In Its Mother For Nine Months - Alone

After giving the introduction in the last chapter, we can now begin to recognize our power of "*levad*", being "alone." Since some people can't progress as easily in this *avodah* as others do, we will begin from the first, basic step in this, so that everyone studying these words can gain.

For nine months, a baby is inside its mother's body, alone from the world. Why did Hashem make such a situation? What is the lesson behind this? It is to show us that we have a power to be "alone" and secluded from the world. This state enabled us that we can always be "alone" when we choose to.

Why is this ability so important that it had to be given to use before we were born? It is because we spend all our life amongst people; since we are always around people, we need to be alone sometimes (as we will see), and for this reason Hashem gave us this ability even before we were born, so that we have the ability to start out with in life.

Now we will explain this *avodah* to be "alone" – known as "*levad*", or "*hisbodedus.*"

The Initial Struggle To Be Alone

Most people naturally love to be around people, and they do not like being alone. It does not come naturally for them to be alone sometimes. Since this is the situation of most people, we will focus on how we can work to acquire the ability to be "alone".

Every person – man or woman – needs to have times of being alone. What you do during this time is a separate discussion, but the basic point is that everyone must have times of being alone.

This will be a bit of a battle at first. It is hard for a person to get used to having times of being alone when he's not used to it from before. Yaakov had to fight with the angel "alone", which implies that it is indeed a struggle to learn how to be "alone."

There are people who, by nature, are terrified of the thought of being alone. As soon as they are alone, they are seized with anxiety, and they will immediately do something, such as calling a friend. Others have an easier time being secluded, as they are more reserved by nature; those people do not need this chapter and they can go to the next step. But for most people, it is hard to learn how to be alone and not to run away from this, and they will need the guidance in this chapter.

How To Get Used To Being Alone

The advice we can give for this is that one can do something light and relaxing as he is alone, such as listening to music, or doing the laundry (if you find this relaxing). In this way, it doesn't feel as if you're totally alone, because at least you feel like you're doing something.

Each person needs to figure out what calms him down, and then use that to start out with when he is alone. Every person, in either case, though needs a minimum of ***fifteen minutes a day*** *of being alone*.

As you get used to fifteen minutes a day of being alone more and more, your soul gets used to the concept, and it will be calmed. With some people it takes more time than others. Eventually, after getting used to this, it will become natural to you – and it won't feel hard to do this anymore.

If you feel that it has become natural for you to do this, you can now proceed to the next step – but only on condition that it is indeed natural for you, and that this isn't stressful at all.

What Do You Like To Do When You're Alone?

After this comes the next step: do things that calm you down during these fifteen minutes. We will give some recommendations on how you can make this relaxing.

All of us do things we enjoy; some things we enjoy doing with others, and other things we enjoy doing when we are alone. We need to discover what we enjoy doing when we are alone, as this will help us during these fifteen minutes of being alone. We are referring to doing small things that we enjoy doing when we are alone. Take out a pen and paper and write down what you enjoy doing when you are alone.

Again, let us summarize the two steps thus far: **Step 1** is to have fifteen minutes of being alone. **Step 2** is to do things you enjoy during these fifteen minutes [so write down a list of things you like to do when you're alone – we gave two examples, music and doing the laundry, but you can add in your own].

For those who find it easier to combine the two steps at once, they can do so, but for others who do not find this so easy, they should split this up into two steps: first make fifteen minutes a day of being alone, and then discover what you enjoy doing when you're alone.

As a person gets used to this more and more, he begins to acquire the ability of "*levad*". He gains in three ways. Besides for learning how to be alone in the external/physical sense, as well as finding it a pleasurable experience to be alone, he also gains a certain feeling of *tranquility* in being alone.

Choose Quieter Actions

After you make a list of what you enjoy doing when you're alone, think about the following: Which of these actions on the list would you consider to be louder or quieter actions? The reason we need to do this is because we are trying to gain the quietest kind of situation possible. The soul is only reached through silence, for it is written, *"For Hashem is not found in a loud voice, but in a soft, subtle sound."* For this reason, the deepest kind of silence will help us get there.

We all understand that we need physical seclusion for this, but it's harder to understand why we need to quiet our surroundings even when we are alone. Most people have a hard time understanding this part of the *avodah*, and for this reason, they never end up enjoying the silence; they definitely never get to the third step, which is to feel the tranquility in this.

Therefore, it is very important for us to figure out what we enjoy doing when we are alone.

"Hisbodedus" Is Not Just Meditation

Some of the material in these classes is well-known to many people, such as the need for physical quiet. But the other aspects contained in these classes – the need for internal quiet – these are matters which will seem foreign to us at first, and they are concepts which will take time to become opened up to you. It is to develop a whole new kind of thinking and lifestyle which people are not used to.

There are various therapies developed by the secular world that involve meditation, but they only cover the external aspect of being alone. Meditation in the secular world is a superficial act in which the general instructions are, "Do A, now do B, then do C." This doesn't help us reach our internal world. The Torah approach to meditation is that we need all this calm and quiet as a way for us to open up our soul.

Becoming Mature

The third step we mentioned – feeling the tranquility in being alone - can now be understood better.

As we get older, our tastes for things change. When we are children, we enjoyed certain hobbies, and when we get older, our tastes and enjoyments change. Children often like loud music and action, while older people often enjoy quieter music and quiet. This shows us that we need to mature our tastes a bit and learn how to get used to enjoying subtle matters. The reason that older people enjoy quiet more is because as the soul matures, its needs change – it wants calm and quiet, not action and noise.

There are people who still act very childish as they get older, and they still like action and noise. This is actually a reflection of an inner problem in the person – he's still acting like a child, and he hasn't matured yet.

Therefore, we should look at the list of things we've written down and see which actions are loud and which are quiet, and then only do what's quiet.

When we become used to enjoying the quiet, we will find ourselves being opened up to a whole new world of enjoyment.

Summary of the Three Steps

Let us summarize the three steps:

Step 1 – Physical quiet every day for fifteen minutes.

Step 2 – Do enjoyable things during these quiet times (for others who don't need this, they can just have the first step).

Step 3 – Do things that are not just enjoyable, but things which are calm and quiet. This is actually the introduction to entering our inner self, a world of enjoyable solitude.

Tips To Help Yourself Relax

Here are some more ideas of how to actualize all this.

Find a place that you like to be alone in, such as nice looking room, or a room with pretty paintings in it.

1. Put on nice (Jewish) music that is relaxing.
2. There should be a window in the room in which you can see the clear blue sky, which you can look into as you're there and enjoy the relaxing view.
3. It would also be a good idea to put something that smells fragrant in the room, such as *besamim.*
4. Eat a light treat in the room that relaxes you.

We have so far mainly discussed the external ways how to attain quiet, but in the next class, we will discuss how to develop internal quiet.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: W*hen being alone, I find it very hard to feel calm, because my mind is full of many kinds of stressful thoughts. What can I do to calm myself down?*

A: It is indeed difficult to find calm when you are alone, and that is why these classes are being taught. If you do what it says here, you will be able to help yourself. Many people mistakenly skip the step of first calming yourself down and try to jump to the higher stage of being strongly connected to *ruchniyus,* but they never get there, because they missed the first basic step.

Q2: *A metzora (leper) is punished with being secluded, so doesn't this imply that being secluded is a bad thing?*

A: Because the *metzora* has made himself "alone" in an evil way - by becoming distanced from Hashem through his sins - he must learn how to be "alone" in a holy way.

Q3: *If I daven with concentration for 10-15 minutes a day, will that be considered "hisbodedus?*

A: This is similar to the first question. We cannot jump to *ruchniyus* if we aren't calmed first. We have to start from a basic point in order to get to the higher point; we need to work our way upwards – from the bottom up.

Q4*: I am alone a lot – I do not have children, and my husband works most of the day and isn't around. Do I need to make time for being alone? (And I enjoy being alone all day – I read and I listen to shiurim, and I enjoy just being alone doing nothing).*

A: Are you choosing to be alone, or is it due to life circumstances? If you are choosing to be alone all day, this is extreme, and it isn't a balanced way to live. When you are alone all day, do you get to know yourself better and feel that you have entered yourself very inwardly. Do you feel that because you are alone all day that you have come to understand yourself better? It is wonderful that you strongly identify with the need to be alone, but the goal of these classes is to live by your discoveries which will result as these 15 minutes of quiet time.

Q5: *All this "alone time" is making me very depressed; I really want to know my inner self, but I'm getting all kinds of terrible thoughts about myself all day – all day, not just during this quiet time. I know it's all coming from my yetzer hora, but I still really, really want to be close to Hashem. How can I keep onto my ratzon without getting depressed?*

A: It sounds like you are not enjoying life. You need to calm your body in order to reach your soul. For this reason, don't jump to deep thoughts, but instead focus more on getting a physically comfortable environment, in the manner which we have described.

Q6: *If I read a book during this quiet time, will that help me calm down?*

A: Yes, read something enjoyable, but don't read nonsense. Only use this as a temporary means to get yourself calm.

Q7: *In the previous chapter, the Rav has said that our ratzon for hisbodedus has to become our strongest ratzon. If I have a ratzon that my husband should feel better, does that hold back my ratzon for hisbodedus being number one?*

A: That is a physical *ratzon*, but your deepest "spiritual" *ratzon* should be your *ratzon* for *hisbodedus.* Do you want your husband to get better for a physical reason, or for a spiritual reason? Of course your husband is very important in your life, but "you" are not your "husband". You need to build up your own spiritual world, and that of course can also be given over to your husband and to others – but you need to realize that you need to have your own *ratzon* to develop *your ruchniyus*.

3 | Calming The Senses

Our Goal

Let us continue what we have begun to discuss. First, we will state the goal of what we said until now: the goal of all this to calm ourselves down – both externally, as well as internally. First we need to calm ourselves physically, and then calm ourselves internally.

We all have five senses, and we must start by calming them all down. Let us start with the lowest of the senses, the sense of touch.

Calming Your Sense of Touch

To calm your sense of touch, choose the right setting where you will be comfortable. Each person has a different way of getting comfortable; some people like to be able to move around in their chair, while some would prefer to be totally still. The point is to get comfortable.

Calming Your Sense of Taste

Next is our sense of taste. To calm down your sense of taste, you need to pacify it, and you can do this by giving in *a little* to your need to taste things. For this, take a light food or drink with you into the room and nibble/sip it. In this way, you give yourself some outlet to your need to taste things, without getting too caught up in what you're eating. This will only be constructive if you take something *light* to eat or drink, and not something that's heavy.

Calming Your Sense of Smell

Next comes our sense of smell – we need to calm this too. For this, take something into the room you enjoy smelling. The best thing to use for this is to smell something holy, such as an *esrog*, or *besamim*. Don't take something which has too strong of a smell, because the stronger or spicier it smells, the gruffness of the smell awakens our physicality. So it should be something which is either a holy item to smell, or something light-scented.

Refining our sense of smell is a very subtle *avodah*. Smell is a deep matter; it can help us reach our soul, when we inhale a scent deeply. This is only true when we smell something slowly and deeply – through the sense of smell, we can actually enter deeper and deeper into our soul.

Alternative Method: Breathing Deeply

Either we can take **deep breaths** *without* smelling something deeply, or we can **smell** something **deeply** *without* taking deep breaths. The common denominator between either *avodah* is that it helps us reach a deeper place in ourselves.

We need to keep deepening our sense of smell in this way, more and more, until we feel ourselves entering a deeper place in ourselves. By getting used to this, we will uncover a great inner calm – and it is a very deep feeling.

The truth is that deep smell can only be reached after we calm down the rest of our senses. When we start out *hisbodedus*, we cannot jump to this higher stage, and we have to just get used to breathing or smelling deeply. Only later can we begin to deepen our sense of smell as a way to access our inner self.

Three Ways To Deepen Our Breathing3F[4]

1) Air is "*avir*" in Hebrew, which has in it the words "*ohr*" (spiritual light) and the letter "*yud*". This hints to an *avodah* in which one can imagine in front of him air with a white hue, and then breathe in this air which is luminous, pure and clean. That is one way to breathe in air: as you breathe, imagine that you are breathing in this "*ohr*" contained in the air.
2) A second way to gain from breathing air is to breathe in air that is clean.
3) A third way is for one to imagine a *possuk* in the air and then breathe it in. By thinking about a *possuk* and then saying it verbally, we purify the air that enters us as we breathe it in.

In today's times, there are all kinds of breathing exercises. The basic idea between all these methods is that the person imagines that he is inhaling something pure into himself so he can purify himself, and he is exhaling something impure from himself so he can expel his impurity. We cannot say that these methods are incorrect, but they are not brought in our holy *sefarim*, The methods which we brought, though, have been written in our holy *sefarim*, such as in the *sefarim* of Rav Abulefia and the *sefer Yesod Tzaddik*, written by Reb Shlomo of Zhevil. The *avodah* of breathing merits its own discussion, but let us return to our main point.

Calming Your Sense of Hearing

Next comes our sense of hearing. We need to calm our sense of hearing by listening to calming songs, such as a stirring *niggun* (tune). The power of a deep, calm *niggun* can help us go deeper into

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4 4 Refer to the Rav's class in Appendix 2: Serving Hashem Through Breathing for a full explanation

our soul. This greatly helps us calm down the noise we are coming from. Listen to a song which you know calms you down.

Our sense of hearing must eventually become deepened, just as we said with regards to our sense of smell. In the beginning stage, we need to simply calm down our hearing by listening to calm and quiet tunes, but eventually we have to deepen our hearing so much that we can use it to help us reach our inner self. Don't work on this right away; this will be the later stage. The basic step is to get used to listening to calm music.

Some people calm themselves down when listening to a *tzaddik* or by listening to someone that they enjoy listening to. However, there is a disadvantage to using this way to calm yourself down, because often you think deeply into the words that the person is saying, and this can take you out of your calmness. So it's better to stick with music if we want to calm down our sense of hearing.

Calming Your Sense of Sight

The last sense we need to calm down is our sense of sight. In this, there are two parts – our external power of sight, and our internal power of sight.

We calm the external part by sitting in a place where you can see calming sights, such as a place in your house where you can see the clear blue sky. It should preferably be a place where you can see something pleasant, such as nice paintings; and it should also be a place where you can see a wide view of something calm and pleasing to look at, such as the sky, or the water.

If you can't find such a place, at least be in a room with nice paintings of such places – such as a picture of the sky or of the ocean. However, it should be a real picture – and not on an electronic device, such as a computer screen. Electronic devices do not allow for peace of mind.

The goal here is to use our sense of sight to calm ourselves down, by seeing something pleasant. Some people enjoy looking at a candle, and this calms them down; others get calmed by looking at pictures of *tzaddikim* and *Gedolim* (but there are some people who get anxious when they look at such pictures, because it makes them upset at themselves that they're not on the level of the *tzaddik* in the picture. Such people should not look at these pictures, and instead use the other methods to calm down).

Utilizing Your Power of Imagination

Most people only know of the external uses of the senses, but there are inner uses of our senses as well. Our sense of sight has an inner way of how it can be used – and this is known as the power of imagination.

The imagination is a broad topic, and it needs a whole series of classes of its own in order to understand how to use it properly[5]. It is very important to bear in mind, however, that not all people should make use of their imagination. Imagination can be useful, but there are some people who harm themselves when they try to use their imagination, even for holy purposes. Imagination can only be constructive for someone who is very calm, not by someone who gets anxious easily.

If one meets that condition, he can use imagination to get calm. Let us learn how we can use our imagination for constructive purposes.

In order to allow a calm atmosphere for beginning *hisbodedus*, a person should sit with himself and imagine an event in his/her life that is greatly calming to think about. Think into your past and try to remember a time in your life in which you felt completely calm and happy – a quiet and deeper kind of happiness, not a loud kind of happiness like when you were at a wedding. If you can remember such a time in your life, you now have a tool to always remind yourself of in which you can calm yourself down, by always revisiting the past experience that was calming to you.

Be very clear in the details of that past calming experience. If the details of what you went through aren't clear to you, then it might be detrimental later on when you think about it again, because there might be some unpleasant memories that will suddenly come up, taking away your calmness. So it has to be an event in your life in which you are totally sure that it was a truly happy experience for you.

There is another method in using the imagination for positive purposes, and that is for one to imagine a future event which you would like to happen for you that will greatly calm you. However, it is not advised to use this kind of imagination. First of all, there is a danger of imagining things that will never happen. Secondly, if it never happened yet, your soul can't fully connect to such an episode. Your soul can connect very well, however, to something which actually happened in your life that was pleasant. Recall that past experience and relive it in full detail.

In general, using the imagination can be dangerous, and therefore as we said, we have to be very clear in the details of our past calming experiences if we want to relive them again, or else we will end up going too far with our imagination.

In Conclusion

We have explained how to calm down our senses, but not every person needs to go in the order we have given. Every person is different – some people get calmed better by first listening to light music, while others need to calm a different sense first in order to get calm. How much you need to

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5 Refer to "Getting To Know Your Imagination" (Da Es Dimyoncha); see ***http://bilvavi.net/sugya/daes*** *for the English translations.*

calm yourself down depends on each person – and we cannot give concrete rules. We *all* need Heavenly assistance, though, to help ourselves figure out how much we need to do to get ourselves to be calm.

We have spent much time discussing how to calm ourselves down. You are probably wondering: What about getting closer to Hashem through all of this? When will we finally start talking about reaching our goal, which is to get closer to Hashem?

However, we must realize that there is a ladder of growth here we have to climb – if we want to reach for the sky. Before anything, we need to make sure that the ladder we are using to get there is firmly footed in the ground. By learning how we can calm ourselves down, we are building for ourselves a firm ladder to climb upon.

Whatever we have discussed until now is how to **prepare** ourselves for *hisbodedus*; we have not yet explained how to actually **practice** our *hisbodedus*. All that we have said so far is the necessary prelude to *hisbodedus*: that we must make sure that we are first physically calm, and that is why we first have to calm our five senses.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: Is there a tefillah we can say before we start hisbodedus?

A: Before *hisbodedus*, *daven* to Hashem in the way you are comfortable with; each person has his own unique way how he talks to Hashem.

Q2: *When we try to relive our past experiences that were pleasant, what happens if bad memories come up with that?*

A: If any bad memories are coming up from that experience, don't think of it.

Q3: *If we are doing hisbodedus at night, how will it help to look at pictures, if everything anyways is dark?*

A: Very good question. It is better for a person to first start by calming down his sense of sight, such as by looking at calming sights. Only light can help you begin to open up your soul more. After this can come a later stage, which is to get used to sitting in the dark; in *Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem*, it is brought that *hisbodedus* should be done in the dark. But this should only come at a much later stage in *hisbodedus* [than the stage we are learning about right now].

Q4: *When trying to calm ourselves down, does it have to be music, or can it be a sound machine that plays calming sounds (such as the ocean waves)?*

A: If it calms you, use it, but it's better to calm ourselves with holiness, such as listening to a deep, stirring Jewish *niggun.*

Q5: *Why is a niggun holier than the sounds of the ocean waves or the chirping of a bird? Hashem made it, so it is holy also!*

A: What is holier – the sound of a bird chirping, or a *niggun* composed by a tzaddik? A *niggun* composed by a *tzaddik* has holiness infused in it by the *tzaddik*, while the chirping of bird does not contain a holiness added to it.

You don't have to use a *niggun* to calm yourself. You can use a sound machine of calming sounds if you really wish to – it's totally permissible *l'chatchilah*.

Q6: *What is considered a good niggun to listen to?*

A: Any *niggun* that was composed by a *tzaddik* from generations ago. Even if it is sung by someone from today, as long as it was composed by a *tzaddik*, it's still better to listen to. Even better than this, though, is to listen to a *tzaddik* singing a song; it's hard to find such a tape, but it is available.

Q7: *How is this month's avodah different than what we spoke about at the end of last month's avodah, which also discussed how to calm down our physical surroundings?*

A: Yes, there is a very big difference between last month's *avodah* and this month's *avodah*. This month's *avodah* is for each person to figure out what works for him the best – which one of the five senses calms you down the most.

Q8: *I live in a crowded place in which it is hard to find a quiet place. There is a nice, quiet place that is 30 minutes away – should I travel there every day so I can have quiet?*

A: Practically speaking, women need to be more indoors anyway, so *hisbodedus* for women mainly needs to be done indoors. It is only recommended to go occasionally to quiet places that are outside your house. Don't ever go to places which are dark and are deserted from people, though.

Q9: *What is more preferable for this – indoors or outdoors?*

A: Again, as we just said, women need to be in the house more; we do not want to send women outdoors. For women, the best thing that works is indoors – and only occasionally, women can go outdoors for *hisbodedus.*

Q10: *Should we look at pesukim and concentrate on the letters of the Aleph Beis when we prepare ourselves for hisbodedus?*

A: The problem with this is that it can cause your thoughts to become anxious, and this takes us away from our goal over here, which is to come to a complete calmness.

Q11: *If I feel calm, now what?*

A: Then you have reached the goal of the *avodah* of this month. This month's *avodah* is to get to being totally calm and being able to hold onto that calmness.

Q12: *But when I finally get calm, what should I do?*

A: You do nothing. That's the point – being able to do nothing, because you are totally calm. Last month's *avodah* was to do things that calm ourselves down, while this month's *avodah* is to calm our senses, stay calm and be able to hold onto that calmness.

Q13: *If we are having emotions and thoughts going on, does that mean we are still doing something, and thus we aren't totally calm yet?*

A: Very good question. It is a very deep matter to be able to calm our feelings and thoughts, and this is a much higher *avodah*. If one is able to calm even his feelings and thoughts, that is wonderful, but that is not our focus right now. We have focused here only the basic level which can be worked on by all people, at any level they are at.

4 | Ways To Enter Deeper Into The Soul

Going Deeper Into Our Self

Previously, we spoke about calming our five senses, so we can quiet down our surroundings, as a preface to beginning our *hisbodedus*. Before we continue, let us give a short introduction of what is to come.

There are layers within layers in our soul. The outer layers of our soul are used to connect with others, while the more inner layers of our soul are a place of solitude deep inside us. The more solitude we acquire, the more we will be able to reach our soul.

We can compare this to going into a forest. When we start walking into a forest, we can still hear all the commotion of the city, with all the cars honking. As we go deeper into the forest, the noise lessens, and we enter into more and more solitude, alone from people and from all noise. This describes what we are trying to accomplish here. The goal of *hisbodedus* is that we want to leave the external layers of our self – to leave all the noise of our surroundings - and to enter in the deeper layers of our self.

We mentioned last time that there are two abilities in particular which help us to enter more inward: (1) the sense of smell and breathing; and (2) the sense of hearing, which we can use to hear stirring music to help us penetrate deeper into our soul.

Deep Smell As A Way To Enter Deeper Into Our Self

When we smell the *besamim* on *Motzei Shabbos*, we all enjoy the scent, and we like to hold onto the smell and savor it. But that's only the external layer of smell. We can reach a deeper sense of smell. One way we can do this is by inhaling it deeply, lingering with the smell. But that's still only a superficial way to use smell, because we're not doing anything yet with the smell. The deeper method, which is the way we will use to deepen our sense of smell, is to use the smell as a way to help ourselves reach our soul.

Practically speaking, take an *esrog* or *besamim* (anything that smells good, but preferably use something that was used for a *mitzvah*) – and inhale its scent deeply, each time deepening your sniff. With each time you smell it, concentrate on the fact that you're trying to reach deeper and deeper into yourself. Don't do this in a pressurized manner; be very, very relaxed as you inhale the scent. Do it slowly and calmly, not rapidly.

In order to succeed with this, it must be done as we said – slowly, and calmly. We must keep bearing in mind the whole time, as we sniff again and again, that we are trying to enter deeper and

deeper into ourselves, with the smell. We must remember that we are doing this so that we can get used to deepening our sense of smell, as a tool to help us reach deeper into our soul.

By training ourselves to smell like this, we are able to get in touch with the more inner layers in our soul that we never knew about before. As we get used to practicing this more and more, we will find a whole new happiness we never had before – a whole new kind of *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity).

The goal of this exercise is to become calmer as we deepen our sense of smell. We are trying to calm ourselves because we are trying to reach a very calm place within ourselves that indeed exists.

Reviewing The Goal of Hisbodedus

Our lives are very busy, and the noise of life doesn't allow us to have the calm and quiet we need to get in touch with our inner self. That is why we need this *hisbodedus* we are describing – so we can get away from all of the noise, and finally have the tranquil silence to reach our inner self.

The sefer *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that a person is able to come to a point in which he loves *hisbodedus*. This does not mean that the person is supposed to come to a point in which he loves to be away from people! It means that a person loves the calm and quiet of *hisbodedus* because he is enjoying getting in touch with his true self.

Therefore, the goal of these classes is not just to learn "how to do *hisbodedus"* or on "how to enjoy becoming secluded". The goal of these classes is rather to enter the state of mind which we can achieve through *hisbodedus*. Although we have learned in the classes so far about how to **physically** calm ourselves down, this is not yet the purpose of *hisbodedus*, and it is only the **tool** that can help us reach our goal. The **purpose** of *hisbodedus* is not to calm ourselves down – rather, calming ourselves down is the tool that helps us get to our goal, which is to find our true self.

Alternate Method To Enter Deeper: Deep Breathing

Another way to use the sense of smell that helps us reach our soul is through breathing. We can deepen our breathing in the same way that we deepen our sense of smell, each time remembering that we are trying to get deeper and deeper into our soul as we breathe slowly and deeply. [Refer to **Appendix 2: Serving Hashem Through Breathing**].

Another Alternate Method to Enter Deeper: Music

We have a third way as well to reach deeper into our soul, and that is through the sense of hearing. We deepen our hearing by listening to stirring music. As we listen to a calming tune, we can concentrate each time we listen that we are attempting to reach deeper into our soul. Each time

you listen to a song, say to yourself that now you want to enter deeper into yourself than the last time you listened.

The Next Step: Holding Onto the Calmness

We gave three different methods how to reach deeper into our self: deep smell, deep breathing, and listening to stirring music. Each person is unique, so each person needs to use a different method to see what works best.

After we train ourselves with one of these exercises, our *avodah* is then to be able to hold onto this calmness for a longer time. Check and see if you can *hold onto that calmness a little longer*, after you attain the calmness.

When someone's tired at the end of the day, he needs to go to sleep and rest in order to feel refreshed. In the same way, *hisbodedus* refreshes us by calming us down from all the noise of life, and it rejuvenates us to continue going on with our life by giving us the calm and quiet we need.

So the goal of these classes is therefore not just "to do *hisbodedus*, for fifteen minutes a day" - or even to do it for an hour a day; it is rather to show us that there is a certain **way of life** we can live – a state of calmness which we can live with, and it can be accessed via *hisbodedus*.

Let us now continue to the next step after this. However, we must point out that one should not continue to the next step if he/she hasn't achieved the previous steps.

The Goal of Hisbodedus

The goal of *hisbodedus* is to be able to reach the deepest part of our soul. Each time we practice the exercises we have said here, we can enter deeper and deeper, until we finally reach the deepest part of who we are. We aren't doing this simply out of a love for the calming quiet of *hisbodedus* – the goal is rather to reach our true self. The ultimate goal of all this will be to find Hashem, but that will be a much later stage. For now, our goal is that we want to reach the innermost layer of our self. [Refer to a piece from *"Bilvavi" Vol. VI,* The True "I" is Hashem].

To have a clear picture of what we want to achieve here, we will soon briefly present the various methods of *hisbodedus* which our Rabbis have written about. There are all kinds of *hisbodedus* - some of them utilize our physical body, while other paths utilize our soul more than our body. So far, we have only spoken about the external layer of *hisbodedus*, which makes use of our physical senses.

The coming chapters, where we will continue to explain *hisbodedus*, will not apply to every person. This because we are presenting only *one* of the paths of *hisbodedus* brought in the *sefarim* of our teachers. We will explain who it can work for, and who it can't. Who can these classes work

for? They can only work for someone who has emotional depth, as well as intellectual depth. If someone has both of these aspects, then he/she can gain from the approach we have given over so far, which have addressed how we deepen our physical senses.

If someone is trying to practice any of this and is only feeling pressured by trying to carry this out, it's a sign that these classes are not meant for them to work on.

As we advance in these classes, we will discuss more subtle and delicate matters. If someone feels at this point that these matters are troubling, please ask all your questions now. We must be honest with ourselves if we are indeed going in the right direction with all of this.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Are these three different options we have to reach our self (smell, breathing, or music), or must we do all of them?*

A: We do not need to do all of them, as we have already said in the class here that each person needs a different method. It is definitely better if we use more than one of these methods, but we don't have to, and we definitely don't need to do all three.

Q2: *Is there any prayer or thought we need to have in mind before doing any of this?*

A: Good question. We need to be very calm as we do this, so it is better not to think deeply about anything.

Q3: *Isn't hisbodedus more about speaking with Hashem?*

A: Although the purpose of Creation is *d'veykus* - to connect and bond with Hashem - when we begin to serve Hashem, we first need to start with the lower rungs of the ladder, such as through *hisbodedus*. If someone begins with talking to Hashem, then it's like running away from ourselves. First we need to reach our true self, and then we can eventually connect to Hashem, our purpose. Therefore we need to learn how to do proper *hisbodedus*, so we can truly connect to ourselves, and then we will eventually be able to reach closeness with Hashem.

Q4: *I have emotional depth to me, as is required for this; but I am practicing everything so far here and I don't feel that I'm becoming calmer. What should I do?*

A: What haven't you achieved yet – you aren't becoming relaxed, or you haven't felt that you've reached deeper into yourself? There can be two possibilities why a person isn't get calmed as he/she tries to enter deeper into his/herself: either there is a lot of confusion going on in his/her life, or because the person is feeling pressure at doing any of this. These classes will not be able to provide the answers to those problems. One needs to seek help for those particular issues, because in order to become calm, you need to get past all the other issues you're having. These classes cannot answer every particular issue that a person has – they are just a general approach, which applies only to those who aren't having issues more than the norm.

Q5: *But aren't these classes meant to help a person who isn't calm to become calm?*

A: These classes are for those who are going through a normal amount of stress in their life, not for those who are going through extreme stress in their life. There are indeed about 20% or 30% of people who are going through more extreme stress than their norm (either because of emotional turbulence, or other various issues they are going through), and they need different guidance than these classes. They must get past those issues in order to be able to work on acquiring the calm state we are trying to achieve through these classes.

Q6: *If I can't concentrate so well, does that also mean that I'm not able to become calm yet through these classes?*

A: All of us have a hard time concentrating, but some people have a harder time with it, and then it's more of an extreme problem. These classes are not for those who have extreme issues. These classes are more general in their nature, and they are not meant to address the various particular issues that a person can have. Those who are having extreme issues need to go to a professional and get help, and if they are helped, they can then benefit from these classes.

Q7: *How do I know if I'm really progressing with all of this, or if I'm just imagining it?*

A: In everything, there is a combination of truth and falsity. Therefore everything contains in it some imagination – every feeling we experience has some imagination mixed up in it. Someone with more of a tendency to imagine things will have more imagined feelings. But in any case, as long as one feels that he is becoming calmer through these exercises, the goal has been reached.

Q8: *Which kinds of music should we listen to (if we are using music to reach our soul)?*

A: The older the music is, the closer to holiness it is. In more recent times, the *niggunim* of Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro *zt"l* are considered to be the best songs to listen to[6]. Rav Wolbe *zt"l* said that these songs are extremely holy. There is no music on it, however, just words. You can hear them on *Kol HaLashon*. You can also buy the songs of Rav Baruch Ber Levovitz *zt"l*[7] in the *sefarim* stores which are from many years ago. These are very holy *niggunim.*

Q9: *If I think about my stress and that calms me down when I think it through, can I use that as a way to reach the calmness here?*

A: It can definitely be a part of the calmness, but there is still a lot more to be done. We need to strengthen our *emunah*, as well as learn how to "accept suffering with love".

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5 | Lifestyle of Hisbodedus

The Summary (and Goal) of the Previous Chapters

With the help of Hashem, in the previous classes, we have discussed how to begin *hisbodedus*. To summarize, we first explained the need for *hisbodedus*, then we explained how we can make this a more pleasant experience, and then we explained how to calm down the physical senses. Previously, we also explained how to use smell, breathing or music to reach deeper into our soul.

There are two classic methods of *hisbodedus*. One method, which is the more common and general approach, is to set aside time for *hisbodedus* every day, and to make a soul-accounting during this time; and to thank Hashem during this time. There is a second method, however, which is a different take on *hisbodedus*, where *hisbodedus* is a way of life; that *hisbodedus* deepens the whole way we live our life. It is this second approach which we are taking here.

Most people have only heard of the first approach, which is the general approach of *hisbodedus* that appeals to most people. Thus they find the second approach towards *hisbodedus* - which is our method here - to sound strange at first.

The method of *hisbodedus* that we are explaining here consists of two gains. First of all, through *hisbodedus*, we begin to live life more calmly. Secondly, we get to really know ourselves, by going deeper into our soul's layers. The approach given here about *hisbodedus* is not simply "Do A, now do B, now do C." The point is to change our attitude about life – to live a calmer, quieter kind of life. This is the first goal of *hisbodedus*. The second goal of our *hisbodedus* is to reach deeper into our soul, as we said. For this, we gave some advice in the previous two chapters on how to do this.

That was a brief summary of what we learned until now. Now we will advance with this and explain how to make *hisbodedus* into a way of life: a quieter, calmer kind of life.

The approach given here will require effort on our part, but if we do it, it will greatly enrich our life, and our life will actually taste like *Olam HaBa* (the World to Come) as a result. Let us now explain how to live a life of quiet and calmness.

Three Lists To Make

Our life is very busy. There are loads of responsibilities and errands which we have. Besides for our various responsibilities we all have in our life, it is our very lifestyle, the *very way* we are living life these days, that makes us busy and bogged down from everything. In today's generation, this is now more applicable than ever.

Recently, the advances in technology have only made things a lot worse. Cellphones and other devices connect us to the world on a constant basis, and it takes away our quietness, because we are never alone from these devices.

We need to get back to the quieter kind of life, the way life is supposed to look like. Of course, we can't reach it completely, but we can at least improve our life, to resemble in some way, how a true life is supposed to look like.

Therefore, let us take the time and think to ourselves: How would we like to live our life? How do we want it to look like? Take out a pen and paper and write this down. We will naturally discover that we indeed want to live a better quality life than the one we are living now. Now, we have to think to ourselves: What are those things I can do that will bring me to a quieter kind of life?

Living a higher quality kind of life can only work for someone who has developed a desire to live a quieter kind of life, which we have been speaking about in the previous classes. Whatever we are about to discuss is based on this elementary stage; we can progress only if we have developed the desire to live a quieter kind of life – not just to have a half hour every day of *hisbodedus*, but to let *hisbodedus* carry over into the way we live our life.

So write down on a paper about the kind of life you would want to live, and another paper write down all of the things in your life that are bogging you down from having this life of quietness – all the various responsibilities you have which are getting in the way of this. And on a third piece of paper, write down the things you can do which will lead you to a quieter kind of life.

Needs vs. Wants

Look at your list of responsibilities. There are many things we do which we don't really have to do, and these various activities take away from having quietness. If we have realized the importance of *hisbodedus*, we will be able to cut out many things we do, in preference of *hisbodedus*.

For example, on Sundays in America, people are off from work. Many people feel that Sunday is for taking care of all the things we normally can't do during the rest of the week: shopping, spending more time with family, attending parties, etc. But if we have internalized so far how important *hisbodedus* is, we can discover that it is far more important to use Sundays to get to know our inner self more, rather than to use Sunday for our various activities.

There is a very big difference to what we *must* do, to what we *want* to do. The things we must do cannot be cut out. But the things we want to do, which are not "musts" but rather just "wants", can be pushed aside so we can do what we want more – getting to know our true self, via *hisbodedus*.

A very good example of "wants" that are not "musts" is the habit that people have in sitting in front of the computer all day. When a person sits in front of the computer for hours on end, he will tend to ignore his family, engrossed in what he's doing. Does he really have to be on the computer so much? The computer is not a must; it's rather something that a person wants to do, but it's really not necessary. This is a very good example of something that people "want" to do very much – but it's not a necessity in life.

It is not only a computer that brings out this point; there are many other things as well which we do that are not necessities, but rather things that we want. To give another example, people in today's times make extravagant weddings for their children. It takes weeks of preparation to make a wedding, and it's expensive. But how much of the wedding preparations are actual necessities for the wedding? We can discover that most of the wedding preparations we make are spent on things that are not needed, but rather on things we just "want". A very small part of the wedding preparations are what's absolutely necessary. Now, we are not suggesting that we become extreme with this and become too frugal, only doing these that are absolutely necessary. We only mean to minimize our wants, and to focus more on our actual necessities in life.

By practicing *hisbodedus*, we are trying to enter an inner kind of life, and it is totally different than the loud, action-oriented world we see. We need to quiet down our physical life in order to get to an inner kind of life. If we do so, we will greatly enrich the quality of life – and we will be able to lead a happy, serene kind of life. How can we do this? We will say how, but again as we mentioned, this can only work on condition that a person has already internalized by now how important it is to have a lifestyle of *hisbodedus*.

Nullifying Your Desires Each Day

The advice on how to do this as follows. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l*[8] writes that every day, a person should do something against his will – and he should do this for three times a day. This will get a person to come to nullify his desires (*bittul haratzon*).

By getting used to doing this – three times a day of doing something deliberately against our will – we are starting to enter the inner kind of life. To start, pick things you want every day which you find easier not to give in to.

The purpose of nullifying our desires every day is to attain a more serene kind of life. So as we go against our desires each day, we should be aware as we do this that we are doing this because we want to become calmer. We need to have this awareness as we nullify our desires: that we are trying

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8 Mashgiach (spiritual mentor) of the Mirrer Yeshiva, who was niftar in 1936. His sefarim are three volumes of Daas Chochmah U'Mussar, and five volumes of Daas Torah, al HaTorah. To read about his great personality and life, see the book In Their Shadow, Volume One (Feldheim Publishers).

to enrich the quality of our life. That is the goal of this, and we should bear it in mind as we progress.

When We Don't Get What We Want

Also included in this is the following point to consider: when we discover things that we felt that we needed, which didn't end up happening, how do we react?

For example, sometimes we go shopping for something we wanted to buy, and then we get to the store and it's not on the shelf. Normally, this can be disappointing, but it can really be an opportunity for us to realize that if it didn't end up happening, it must be that we didn't really need it. So if something like this happens, we can use it to think to ourselves the following: I wanted this, but I didn't really need it. It is another way how we can nullify our desires.

The Happy, Calm Life

People will pay a lot of money today to someone who will tell them how to live a calmer kind of life. But the truth is that there is no person who will be able to tell it to you. The only way to do it is by actually nullifying our own desires, and this is the only thing we can do that will enrich our lives to become more serene.

When we begin to enter the internal kind of life – which is accomplished through living a lifestyle of *hisbodedus* - we will be able to enrich our life greatly.

May Hashem help everyone here to have a lot of *hatzlacha* with this.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *If I don't need to do something, does that it means that it always comes from my yetzer hora? Or are things which I don't need to do, yet they are not coming from my yetzer hora, and therefore I can still do those things....?*

A: There are two kinds of *yetzer hora*. One kind of *yetzer hora* is to make us do things that are totally forbidden, and these things are never allowed to give in to. Another kind of *yetzer hora* is to get us to do things that aren't forbidden, but they are just not necessary. But even those things, although not forbidden to do, should still not be done.

Q2: *I live in Israel and am a mother of a large family, and I don't feel that I have too many desires that I need to nullify.*

A: Every person, even if he doesn't have too many desires, needs to enter an inner kind of life. For example, recently there was a terrorist attack in Har Nof. There was a woman who wanted to go shopping that day, and when she heard about the attack, she decided she's not going shopping. She suddenly changed her desires. Here we can see that there are things which we think are real needs, but they are not really needs, but desires. This woman realizes that she didn't need to go shopping – she only wanted to; she gave up this desire as soon as she heard about the terrorist attack.

Another example is when we but clothes for our children. We can think to ourselves: Does our child really need this, or is it just that I want it?

Q3: *When I do hisbodedus, I feel like I'm leaving my body, and I feel like I'm going up; I felt that I have to become more grounded, because I didn't think that Hashem wants me to feel like I'm leaving my body like this, and I felt that doing exercise beforehand helps me stay more grounded. Am I doing the right thing?*

A: It sounds like you are experiencing a disconnection between reality on this earth and the reality of the spiritual realm. There is nothing wrong with the exercising that you're doing, but you need to develop a healthier connection between your body and your soul.

Q4: *(Rephrasing the question): I feel that exercising before I do hisbodedus is something that necessary which helps my body and soul stay connected. Is this the right thing?*

A: There is some kind of disconnection you are having between your body and your soul, and you need to find what it is. Since this is a personal thing you have, I do not know exactly what it is. You need to find in your own life what exactly is causing this disconnection between your body and soul.

Q5: *When I give up things I want, I feel tense from this, and it's not making me calmer.*

A: We cannot become extreme in nullifying our desires; it's a slow process. We can't jump from earth to heaven at once. We need to get used to it, and we can do it by doing it three times a day. You can still do things that you want to do which aren't necessities. We are merely trying to take a small step in the other direction.

Q6: *In order to reach the quiet place in myself, do I also need to silence all my feelings and thoughts?*

A: It is very dangerous to do this. If a person silences all his feelings and thoughts at once – all of them – then he's not really calming himself; he's running away from his problems if he does this. He will simply be shutting down all his feelings and thoughts; he will come to stop loving his family as a result, because he has closed himself off from his feelings.

The proper way to calm our stressful feelings and thoughts is to learn how to deal with them, properly, and not to run away from them.

Q7: ***Chazal*** *say, "Shelo lishmah (ulterior motivations) leads to lishmah (pure motivations)", so doesn't this contradict the avodah of nullifying our desires?*

A: Actually, it fits in very well with "*shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*." The *shelo lishmah* we start out with in life is that we have desires in our life that are not necessary, so by nullifying our desires, we go from *shelo lishmah* to *lishmah*.

Q8: *How much time should we spend on hisbodedus (since this is very new to us), and also, should we first make sure that we have the five minutes of hisbodedus before we work on nullifying our desires?*

A: You are saying the sensible approach on how to do it – first spend time on *hisbodedus* itself, and only after that progress to nullifying your desires. Those who are beginning *hisbodedus* need to spend five minutes a day on it. First think about the importance of *hisbodedus,* for five minutes a day, and only after that, work to nullify your desires.

6 | The Essence of Hisbodedus – Becoming Serene

Let's Take A Break And Consider The Following

Since we started these classes (with the help of Hashem), many questions have arisen about the method of *hisbodedus* that we are explaining. Therefore, we will take a break from continuing and instead clarify some of the points which people are asking about. From the questions asked, the method being given in these classes will then receive greater clarity, and in this way, all of those participating will be able to gain more.

There are many ways of *hisbodedus* which you are all familiar with, which involve *tefillah*, *cheshbon hanefesh* (making a soul-accounting) and coming to have deep, vast feelings [of closeness to Hashem[. However, the method of *hisbodedus* being given in these classes is totally different than any of these.

To give an example, let's say a person decides that he wants to make *hisbodedus* for an hour. He goes into a forest to make *hisbodedus* – but at the same time, he's carrying with him a laptop and a smartphone. Can we call that *hisbodedus*? Of course not. Just because the person is separated from his physical environment doesn't mean he has disconnected from the world; for all purposes, he is totally connected with the entire world even as he sits in the forest.

Even if we aren't carrying any technology with us, we can still be very far from true *hisbodedus,* if our very thoughts and feelings are bombarded. Without being calm inside, *hisbodedus* is ineffective.

In today's generation, there are many people who practice *hisbodedus*. They go to a secluded place like a forest and engage in *cheshbon hanefesh*. Most people that do this eventually drop out from this; they can't hold onto this practice for too long. Why?

There are many reasons, but the main reason that this doesn't last for people is because such *hisbodedus* is only superficial; the person is focusing on the external part of the *hisbodedus*, which is to be secluded. The person is only disconnected from the world in the external sense, but inside himself, he's still very connected to the world, in his thoughts and in his feelings.

The purpose of these classes is, therefore: to arrive at an **internal** *hisbodedus*.

To illustrate what we mean, on Shabbos, we are not allowed to do any of the 39 forbidden labors (*melachos*). Some things we all know, like that it's forbidden to turn on the lights or cook. We tend

to think that we know what it's forbidden to do on Shabbos. But when we begin to learn *Hilchos Shabbos* in-depth, we will discover that there are countless things on Shabbos which are considered *melachah* (forbidden labor). Not only that, but a whole new depth to our Shabbos will open up to us when we learn about its intricate laws, and Shabbos to us will look totally different than the Shabbos we were keeping until now. In the same way, people generally think they know what *hisbodedus* is. Most people think that *hisbodedus* is to: spend time with yourself, make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, talk to Hashem, asking Him for things, thanking Him for things; and that sometimes we spend more time on *hisbodedus*, and sometimes we spend less time. Most people think that in general, they know what *hisbodedus* is.

Similarly, one of the Sages said, "I have seen *b'nei aliyah* (those who ascend), but they are few", yet many people think they know what it means to grow in their *Avodas* Hashem, but the truth is that there are only a few who truly grow.

There are irreligious people in the world who think they know what Torah is. They think that Torah means Bible personalities such as the forefathers, Moshe, Pharoah. With their little knowledge, they think they know what Torah is all about. Then when a person becomes a religious Jew, he suddenly realizes how much he didn't know. He thought he knew what Torah is, and now he sees that he did know what Torah is. He only had some idea about it.

In the same way, many people don't really know what *hisbodedus* is, but think they do. They resemble the irreligious Jew who thinks that because he has some idea of stories of the Torah, he must know what Torah is about. People who know a little about *hisbodedus* tend to think they know what *hisbodedus* is, but they don't know what the essence of *hisbodedus* is. When a person discovers the essence of *hisbodedus,* he will realize what he didn't know anything about *hisbodedus* until now.

In these classes, we are trying to show that what people think is *hisbodedus* is very shallow and superficial. *Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem*, which was written by Rav Avraham ben HaRambam, describes true *hisbodedus.* He describes how all our Avos, as well as Moshe, Aharon and Dovid, would do *hisbodedus*. The *hisbodedus* described there is the true *hisbodedus,* and it is totally different than what people think it is.

The truth about *hisbodedus* – described in these classes – is that *hisbodedus* has to become a way of life. In order to appreciate these classes, we need to realize that whatever we thought about until now about *hisbodedus* was only the external layer of *hisbodedus*.

The Essence of Hisbodedus

What is that internal layer of *hisbodedus*? It is the power called "*menuchas hanefesh*" – the true serenity of our soul. The whole purpose of *hisbodedus* is to arrive at *menuchas hanefesh*.[9]

When we do *hisbodedus*, we are alone from other people, in the external sense. But the point is not just to be alone in the external sense. **The point is to become "alone" even internally**. As long as our thoughts are floating and connected to the outside world, we will not be able to attain *menuchas hanefesh*, and then we will just be left with the external layer of *hisbodedus*.

Only with *menuchas hanefesh* are we able to silence our thoughts and feelings. Only when we calm our feelings and thoughts, will we be able to disconnect from the world around us and do proper *hisbodedus*. Otherwise, our various thoughts and feelings still connect us to the world.

Whatever we discussed until now was essentially a path to get to *menuchas hanefesh,* slowly but surely. Whatever ideas we have until now were to help us take small steps to slowly calm ourselves down more and more, so that we can calm our bothersome thoughts and feelings and thereby bring ourselves closer to *menuchas hanefesh*. Living a calmer kind of lifestyle, which we discussed last time, was essentially about this point: because we need a calm lifestyle in order to get to *menuchas hanefesh.*

There are those participating here who have heard a lot about *hisbodedus* and what to do, as far as the external layer concerns. Therefore, they are impatient by this point and want to just continue further. But what they aren't realizing is that they haven't yet acquired *menuchas hanefesh*, and therefore they are only interested in the physical aspects of *hisbodedus*. What those people really need at this point is to try to attain *menuchas hanefesh*.

Since these classes are being given to a large audience, it is impossible to give a class that will be custom made for each person. Therefore, some people will have a hard time following these classes and grow impatient. However, we must give classes that are geared toward the general audience. So we each require our common sense, as well as *siyata d'shmaya*, to understand each of these classes and apply them to our own level. Not everything that is said here applies to every exact situation to those listening to these classes, and therefore, each of the listeners here has to see how it can apply to him on a general level, even if it doesn't apply exactly to his situation.

To illustrate what we mean, when we set the air conditioner in the house, the temperature will not be pleasing to all people in the house. Some people like it a little colder, and some people want it to be a little warmer in the house. There is no temperature that satisfies all people. So too, these classes will not satisfy every person, because everyone is different. What is being said here in these

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9 See the e-book of the author's collection of droshos entitled "Search for Serenity" (published in Hebrew as "Da Es Menuchasecha").

classes cannot be applied to every person's exact situation, because each person needs something different.

So in order to gain from these classes, firstly we need to use our common sense and realize how we can apply these classes to ourselves, on a general level, even if it's not exactly what we need to hear. Secondly, as we mentioned, we need *siyata d'shmaya* (Heavenly assistance).

The general point in all these classes is that we are trying to achieve *menuchas hanefesh*. That is something that applies to everyone: we each need to live a calmer lifestyle, as this will help us get closer to *menuchas hanefesh*.

If a person implements these classes and finds that he is getting closer to *menuchas hanefesh*, this is a sign that he's succeeding. If he tries to implement these classes in his life but he doesn't feel that he's getting closer to his *menuchas hanefesh*, it's a sign that he has gotten something wrong.

Time Spent on Hisbodedus

Another point we need to consider is: How much time should we spend on *hisbodedus*? For some people, an hour a day is too long. For others, even an hour a day isn't enough, because they feel that an hour is not enough time to get everything accomplished.

Not only that, but each person himself cannot have a set time for *hisbodedus*. Even if a person needs an hour a day of *hisbodedus*, that doesn't mean that if he doesn't have time that he shouldn't do any *hisbodedus* at all, because even five minutes a day can be effective. We don't always have the time we need for *hisbodedus*, but that doesn't mean that there is no point in doing it for a small amount of time.

It's already half a year that we are giving these classes. If a person feels thus far that his life is somewhat calmer, it shows that he is succeeding with this method of *hisbodedus*, and therefore, this approach of *hisbodedus* is meant for him to work on. But if, at this point, a person feels that his life has not become calmer yet, then it can either mean one of two things. Perhaps this way of *hisbodedus* is not meant for him, and he has to speak to someone to find out what method is for him. Or, perhaps, it can mean that he has misunderstood some points we discussed in the previous classes and he just needs to clarify those points.

Clarify To Yourself If This Method Is For You

Therefore, if any of the participants in this series have any questions, please send them in,[10] so that each person can clarify on her own if the method being discussed here is indeed the path for *you* to take. It might not be for you, so it is imperative that we clarify this now before continuing.

There are many ways to serve Hashem, and there always have been. Each person has to serve Hashem in the way that is meant for him. There is no one way that is for everyone. If someone isn't being successful after trying so hard to implement a certain path he's taking in *Avodas* Hashem, it's very possible that the way he is taking is not meant for him to take.

For example, if a person feels that he is trying very hard to implement our method of *hisbodedus* and that it's just not working, no matter how many times he tries, it can very well be that the method here is not for that person. Instead of being disappointed at this, a person should realize that this particular path of *avodas Hashem* is simply not the path he needs to take to get close to Hashem, and that it is merely upon him to find out what his path in *avodas* Hashem is. We have to all be realistic when it comes to our *avodas* Hashem.

So, we conclude that the approach towards *hisbodedus* that we are learning about here is indeed not for everyone to practice. A person has to really know well if the approach here is for him to take or not. This chapter was just a general overview of our goal here; with Hashem's help, we will continue with the next chapter.

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10 All question should be sent to: info@bilvavi.net

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *How do we know what menuchas hanefesh is supposed to look like? How can we tell the difference between superficial "hisbodedus" and real, internal hisbodedus?*

A: True *hisbodedus* is **when you feel a very strong desire to connect to where you are trying to connect to, and to be there in that place.**

Q2: *If we only have 1-2 minutes a day to do hisbodedus, what should we do during that time? What should we be aiming for?*

A: Try to attain as much tranquility during that short minute, as much as you can.

Q3: *What is the goal of menuchas hanefesh at this point – is it because I should want to achieve menuchas hanefesh as a goal unto itself, or is it only a means to a greater goal beyond this?*

A: Yes, it is only a means to a greater goal.

Q4: *If it's very hard to disconnect from the world in my thoughts and feelings, does that mean that the method here is not for me?*

A: It doesn't mean that the method of *hisbodedus* here is not meant for him. There are some people who have a hard time with detaching from troublesome thoughts and feelings. It is hard to know this, but there do exist some people who simply have a harder time detaching from their thoughts and feelings. But it is not a sign that they cannot achieve the method of *hisbodedus* here. They just have to learn how to get by that side issue.

Q5: *So is there a way for me to get by that problem?*

A: Either you can speak to a professional who can help you get by these bothersome thoughts and feelings you're having. Or, you can try the following advice.

When it comes to avoiding **bothersome thoughts**, you can learn the art of focus, such as by training yourself to keep focusing on a certain object for a long amount of time; this will train you to avoid your thoughts from wandering around and to instead keep them focused.

As far as your **bothersome emotions,** what you can do is focus for a long amount of time on someone you love and make sure that you're holding onto your love for that person, for as long as possible. This trains you to calm your emotions. This is just general advice, but there are much more details to this therapy.

For example, if a woman feels that her life is very dysfunctional, what she can do to remedy this is to organize her house a little each day, and this will help her attain at least an external orderliness (*seder*) in her life. The external orderliness will help her give orderliness to herself internally, and this will calm her down inside.

Q6: *Recently, some of us women who hear these classes had a meeting to see and determine if we are gaining from these classes. We felt that we are all gaining from these classes, by the very fact that we are involving ourselves with the idea of hisbodedus. We indeed felt that these classes are helpful to us. But, we find these classes very hard to actually practice.*

For example, we can identify with the fact that everyone needs 15 minutes a day for hisbodedus, but we are finding it very hard to carry out any avodah when it comes to this. So we remembered what the Rav has written in sefer Da Es Atzmecha, that there are outer thoughts and inner thoughts; that there are thoughts which come from outside ourselves, which aren't coming from our true self, and that there are inner thoughts which come from ourselves. Therefore, we wondered: what thoughts are we having throughout the day that are causing us to have such a hard time practicing any of these classes? We therefore concluded, based upon what we learned in Da Es Atzmecha, that we have to sit and reflect before we do hisbodedus and try to figure out if our thoughts are indeed coming from within ourselves, or if they are coming from outside ourselves and thus not our real thoughts. Is this a proper way to start hisbodedus (to first try and determine if our thoughts throughout the day are inner thoughts, or outer thoughts, as the Rav says to do in "Da Es Atzmecha")?

A: It depends on the person. The concept [you quoted] written in *Da Es Atzmecha* is addressing people who have a negative self-image; the *avodah* described there is to help a person attain a positive self-image of himself by ridding himself of his negative thoughts that aren't coming from his true self. If someone has a low self-image, it indeed is recommended for the person to make sure

he has a positive self-image of himself before he begins to implement the *avodah* of *hisbodedus* being described in these classes; as you said.

But if a person already has a positive self-image of himself, then he does not need to do the above before starting *hisbodedus.*

Q7: *Is the method of hisbodedus here supposed to lead us to having more menuchas hanefesh throughout the rest of the day as well, not just during the time of hisbodedus?*

A: Yes, the *menuchas hanefesh* which you achieve during the time of *hisbodedus* will help you feel an internal *hisbodedus* throughout the rest of the day as well.

7 | Habatah (Part One): Inner Sight

Three Methods of Internal Calmness

With Hashem's help, we discussed previously how we can attain inner calmness in both the physical and spiritual sense.

Let's return to discuss a certain fundamental point. We have already discussed how to calm ourselves through our senses. We also described a method using imagination to calm ourselves down. This is further elaborated upon in the series *Getting.To.Know.Your.Imagination.*[11]

There is also another way to calm ourselves down, which we only mentioned briefly: to find out what our worst *middah* is, in order to calm that *middah.* All of us have one particular bad *middah* which mainly deters us from growing. The four main bad *middos* are arrogance (rooted in our element of fire), idle speech (rooted in our element of wind), evil desires (rooted in our element of water), and laziness/sadness (rooted in our element of earth). We need to try and locate what our most dominant bad *middah* is, and then we need to calm that particular *middah*, so that it won't continue to get in the way of our *avodah*.

The Three Tools We Need For Hisbodedus: Inner Sight, Inner Recognition, and Inner Listening

We will now return to discussing what the goal of *hisbodedus* is and how to start the *avodah* of *hisbodedus.* As we have emphasized in the past, *hisbodedus* is not mainly about making a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting, or self-introspection)[12] or about *davening* to Hashem during this time. Nor is it about thanking Hashem. Although these things are truthful actions we need to do, these things are not the goal of *hisbodedus.*

To give a general description of the inner goal of *hisbodedus*, it is the following: Firstly, to develop an ability called "***habatah",*** an inner sense of "sight". Secondly, we will need to develop a power called ***hakarah,*** inner "recognition". Thirdly, we will need to develop a power called ***hakshavah,*** inner "listening".

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*11 Refer to **"Getting To Know Your Imagination",** Chapters 3 and 4. The English adaptation of this series is available at www.bilvavi.net/files/Getting.To.Know.Your.Imagination.pdf*

12 For more on how to make a cheshbon hanefesh, it may be helpful to see Bilvavi Part 4: Chapter 4: Making A Soul-Accounting.

We will also need to incorporate these three stages throughout eight steps

1. We need to first "see", "recognize" and "listen" to our **physical actions** that we do, which helps us gain more awareness of our most basic physical layer, our body.
2. We also need to "see", "recognize" and "listen" to our **speech**.
3. After that, we need to work to "see", "recognize" and "listen" to a deeper layer: our **thoughts**.
4. After deepening our awareness in this way towards our actions, speech and thoughts, we then need to "see", "recognize" and "listen" to our **emotions**.
5. After becoming more deeply aware of our emotions, we can then analyze our **subconscious** (in Hebrew, the "*tat-hakarah*" or "*tat-muda*") using once again the three abilities of inner sight, inner recognition, and inner listening.
6. The level after that is to learn how to "see", "recognize", and "listen" to **above our conscious** (in Hebrew, "*al-hakarah*" or "*al-muda*").
7. After that, we can rise to yet a higher stage of deepened awareness, where we can learn how to "see", "recognize" and "listen" to our actual **essence** (our *havayah*).
8. Finally, we can become aware of the point above even our own *havayah*\essence, by learning how to "see", "recognize", and "listen" to the deep part of ourselves that attains **closeness with Hashem**.

Altogether, we have described eight steps, which are like rungs in a ladder that we need to climb, step-by-step. We cannot skip any of these steps; we must begin from the bottom and work our way upwards. People tend to skip, starting out their *hisbodedus* with *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) or with *tefillah* (prayer), but this is erroneous, because *cheshbon hanefesh* and *tefillah* are examples of later stages, while we need to start with awareness of our actions. We must go in the order of these eight rungs in the ladder which we have presented. Each of these levels is getting more and more inward towards the innermost point of our self, and the eventual goal will be to reach *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem.

We might become flustered when we hear all of this and feel that it's too hard and overwhelming, despairing that we will never get to our goal. It is indeed challenging, and it takes a long time to get to the goal – but for this very reason, Hashem gave us an average lifespan of seventy or eighty years (as it is written, *"The years of a man are seventy, and if he is strong, eighty"*) so that we can have a long time to be able to work on all this!

Deepened Awareness Towards Our Actions

With the help of Hashem, let us now start with the first step, which is to become more "aware" of our physical **actions**. We need three abilities in order to become aware of our actions: inner

"sight" (***habatah***), inner "recognition" (***hakarah***), and inner "listening" (***hakshavah***), towards the actions that we do.

Before we actually begin to explain this, we will mention an introductory point that one should first think about, before starting the part of *hisbodedus* we will soon explain, in which we are becoming more deeply aware of ourselves.

There are some people who do not enjoy sitting alone, and sometimes this can be because they went through something traumatizing when they were children, which took place when they were alone. For example, if a child was left alone somewhere by his parents once, the experience can be traumatizing to the child and made him develop a fear of being alone. If this is the case, the person starting out *hisbodedus* will have to fix his past trauma by re-experiencing the trauma in his mind, and then to "go back in time" and fix it[13] [3]. A person should go to a professional therapist who can help him tackle the trauma of the past.

If someone didn't have a childhood trauma, yet he is still afraid of being alone for some reason, he can try getting used to being alone for five minutes a day by, for example, putting on light music in the background, to ease the tension of the loneliness.

Only after these obstacles are removed can a person should begin to make *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) on the actions he did that day. When making *cheshbon hanefesh*, we need to remember both the good and bad things that we may have done that day. But one needs to use three abilities we mentioned in the beginning: "inner sight", "inner recognition", and "inner listening" [which we will soon elaborate upon], within his *cheshbon hanefesh*.

Usually, when a person makes a *cheshbon hanefesh*, he simply thinks of his actions. For example, a person *bentched* (recited *Bircas HaMazon*) that day, and he's thinking if he *bentched* with *kavanah* or not. But this is not the inner kind of *cheshbon hanefesh*; it is only beginning to scratch the surface. Indeed, the word "*cheshbon"* comes from the word "*choishev"* – to "think" – but it is more than just simply "thinking" superficially.

The inner way to use the method of *cheshbon hanefesh* is that when you're thinking of the actions you did that day, you should **imagine it clearly** and **then analyze what you have done**. We should also attempt to **relive** the situation in our minds and then **see how we could have done it better**. This is called *habatah*, "inner sight" – and this is how we actually "see" into the actions we have done.

The next step in this is that when you're reliving the experience, imagine that **you are looking at yourself as an outsider**. This may seem to be like your regular imagination, but it's more than just

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13 See the author's recent series, Getting To Know Your Imagination, Chapters 03 and 04.

imagination. It is a power that we have to go above our consciousness, and we can access it when we view ourself from the "outside" of ourself.

For example, when you watch a video of yourself you notice new things about yourself since you're seeing yourself from outside of yourself, it offers you a whole new kind of view of yourself. So too, you can watch a "video" of yourself and view yourself from the view of an outsider, by closing your eyes and imagining and reliving how you acted throughout the day. You can imagine that you are watching a video of yourself, noticing what you did, and seeing how you could have done better, how you can improve.

This is a subtle ability to use, and some people will find it easier than others to use, whereas other people will find it more difficult. For those who find it difficult, they can try watching a video of themselves sleeping. This can help a person begin to relate to the subtle concept we are describing, where we are learning how to "see" ourselves from "above" ourselves.

There is a third example that can help us understand the concept: when you are at a wedding and you see the dancing, imagine yourself dancing in the circle, and how you would act. Here too, you are "seeing" yourself from "outside" of yourself.

Summary of Making A Cheshbon HaNefesh On Our Actions

To summarize, the first step of making *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) on our deeds is to simply think about the things we have done in the past. The next step is to use the inner power of *habatah*, to "see" into what we've done – to imagine the scene vividly, and examine how we could have done something better or what we shouldn't have done.

The next step will be "*hakarah"*, inner recognition, where will reach deeper understanding of what we did, learning how to better "recognize" what we did. The final step will be *"hakshavah",* to "listen" in an inner way to what we have done, by trying to discern the motivations that caused us to act.

These matters may sound very new to us, and we might get overwhelmed when we are introduced to these deep concepts. A child as well gets frustrated when he is being taught new topics, but the more we teach the child about the material, the more he gets used to it, and then he begins to understand. So the more we get used to hearing about these concepts, the more we will be able to identify with them as time goes on.

To summarize what we said so far in a way that will help us practically:

1. **Step 1** is to spend five minutes a day alone with ourselves.
2. **Step 2** is to write down a *cheshbon hanefesh* of everything we did that day; write down all the good deeds and bad deeds which you did that day.

3. **Step 3** is to use our abilities of *habatah*, *hakarah*, and *hakshavah* (as we explained).

The later steps which we have begun to mention (speech, thought, emotion, subconscious, above-conscious, essence of the soul, and ultimate closeness to Hashem) are beyond the scope of the current discussion, and we hope to explain these stages in the later chapters.[14]

Currently, we are dealing with the first step, which is to become more aware of our **actions**. The previous six chapters were all an introduction to the current class, and the purpose of those classes was to help us attain ore inner quiet. Without inner quiet, we can't even begin *hisbodedus* at all – not even the first stage (awareness to our actions) because inner quiet is the required prerequisite to *hisbodedus*.

Each step takes time. It is a slow process. May we all merit to reach more and more inward, and that we should eventually merit the final goal of all this – to reach true *d'veykus* (ultimate closeness with Hashem).

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14 Editor's Note: From the coming chapters, it is apparent that the Rav did not get to explaining the later steps of habatah-hakarah-hakshavah beyond the stage of "action", when this series of classes took a turn in the different direction with Part Two of the series, where the Rav explained about "hisbodedus with Hashem". This was due to the request of those participating, who were eager and anxious to hear already about how to use "hisbodedus to talk with Hashem"; thus the stages of habatah-hakarah-hakshavah in the areas of speech, thought, emotion, subconscious, above-conscious, essence, and closeness to Hashem were never taught.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *When I do "**cheshbon hanefesh**" (self-accounting), I become sad with myself, because I see that I have mostly bad things in myself. How can I stop being so negative about myself and begin to see myself as mostly good?*

A: Try not to focus on any of your negative qualities and remain focused on your positive aspects. If this doesn't help, you can think the following: Who gave you all your shortcomings? Hashem gave those very shortcomings to you. Realize that even your weaknesses come from Hashem; you will then find that you look at your shortcomings in a different light.

Q2: *I understand that it's all from Hashem, but my difficulty with this is that all of my shortcomings have developed in me due to all my sins!*

A: Do you only do bad things? Do you only make evil choices? We go through countless decisions each day; if you analyze your day well, you will discover that you are mostly choosing good throughout the day.

Q3: *Besides for using imagination as we do hisbodedus to relive our deeds throughout the day, is this supposed to carry over into how we actually act throughout the day as well, that we need to this as well as we are acting throughout the day?*

A: Yes. The first step is to use this power of "inner sight" just during *hisbodedus*, so you can become aware of what you did during the day in a clearer way. The eventual goal of this is so that the way we act throughout the day will become improved as well.

Q4: *Is it better to do hisbodedus before we* **daven** *in the morning or after?*

A: This is hard to answer, because it depends on the person. If a person feels that he will *daven* better if he does *hisbodedus* beforehand, then he should do so, but if he feels that *hisbodedus* will tire him out too much and then he won't be able to daven well, then he should not do *hisbodedus* before *davening*.

Q5: *How does the Rav's approach here of "cheshbon hanefesh" coincide with the approach of Sefer* Cheshbon HaNefesh" *(at least according to the explanation I have seen from Rav Dessler zt"l), which seems to take a different approach than the Rav's, towards the concept of "cheshbon hanefesh"?*

A: The *sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh* is describing the higher levels of *cheshbon hanefesh* that what we described here; *sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh* deals with analyzing our *ratzon* (will) in our actions. This class was about the initial step, examining our actions, which comes way before the stage of analyzing our *ratzon*.

8 | Habatah (Part Two): Seeing Renewal

The Three General Stages of Development

In the last class we discussed, with the help of Hashem, the three basic parts of *hisbodedus,* which are: *habatah* (inner sight), *hakarah* (inner recognition), and *hakshavah* (inner listening). In this chapter, we will explain these concepts more in-depth, and to try to make them practical.

As we mentioned before, there are two layers to *hisbodedus* – the external part and the internal part. The external part of *hisbodedus* is to be in a secluded environment, away from society. The internal part of *hisbodedus,* however, is to have *hisbodedus* within us, all the time, even as we are amongst people.

From the time we were born, we have been living a private life. A baby cares entirely for himself, and even as we get older, we tend to be self-absorbed. Each of us goes through this stage of having our own private life.

As a baby matures, he becomes curious, and he looks at everyone around him. Then he begins to recognize his surroundings, such as his parents and his siblings. We put on music for the baby, and then he learns how to listen.

The lesson we can see from a child is that this resembles our first stage in *habatah*, because the child begins to look around. Then we go through *hakarah*, because then the child begins to recognize all the people in his life. Then we go through *hakshavah* – the child begins to listen, respond, and communicate.

In a child, the abilities of *habatah, hakarah* and *hakshavah* are only superficial and undeveloped; they haven't yet matured. As adults, must develop all of these abilities and bring them to a more mature level, or else we remain with the childish kinds of *habatah, hakarah* and *hakshavah*. Also, a child isn't aware that he is using these abilities, and it's only happening by default. So at a certain point, we need to develop an awareness of these three abilities, and it won't suffice for our development if we remain at this "child" level.

Thus, we need to nurture these abilities of *habatah*, *hakarah* and *hakshavah* that we were born with. We need to develop a whole new kind of awareness in life. As a child, we had some *da'as* (mental abilities), but now we need to become more mature in our *da'as*. In order to begin *hisbodedus*, we need to have a "grown up" outlook on life. We need to have a **totally new perspective** on things in our life.

Our *avodah* is always a constant cycle of "*rotzoh v'shov*" – we progress, and then we retreat from progressing, and then once again we repeat the cycle. We need to be connected to our inner world

of *hisbodedus*, but we also need to disconnect from *hisbodedus* and then we go back to our practical life, and then we repeat the cycle. So we need to be able to connect to our internal world of *hisbodedus* and then be able to disconnect from it when we have to.

Constantly Acquiring A New Perspective

We must understand the following in order to make *hisbodedus* practical.

A person has the ability to completely change his perspective on things, every single day. *Chazal* say that when a person learns Torah, he should view his learning every day as if it's being given anew from Mount Sinai.

We always need to be able to have new perspectives on things. This will enable us to connect to and disconnect from our inner world (when we must). *Hisbodedus* helps us disconnect from things that we felt connected to the day before, because it enables us to look at things from a totally new perspective. Each day, we can choose if we will be connected or not to something, and this is really the power behind *hisbodedus*.

For example, a person goes on a vacation. First we look around at our surroundings (*habatah)*. Then we recognize what's going on (*hakarah)*. Then we absorb and take it in (*hakshavah)*. These three abilities we have are able to be looked at in a new way as well. We had these abilities as children, but now we can give these abilities a new perspective.

When we go to a new place we've never visited, it's easier to identify with this concept. But how do we go back to the same exact things we see every day and renew our perspective on them? The answer to this, though, is that we each contain depth within depth of ourselves. There are layers upon layer in everything, so we can always gain new perspectives on even the same things we see every day.

It is written, *"He renews, in His goodness, every day constantly, the act of creation."* Every day, Hashem creates the world anew. Since Hashem is making the world new every day, everything is constantly becoming new.

We think of our husband and our children as the same each day – the same husband and children that we already know from yesterday. However, if we acquire the ability to gain new perspectives, we will be able to look at our husband and children as completely new! We will see a whole "new" husband and a whole "new" child that we didn't see until now, because we can gain a new perspective. We can disconnect from yesterday's perception and connect to an entirely new perspective of today.

Each day, think that you are having a new beginning; you are constantly beginning again totally *anew*. Today is not a continuation of yesterday; it is a new beginning. Whatever you see today

doesn't have to be a continuation of yesterday – everything going on in your life can be seen each day with a *totally new* perspective.[15]

Using The Ability of Renewed Perspectives: The Concept Behind "Habatah"

Last month, we began to explain the concepts of *habatah, hakarah,* and *hakshavah*. We explained that *habatah* is the ability to see oneself from the outside of one's self. For example, when a person is reviewing what he did that day he can think about it and improve his actions for the future, by viewing himself as an outside observer who is taking notice of his actions.

To work on this concept, *habatah*, let us use the following three examples.

1 - When Looking At A Picture15F[16]

Look at a picture in your house, and try to notice things in it that you haven't noticed before. Look at it as if it's the first time you're looking at it. You can do this as well by looking at the ocean or the stars at night; imagine it's the very first time you are seeing it. By doing this, you will be able to notice new things you never saw until now in something you're always used to seeing.

This shows us that each time we look at something, we should approach it as if we've never seen it before, and this in turn will show us new perspectives on what we are looking at.

This was just a very simple example that explains the concept. Practically speaking, the exercise we should practice based upon this is as follows: look at the picture for about 2 minutes. Then, close your eyes and think about something totally unrelated, and let your thoughts wander. Now open your eyes for another 2 minutes and look at the picture. Keep doing this, and you will see that you are able to notice new things about the picture each time.

2 - When Reading A Book

Looking at things anew each day can be applied to our entire life, not just to what we look at. For example, when reading a *sefer*/book, a person should get used to closing the book and letting his thoughts wander, and then open the book again. Usually when a person is reading a book he enjoys, he can't put it down, and he reads on and on without being able to detach. But we need to be able to detach, and the example of reading a book is a good way for how we can work on the concept of detaching.

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[16] *Refer to the class in Appendix 1: Elul – Renewal for an in-depth explanation of renewal.*

3 - Listening To A Shiur Recording

Another example is when we are listening to a recording of a *shiur*. As you're listening to a recording, pause the recording and stop to think, letting your thoughts wander. Then after a few minutes, turn the *shiur* back on.

Acquiring The Art of Detachment

This concept may sound very strange to us the first time we hear about it, but the truth is that it can give a person a whole new perspective on life. In today's generation, many people are very stressed out. The inner reason behind this stress going on today is because people are "living" with the emotional stress built up from their entire life. They haven't learned how to detach from it. They carry the past with them into the future.

But we are able to detach from all that we have gone through in life and then begin anew. The past doesn't have to affect us *now*.

We must learn how to detach sometimes. If we lose a friend or a family member whom we loved and were close to, it is difficult to pull away from this great sadness we feel upon the loss. But if we learn how to detach even from the people who we were greatly connected to in our life, we are able to pull away from all the pain that is weighing us down and then begin anew in our life.

In Conclusion

It is advised to listen to this month's class several times since its lessons can give us a new perspective on life which we must learn to acquire.

The only way we can progress is if we advance in our *avodah* slowly [so we shouldn't rush between stages].

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Is "habatah" the same concept as "hishtavus hanefesh" (which is mentioned in another sefer, in which a person can learn how to look at himself as if he's a different person?*

A: Practically speaking it is the same thing, but we are explaining here that the source of this concept is because we must learn how to look at ourselves from a completely new dimension than what we are used to. Also, "*hishtavus hanefesh"* is a much deeper point than the point discussed in this class. "*Hishtavus hanefesh"* is about nullifying your sense of self. This will be the climax point of what we have described in this class – for now, we are only at the elementary stage, which is to learn how to acquire a new perspective. The lower level – which is what we are addressing – is to be able to put aside our feelings and thoughts, so that we can look at ourselves as an "outsider". The higher level, "*hishtavus hanefesh"*, is to realize that our *neshamah* is equal to everyone else's *neshamah*, and therefore we come to nullify our sense of self.

Q2: *In order to disconnect at times from reading a book or listening to a* ***shiur****, does this mean that we should think about our inner selves, or we don't have to do this and we can just think about other things during this time of detachment?*

A: When you detach from what you're doing, think about your inner world.

Q3: *When I try to think of everyone else as constantly "new", I have a hard time with this; everyone always looks the same!*

A: The thought itself that every day is new and that our surroundings and people in our life are always new – this is certainly commendable, but it's still only a superficial perspective, and it is not the point of what we have said here. The point of seeing everything as constantly new is so that we can attain an internal calm, and from the perspective of this inner calmness, we can always gain a new perspective on everything we see.

Q4: *How can a person detach from his intense emotions, such as if he was in mourning this year over a family member, and other intense times?*

A: If a person can train himself to detach in general, then when he goes through a very intense time, he will be able to detach even from these intense times he goes through. It will not be easy of course, but its difficulty will be greatly lessened. We can't start to learn how to detach during the

actual intense time – we need to develop a lifestyle of detachment already from before these kinds of times, and only through that can we survive the rough times in our life.

Q5: *Should we continue last month's* ***avodah*** **or should we continue now with this month's** ***avodah*****?**

A: It is impossible to give a class in which each person can be guided specifically in what he has to do this month. Each person is holding at a different level with working on these concepts.

However, if you feel that you are ready to progress from the *avodah* of the *habatah* (seeing ourselves from an "outsider" viewpoint) and that you feel ready to start to work on the *avodah* of *hakarah*, (acquiring a new perspective on everything, through learning the art of detachment), then you can do so.

Q6: *After I have reached the inner silence in myself and I am trying to gain the "new" perspective on things, is this "new" perspective accessed through having a* **ratzon** ***for it, or through*** **davening** ***to Hashem for it?***

A: We must always *daven* to Hashem for everything, no matter what. But in addition to *davening*, we have an *avodah* we must do. In this chapter, we have described a part of our *avodah*, which is to refresh our perspective on things. For example, when you're missing something in the house and you're looking all over it, you can retrace your steps to where you started and begin anew in your search, and then you have a whole new perspective that can help you retrieve the item. In the same vein, we need to always begin again anew, constantly refreshing our perspective on what's going on in our life, as if we have never seen those things before. Gaining the renewed perspective on things gives us new understandings toward everything we are used to seeing.

9 | Hakarah: Inner Recognition

Summary of Previous Lesson

With the help of Hashem, we have begun to explain the three stages of ***habatah*** (inner sight), ***hakarah*** (inner recognition) and ***hakshavah*** (inner listening).

In the last class we explained the first stage of ***habatah,*** a concept in which we can see new perspectives on things – via the means of thinking "into" something we see, then pausing our thoughts, and then returning to our thoughts. This refreshes our perspective on everything we come across and gives us the ability of renewal. It also provides us with the ability to be able to disconnect from something and then reconnect to that very same thing, but this time, with a refreshed outlook.

Now we will explain the next stage – ***hakarah*** (inner recognition).

Hakarah: Deepening Your Perception

As we work to refine our ability of ***habatah***[17]***,*** our ability of ***hakarah*** gets stronger with it as well.

Hakarah means to recognize, to understand, to get to know. When two people first meet each other, they don't really know each other. They only have a superficial kind of recognition of each other. As time goes on, however, their recognition of each other gets stronger, as they get to know each other better. This is the idea of ***hakarah*** – to develop our power of recognition of ourselves, more and more, and to keep refining it.

Just as we have explained in the past that the power of breathing can become deepened and help us go deeper into ourselves[18], the same is true with the concept of ***hakarah.*** The more we recognize ourselves, the deeper we are able to get into ourselves.

We can compare this to the following. As a baby develops, the parents get to know their child better, through his various nuances and antics. Their connection to the child grows stronger with the better they recognize the nature of their child.

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[17] ***Editor's Note:*** *This is accomplished by focusing inwardly on our actions by thinking "into" them, as explained in Chapter 7*

18 See ***Appendix 2: Saving Hashem Through Breathing.*** *Also refer to Chapter 4,* ***"Ways To Enter Deeper Into the Soul."***

Returning To "Habatah" After Gaining "Hakarah"

The first stage, ***habatah***, is not just to know about seeing more and more things we notice about ourselves [in a superficial manner]. It is rather about seeing our actions in a **deeper** way until now. In this way, our ability of ***hakarah***/recognition towards those very same things grows deeper also.

This is an important point which we have added to our understanding now. We said in the past that ***habatah*** is **not** about seeing **more** of our actions – it is about **deepening** our way of seeing things, and this gives us a **new** perspective on things. Now we are making a new point we haven't said before: that when we acquire the ability of ***hakarah***/recognition, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of how **see** things. Refining our ability of ***hakarah*** will deepen our ability of ***habatah*** towards our actions.

To help us understand what we are describing, we can say the following: if a person looks at something when he isn't calm, his perception is limited, due to his lack of calmness. The lack of calmness takes away from his clarity of perception. But when a person is calm and he looks at something, his perception is much clearer, and it's a whole new kind of perception than when he wasn't calm.

This is the gain of ***hakarah*** – it helps us come back to how we view our actions and now view them in a deeper way. [With ***habatah*** we reflect on our actions and see them in a new perspective, and after we develop ***hakarah,*** we can then return to those actions and view them in an even deeper way than what we discovered through ***habatah*** alone].

Another illustration that can help us understand this concept is the follows. When we look for something in the house, either we look around the house a little bit for it, or we make an intense search. Or, when we want to reprimand our child, we give the child a sharp look in the eye so we can understand what the child is really up to. In the same way, we are able to have a deeper **look** at ourselves [which is ***habatah***] and from that, we gain a much deeper **understanding** of ourselves [which is ***hakarah***].

Just as we can understand that we can deepen our perception towards the same things we see all the time, so can **also** we use this power towards ourselves. Because this is a delicate concept to understand, we gave several examples to illustrate it better.

In each person, there is a "child" aspect and "adult" aspect. A child has a superficial way of looking at things, while an adult is able to look at the same thing and see it from a whole different perspective – a much deeper perspective. In the same vein, we need to use our "adult" aspect and see things in a deeper perspective than the view from the "child" within us. Our level of perception needs to become more mature.

Examples of Developing "Hakarah"

You can work on this concept as follows. Let's say you did something improper when you were a child. Think to yourself: Now that I'm an adult, how would I have done that differently had I been an adult and more mature?

Another example: When a person is sad and he's looking at a picture, his perception of the picture is different than someone who sees the picture when he's happy. Think about the two different perspectives and compare them – the way you view something when you're sad, as opposed to the way you view something when you're happy.

Another example: A person who sees the ocean from sea level sees it a certain way. When a person views an ocean from atop a mountain, he sees the very same ocean, but with a whole different kind of view – a deeper kind of view, a vast kind of view.

If you try any of these exercises, you will be able to identify with this concept we are describing – ***hakarah*** – that you are able to gain a totally new perspective towards the very same thing you thought about previously.

The concept of ***hakarah*** is, to be able to see the same thing from many different angles. After refining our ***hakarah***, we can then return back to ***habatah*** – and reflect on our actions with a whole new perspective, a much deeper way to tune into those very same actions.

Progressing Through Hisbodedus: Feeling The "Alone" In Your Soul

There is a story told of the Baal Shem Tov, that once he experienced an "*aliyas neshamah*" – an "ascent of the soul." He felt his soul leave his body and ascend upwards towards Heaven. As his soul was flying more and more upward, he saw other *neshamos*/souls as well. The higher he went, though, the less and less *neshamos* he saw – and he felt more and more solitude.

The lesson learned from this story pinpoints what the goal of *hisbodedus* is. The more we progress in *hisbodedus* – going deeper into ourselves – the more we each realize the uniqueness of our own soul. We can each realize that none of us is like any other Jew, because of each us is truly unique.

On the one hand, we must get along with everyone and feel connected with everyone. *Chazal* say, "*Daato me'ureves im habriyos*" – we must feel open towards others and be able to get along with every Jew. But at the same time, we must also develop in ourselves a power to be alone and secluded from the world. This will help each person discover his own uniqueness.

Hisbodedus Cures Our Loneliness

We will now speak about a point which everyone identifies with from their own life.

People love company. Everyone wants to share their life with someone. It's painful to us when we don't feel companionship in our life. A woman who loses her husband feels terribly lonely, missing the companionship in her life that she once had. A husband who loses his wife also feels this loneliness. Not only that, but even a couple married together will often feel that they don't understand each other, that they don't share the same language. They can still feel lonely, even though they live together; they can each feel like there are certain things which they just can't get others to share in them with. Both the husband and wife will feel sometimes that a friend understands them much better than their own spouse.

But even with our closest friends, we never really feel that we have a friend who completely understands us. There is always a certain void in our life, points going on in our life which we feel totally alone in and that there is no one sharing in on what we are going through.

This is not by chance. Hashem made the world this way on purpose. Each person, no matter how much companionship he has in his life, always feels a certain degree of loneliness in his life. There are always certain areas which we feel like we aren't able to share with others, because nobody in the world will understand us.

And the truth is: it is indeed impossible for a person to have a true companion on this world who completely understands him. Hashem designed people this way – that each of us has a "private" aspect in us which cannot be shared with and experienced with by anyone else other than our self.

The inner reason why Hashem made us this way is so that we can develop the power of *hisbodedus* – to feel an aspect of "alone" in our soul.

Hashem made human beings that we need to sleep. To some degree, sleep is an example of *hisbodedus*, because when we sleep, we are alone and disconnected from the world. It's not a kind of *hisbodedus* that is productive or makes us improve; but what sleep does show us that there is a concept of being "alone", and it is upon us to use the power of being "alone" in the right times and for constructive purposes.

The Purpose of Sleep

In addition, we sleep for several hours a night, and not just for a few minutes. This shows us that [in concept] we need several hours of our day to be spent on *hisbodedus*. We have a need to be alone with ourselves for a few hours at a time – not just for a few minutes.

If you look around the world, you can see that there are many lonely people. There are many people who feel totally alone on this world, feeling like no one understands them. The truth is that all this loneliness is coming from the unutilized power of *hisbodedus*. We need to take all this

loneliness and use it constructively for proper *hisbodedus*, as opposed to the way it is being misused in this world.

The more we realize how much loneliness there is in the world, the more we will be able to recognize the need for *hisbodedus*. It shows us a very big insight into our purpose in this world – that we need to be alone with ourselves, and use the "alone" for constructive purposes, bringing us closer to our purpose of why we are here in this world.

The world is using a very sad kind of *hisbodedus* – people are lonely, and they are sad because of it. We can take all this being "alone" and use it to actually give ourselves deep happiness, when we utilize it for proper *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus – Reaching Your "Individual" Aspect

Hisbodedus can really make us happy, helping us become aware of who we really are inside ourselves. When a person develops the power of being "alone" in the proper way, he is then able to truly feel close with Hashem! This is the goal of *hisbodedus* – to reach our closeness with Hashem. By reaching our uniqueness and individuality, we can use that to feel alone with Hashem.

However, while *hisbodedus* is about getting to know our true self, it's not solely about getting to know your inner self. The point of *hisbodedus* is not just to be secluded and alone with yourself – it is rather that through feeling secluded from others and being alone with yourself, you will be able to feel alone with Hashem. *Hisbodedus* is about becoming alone with **Hashem** – it is not about being alone in a forest.

Most people are indeed afraid to be alone. That's why *hisbodedus* is hard for most people to implement; it makes them uncomfortable when they hear that that it involves being alone with yourself. But if we are able to understand that we need to reach our "alone" aspect and uncover our uniqueness, we will be able to succeed with implementing our *hisbodedus*.

These last two points are very crucial, and it would be recommended to review them often. We must connect to ourselves in a deeper way and be able to disassociate ourselves from the world, in order to feel our inner point of being "alone" and then use that to feel alone with Hashem.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *How exactly do we work on these concepts of "habatah" and "hakarah" in a practical way?*

A: We gave three examples. These are all ways how we can get used to the concepts. The more we get used to these exercises, we will be able to acquire these abilities. After we work to refine our abilities of ***habatah*** and ***hakarah***, we are able to then deepen our method of breathing we spoke about in previous classes, which helps us reach deeper into ourselves (or any of the other methods we described which can help us enter deeper, [as we described in the fourth chapter, "*Ways to Enter Deeper Into the Soul*"].

Q2: *When we work on the "hakarah" concept to renew our recognition on things and thereby come to have new perspectives on our actions we did, does this mean through our intellect, or through our intuition and not through our intellect?*

A: "*Hakarah*" is known as "*seichel murgash*" – a **kind of intellectual awareness that can be palpably felt**. It is not the intellect by itself, and it is not an emotion by itself - it is rather a **combination of both intellect and intuition**; it is *a kind of intellect that can be felt*. This concept is really described in sefer *Chovos HaLevovos*.

Q3: *Are women in particular better at this ability being described?*

A: With regards to the intuition aspect of it, women are better at it than men, but with regards to the intellect aspect of it, men are better. Women excel mainly with their intuition, while men are better when it comes to the area of intellect.

Q4: *The Rav has said that the goal of hisbodedus is to get in touch with our uniqueness, and that this is achieved via "habatah", seeing ourselves from outside ourselves. It sounded like we have to forget about our ego and instead just feel part of Klal Yisrael. Now the Rav has said that the goal of hisbodedus is to get to know our self. Why isn't this a contradiction?*

A: Previously [in the seventh and eighth chapters] when we spoke about *habatah* – seeing ourselves from the outside of ourselves – we did not mean to forget our ego and instead feel like we are part of *Klal Yisrael*. Rather the intention was to see ourselves as if we are outside ourselves; but we did not mean that we are trying to negate our ego with this. Nullifying our ego and instead feeling integrated with *Klal Yisrael* will be a later stage, which we still have not gotten to yet.

Q5: *When we work on habatah – seeing ourselves from the outside – various kinds of thoughts enter our mind. For example, thoughts about how others view the situation enter our mind when we attempt to view our actions from outside of our private perspective. Is this the intended goal of habatah?*

A: As long as your look at your actions in a different and deeper way than how you viewed it until now, this is using the ability of ***habatah***.

Q6: *When we view our actions through habatah, is this experienced through an awareness of our intellect, or as an actual feeling?*

A: ***Hakarah*** means that we are able to view our previous actions not just as an intellectual knowledge, but as a feeling of the knowledge. It is not enough just to "know" of the actions we do. People "know" all kinds of things, but this doesn't necessarily affect them. ***Hakarah*** means that we develop not only a new way of knowing our previous actions, but to feel differently towards our previous actions, as a result of gaining a new perspective on them. It has to be a kind of knowledge that you experience. For example, if someone went to Australia, not only does he know that he was there, but he remembers it because he felt it and experienced it.

Q7: *When we gain a new perspective on things, is this feeling coming from within ourselves, or is it coming from Hashem?*

A: It comes from within ourselves – from our *neshamah*. And that feeling is being allowed by Hashem. However, be aware that often we get a feeling from inside ourselves, but it isn't always coming from our *neshamah*.

Q8: *Since "habatah" and "hakarah" involve being able to concentrate deeply, do we also need to make use of our power of imagination in order to be able to concentrate deeply?*

A: We mentioned using imagination briefly in a previous class, but we do not mean to use it that often. As for concentration, what we mean is that one can become very focused and concentrated on his actions when he reaches a very relaxed state. The intention is to relax your mind, and from that, you concentrate better. This is a very important point. Another point involved in this is that we need to look at things in a more refined way, being able to break our actions down with our mind and then analyze it better.

Q9: *If Hashem wants us to be "alone" sometimes, doesn't this contradict the possuk (in the beginning of Parshas Beraishis),* "לא טוב היות האדם לבדו" *– "It is not good for man to be alone"?*

A: This is a very good question. The answer to this is that Hashem only said "It is not good for man to be alone" because Adam felt lonely and needed companionship, but before that, he was in a more perfected state in which he didn't need companionship. The inner point in our soul which we use for *hisbodedus* reflects the perfected state of Adam before he was with Chavah, in which he didn't need any companionship.

Q10: *If hisbodedus is about discovering our uniqueness, why won't this lead to gaavah (conceit)?*

A: This is a very good question. If a person feels that his uniqueness is because of himself, this is the *gaavah* if he feels special about himself. But if a person feels that he is special because Hashem made him special, this is not *gaavah*, because he is not attributing his specialness due to a feeling from his "I", but rather because Hashem gave him his specialness.

10 | Hakshavah: Inner Listening

Summary of the Previous Classes

With the help of Hashem, we have discussed the beginning two stages of *hisbodedus*: the first stage, ***habatah*** – inner sight of our actions – and the second stage, ***hakarah***, inner recognition of ourselves.

We mentioned that there are two levels to *hisbodedus*: external seclusion, and internal seclusion. External seclusion is when a person secludes himself where there are not any other people. Internal seclusion allows us to reach deeper and deeper into ourselves to become more and more "alone." After we become totally "alone", we can reach the final level: being "alone with Hashem. (We have not yet addressed how we get to the final level yet, which is the eventual goal.)

We have discussed that first a person needs to become internally calm which allows a person to use that calmness to begin to know his inner self better. After that, we discussed that we need to develop the abilities of ***habatah*** (inner "sight") and then ***hakarah*** (inner "recognition"). This requires us to "see" deeply and reflect, with our thoughts, into the actions we have done. Through that, we come to understand ourselves better.

Hakshavah – Inner Listening

Now we come to the next stage, which is "***hakshavah***", inner "listening." We will learn about developing a new kind of inner sense: to "listen" to what's going on in our inner world.

When we listen to others during conversations, there are degrees to how well we are listening. Some people listen better, and some listen only on a superficial level. When a person isn't calm inside, he can't listen so well to others. The calmer a person is inside himself, the better of a listener he is to others.

For example, if a child asks something from his parents at night when all the other kids have already gone to sleep and the house is quiet his parents will have his full attention. But if the child asks his parents the same thing at lunchtime when everyone has returned from their various schools or on Friday afternoon when the family is busy preparing for Shabbos, it is hard for the parents to give the child full attention. It's hard to listen well when we are busy. We can bring many examples, but the point is that we have different levels of listening.

Our soul is able to reach deeper kinds of listening than our physical ears do. There are levels of how intense we can listen to something.

If we have worked on the concepts until now, we have become somewhat calmer, and our listening will have been improved as a result.

Exercise #1: Practice Being A Good Listener

Therefore, before we progress, we should work on the following practical exercise: we should listen deeply to another person every day for five minutes. This can be either with your spouse or children. Listen to them from a deep, calm place in yourself.

This helps you become aware of your ability of inner listening and to develop it further. It will not just help you listen better in the superficial sense, but it will give you a whole deeper kind of listening, an inner kind of listening.

Exercise #2: Try To Listen Even When You're Harried

Also, even when we are busy, we should try to listen to others as well with as much attention as we can currently give. Although this is a bit difficult, we should still try to listen to others even as we are very busy with something. This will not be with the same depth of listening as when we are calm, but it is still beneficial for us, because it helps us train ourselves to listen accurately to others even when we find it hard to listen.

Listening To Others

The more we get used to this "inner listening" – and not just to listen with our ears - we will be able to connect better with other Jews and feel a great love for them. We will be able to reach true *Ahavas Yisrael* through listening deeply to others.

When you really listen to others from an inner place in yourself, you don't just hear his words; you hear the feelings going on inside him. You get to the heartbeat of what he is saying. You feel his *heart* talking to you - and not just the *words* he is saying. When we really listen to others, we are able to access our inner self, and then we are listening to others from our inner self.

This is very relevant for those who are therapists, psychologists or social workers. When you listen to others who come to you with their problems, don't just listen to what they are saying. Listen to what's going on in their heart. Feel their pain and their other emotions; don't just superficially hear their words and take note of what they are saying. When you listen to them from your inner self, you feel another's feelings as he talks to you.

Listening To Yourself

Until now we have discussed internal ***hakshavah*** and external ***hakshavah,*** but both are really **external** forms of listening because they are listening to someone "outside" of one's self – listening to someone else.

True listening does not just include really listening to other people, but we also need to listen to **ourselves**. A person listens *to* himself – **from** himself. We need to be able to hear what we are saying, like when we *daven*. The *halachah* is that one has to be able to hear what he is saying in *davening* and when we say *Shema*. However, this is only the superficial layer of listening. There is also an inner layer of listening – to listen to our actual self. Listening to our inner self is a way for us to **access** our inner self.

Most people never heard of this concept. We are used to a noisy world, and our ability of inner listening is compromised. We have such a noisy lifestyle – hearing others talking all the time affects our ability to listen inside ourselves. But if we become calmer, we can listen to the inner sound in ourselves, which has a very subtle kind of frequency that we aren't used to. It is an **inner voice**[19] (*kol penimi*) inside ourselves which we can begin to hear when we become calmer inside ourselves.

We all recognize physical sounds. When we listen to someone speak, we hear a vocal sound leave another person's sound box, where it then enters our own physical body. But there is more to these sounds we are taking in. Whenever a person talks, there is an inner sound in the words, and it a sound coming from his soul. It is conveying a message.

To illustrate, if there is a bug walking by us and it is rubbing against a leaf, we usually can't hear it amidst a noisy day. But if things are quiet, like at nighttime, we can listen to the ant moving and making little noises. We hear it ruffle against the leaves.

In the same way, when we get calm inside, we can hear subtle kinds of sounds. We can begin to hear the sounds of the soul, present in the words that a person speaks.

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*19 **Editor's Note:** To clarify, what the Rav is describing is based on a concept of the Baal Shem Tov. A person can hear the Bas Kol (Heavenly voice) which goes out each day and announces that we must do teshuvah. However, it should be noted that this is not simply referring to "hearing voices in the head". If someone convinces himself that there are "voices in his head" – or if he deludes himself into thinking that Hashem or some other spiritual force is "communicating" with him through his mind – he is suffering from a mental illness, rachmana litzlan - or he is just deluded by imagination and maybe he's starting to "snap"…he needs professional help!*

The "inner voice" which the Rav is describing, on its deepest level, is referring to a spiritual yearning that one can begin to feel, with the more calmness you have around you and inside yourself. Even if we do not hear this inner voice for spiritual yearning (which most of us probably do not), the Rav is saying that since there is an inner voice contained in everything we hear, we can hear things with greater depth and thus "hear" a deeper implication in what we are hearing.)

On the deepest level of listening, a person can hear the *kol demamah dakah* (a "soft, subtle voice") of the *Bas Kol*,[20] and even deeper, of *Ruach HaKodesh*[21], and even deeper, of *nevuah* (prophecy).[22] These are the highest levels of hearing spiritual sounds, which we are not dealing with here. We are discussing the levels of the revealed *nefesh* (the basic layer of our soul) which each and every one of us is in touch with to some extent. Even if we don't reach the exalted levels of hearing spiritual sound, we can still develop an ability to hear the refined sounds of *our soul* - by attaining some inner quiet and avoiding the great noise that envelops us in this world.

When Adam sinned, Hashem called to him, "*Where are you?*" Adam was afraid of retribution and went into hiding. The simple meaning of why he went into hiding from Hashem's voice was because he was ashamed. The deeper meaning is that ever since the sin, mankind cannot hear the spiritual kind of sound to its fullest level.

Yet, we can still get in touch with spiritual sounds the more we enter inward into ourselves. For example, we have the *shofar*, which is not meant to just to hear it in the physical sense. The *shofar* serves to awaken us to spirituality. So we still have, to some degree, an ability to hear spiritual sounds.

This concept sounds foreign to anyone who hasn't become calmer inside himself yet. If someone has become calmer inside himself, though, he will be able to identify with the concept we are describing.

The more we attain inner quiet, the more we can access our inner listening. When you listen to yourself, it's not with your physical ears, but with your heart.[23] *It is when you pay attention to what's going on in your heart.* It is an awesome inner ability that we have. If we reveal this ability from within ourselves, we will discover an amazing kind of self-awareness in ourselves. It will manifest as *a clear perception towards one's inner self.*

Listen From Your Heart, Not From Your Ears

Previously we discussed *habatah* (inner sight) and *hakarah* (inner recognition), where we use the power of thought to reflect deeply. Those abilities make use of our intellect. Now we discussing a

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20 A Heavenly calling, that goes out every day announcing people to do teshuvah
21 "The Holy Spirit"; A level of prophecy
22 Actual Prophecy
23 For more on the concept of "heart listening", refer to
Getting To Know Your Inner World #005: The Intellect and the Heart;
Woman's World #005: Listening To Your Inner Voice;
Woman's World #009: Heart of the Jewish Woman; and
Rosh Chodesh: Avodah: Tishrei (Touching The Spiritual)

third ability, *hakshavah* (inner listening) which is not an ability of our intellect – it is rather a "heart" ability. It is to listen with our heart, to listen to what's going on inside ourselves.

It must be emphasized that the concept of *hakshavah* which we are currently explaining is not for everyone to work upon. If someone has worked on the concepts thus far, the following stage we will present will be easier to understand. If someone has understood these concepts at least on an intellectual level, but he has a hard time implementing them on a practical level, he can still understand what is to come.

Needless to say, if someone has reached the deep place of inner silence within himself where he can develop this power of *hakshavah,* he will understand better what we will explain in the next chapters.

Disconnect From Physicality And Fix Your Worst Middah23F[24]

Firstly, in order to benefit from what we will learn in the following chapters, we will need to have an ability to disconnect somewhat from the physical world. We need to slowly train ourselves to detach from all the physicality of this world, in order to attach ourselves to the inner, spiritual world within ourselves. That is one thing we will need to do.

Secondly, we will need to reflect on the situation of our *middos* (character traits), before we progress past the current stage. Each of us contains four elements in our soul – fire, wind, water, and earth. Each person has one element that is more dominant than the other elements, which is his main weakness. The following is a brief description of the traits which result from our four elements:

The element of **fire** is the root of the traits of *gaavah*\conceit, anger, [and also *sinah*\hatred, *hakpadah*\irritability, *serarah*\seeking control (*serarah*) and *kavod*\seeking honor].

The element of wind is the root of *lashon hora*\forbidden speech, *sichah betailah*\idle chatter, *leitzanus*\mockery, *chanufah*\flattery and *sheker*\falsehood.

The element of **water** is the root of *taavah*\lustful desires [and *chemdah*\envy, and *kinah*\jealousy].

The element of **earth** is the root of *atzvus*\sadness and *atzlus*\laziness [and *marah shechorah*\melancholy, *kevaidus*\lethargy, *yeiush*\ despair, and *shiflus*\low self-worth].

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[24] *Discovering our worst middah is discussed in these series :*
Da Es Nafshecha ("Getting To Know Your Soul" and
Da Es Middosecha (Understanding Your Middos), and
Fixing Sadness and
How To Work on Your Middos.

Each of us has one particular negative trait which is getting in our way; so each of us needs to figure out what our worst *middah* is [by figuring out what our most dominant element is].[25] This must be done simultaneously with all the inner work we are trying to do. Without discovering our weakest point, it will be very hard to succeed and to progress further.

[25] *Refer to the author's Getting To Know Your Soul*

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *The Rav always teaches that our bad middos are to be viewed as a "garment" over our soul, as our actual soul is always pure; but in this class the Rov has said that we need to find the worst middah in our soul. So is our worst middah coming from just our body – the garment over our soul – or is it located in our actual soul?*

A: The worst *middah* is coming from our body, which cloaks our soul; it manifests in the lowest part of our soul, the *nefesh habehaimis* (the 'animalistic' layer of the soul).

Q2: *Can the Rav give practical examples of how we can apply the concepts of habatah-hakarah-hakshavah (inner sight, inner recognition and inner listening), in particular for a woman who has just gone through a stressful time with a child and she wants to better recognize her child's needs?*

A: In these chapters, we are discussing **in general** of how one can get in touch with the soul, and from there, one can improve other details in his life. If one learns how to develop his inner abilities of *habatah, hakarah*, and *hakshavah*, then he will be able to notice other things as well in his life, though, as a result.

For example, when a child is crying, one will be able to realize why the child is crying, if he has developed his abilities of *habatah-hakarah-hakshavah*. When a baby cries, sometimes he's hungry or in pain; we can discern the reason why he's crying, with the more we deepen our abilities of *habatah* and *hakarah*. But there are other times in which he's crying for a deeper reason – it is because he was used to learning Torah from an angel in his mother's womb. We can only think like this if we have developed the ability of *hakshavah*, discussed in this class. But this is just one example of how we can begin to hear things in an inner way.

Learning about these inner abilities should be learned as a way for us to improve ourselves on an individual level, and it is not meant to be learned to apply it to the rest of what goes on in our life. But obviously, if you learn about how to develop these abilities within yourself, on a purely individual level, you will come to improve other areas in your life as a result (such as better recognizing your child).

Q3: *When I attain inner quiet, I feel clarity, but what does it mean that there is an inner voice in me?*

A: What you are describing is *habatah*, that when you quiet your mind, you feel a new perspective on things. But this is still within your thinking intellect. After using our intellectual abilities of *habatah* and *hakarah*, a person can access the next stage, which is *hakshavah* – to "listen" with your heart. This is *not* an intellectual ability, but an ability you use your **heart** for. It is **when you use your heart to pay attention and to hear to the "inner voice" that is behind something.** It is hard to describe what this is.

Your power to think is only using the external part of your intellect, but the inner layer of the intellect is the ability of *habatah*, inner sight. The ability of *hakshavah* is a different sense; sight and hearing are two different senses, and this is true with regards to inner sight (*habatah*) and inner listening (*hakshavah*) as well. Inner listening, *hakshavah*, is totally coming from your heart, and not from your brain/mind/intellect, because it's not an ability you use your intellect for.

Q4: *How do I disconnect from materialism, being that I am a married woman who takes care of the home and I have to make sure that my family is having its physical needs? By nature, I am not drawn toward running after materialism, but I want to know how I can disconnect from materialism in a healthy way, while at the same providing the physical needs of my household.*

A: You should clarify the following two things: (1) Are you asking this question (how you can detach from physicality) concerning other areas in your life as well, or is it only with regards to the home situation? (2) Also, are you disconnecting from physicality because you feel a need to connect more with spirituality, or is it simply because you don't recognize the physical needs?

If you are taking care of your household because you want to do provide your family, then it's *chessed*, and then being into the physical needs of your home is really being involved in spirituality.

Q5: *How can I know if I am taking care of the physical needs of my home or if I'm indulging in materialism?*

A: This is a very general kind of question, and it is very hard to answer. It depends on the situation of your home. Our spouse and children have different needs. It also requires a lot of *tefillah* and *siyata d'shmaya* to know the fine balance. It is not possible to give exact guidance on how to balance your home's needs while at the same time avoiding a materialistic lifestyle.

Q6: *We are already used to hearing the "inner voice" going on inside our mind. Where is the "inner voice" coming from in our soul, which was discussed in this class?*

A: I understand that you are not speaking to yourself verbally, but mentally. This is not the "inner voice" which was discussed in this class; it is rather an external and superficial kind of ability that people have (a mental kind of ability). The "inner voice" which we discussed in this class has levels to its depth. The more a person reaches greater depth in his soul, the more his "inner voice" is coming from a deeper place in the soul. For example, if a person is at the lowest level of the soul, which is the *nefesh habehaimis* (the "animal layer" of the soul), a person will hear the inner voice of his *nefesh habehaimis*. If he has reached into his soul beyond the *nefesh habehaimis,* he will not only hear the inner voice of the *nefesh habehaimis*, but he will have an inner voice that is beyond the level of *nefesh hebehaimis*.

11 | Alternative Methods of How To Reach The Soul

Summary of the Previous Chapters

With the help of Hashem, we have merited to explain the depth of *hisbodedus*. We will first make a quick summary of what we learned until now before we proceed.

We have explained that physical seclusion is only the external part of *hisbodedus*. The essence of *hisbodedus* is to go deep into ourselves, to the place of "alone" in the soul where we can feel how we are one and alone with Hashem. When we reach our place of "alone" in the soul, we can talk to Hashem properly from there.

Until now, we explained how to reach inner calm, as a way to reach our soul. We mentioned the methods of using the senses to go deeper into our soul to attain inner quiet. Then we explained how to go deeper, through using our inner abilities of *habatah, hakarah*, and *hakshavah* to go deeper into our soul. These were all different ways of how we can reach our internal place in the soul of "alone", in which we can feel utterly alone with Hashem.

We will now present, briefly, a few more ways of how we can reach our *neshamah*/soul, besides for the methods which we explained until now.

1: Mesirus Nefesh To Perform A Particular Mitzvah

We have in us a power called *maaseh*/action. We use our power of action to perform the 613 *mitzvos*. The Rambam and others write that if a person connects himself deeply to one particular *mitzvah* he chooses, and he performs it with enthusiasm and with *mesirus nefesh* (to be self-sacrificing), he can reach the root of his soul. This is an amazing method that was practiced by our earlier Sages in how to reach the soul. It uses our power to perform action.

Our goal is always to reach our soul; there are many ways of how we reach our soul. This is one of the ways – by becoming devoted to a particular *mitzvah*. You can take one *mitzvah* and decide that you will carry it out as complete as you can – be strict about how you perform it, and do it as perfectly as you can. Your joy, yearning and will should be present as you do the *mitzvah*. Take upon yourself that you will carry out this *mitzvah* no matter what comes your way, no matter what difficulties are getting in the way. By becoming devoted to one particular *mitzvah* you take upon yourself, it will connect you to the deepest place in yourself.

Which *mitzvah* should we choose? Any *mitzvah* can connect us to our soul, but each person has a certain *mitzvah* which will connect him more easily to his soul root. Choose a *mitzvah* that you feel more connected to, and take it upon yourself. *Daven* to Hashem and cry about this: that you should merit to discover the *mitzvah* which your soul is meant to mainly pursue.

This is an example of how you can "grab onto a particular detail and get everything through else it" ("getting the *klal*/general whole through the *prat*/details"): by holding onto one particular *mitzvah* and performing it with *mesirus nefesh*, we hold onto one detail and get through to our entire soul's root, through it.

2: Discovering Your Worst Middah

There is another way of how we can get through to our soul which is by discovering your worst *middah* and uprooting it.

How do we discover our worst *middah*? As we have mentioned, Rav Chaim Vital writes that there are four elements in the soul, and these elements are the roots of our *middos*. They are: fire/conceit and anger; wind/idle speech, falsity, and flattery; water/desires and jealousy; and earth/sadness and laziness. Each person has a particular bad *middah* that is mainly dominant in his life.[26]

If you work to discover our own personal worst *middah* and we uproot it, you will get through to our *neshamah*. Be willing to have *mesirus nefesh* to uproot the bad *middah*.

As our Rabbis teach, each of us came down onto this world to fix a particular *middah* that we need to work on.[27] When we work on our *middos*, if we want to do this realistically, we can't do it by working on a different *middah* every day for 40 days, or to work on a different *middah* for each of the 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer*. Our inner *avodah* in *tikkun hamiddos* (rectifying our character traits) is to discover our worst *middah,* and to mainly work on uprooting our worst *middah*, and that will improve our other *middos* as a direct result. This takes a lot of time, but when achieved, we are able to reach our very soul.

In order to do it, a person needs to be able to have a bit of sensitivity to self-awareness – both intellectually, as well as emotionally, and to use his inner sensitivity to discover what his worst *middah* is. Most people, in fact, do not develop this inner awareness. A person must become both intellectually and emotionally **aware** as to what his worst *middah* is, and this takes a lot of time, as well as lot of inner refinement. But if a person perseveres with this, with *mesirus nefesh*, he will be able to reach his very soul.

The second method, as we said, requires the ability of inner sensitivity. If someone doesn't have the inner sense of awareness to his *middos*, using this method will not be feasible, so he should try the first method we mentioned.

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26 See Getting To Know Your Soul to learn about the 4 elements in the soul and how to recognize which element is mainly dominant in your life.
27 As taught by the Vilna Gaon [in sefer Even Shelaimah]

3: Persistent Torah Thought

Now we will present a third way to reach our soul. It is mostly applicable to men, but some women will be able to use it as well. It involves our power of thought (*machshavah*), which we mainly use to learn Torah.

The *mitzvah* of learning Torah applies only to men; women do not learn Torah, and *Chazal* discourage women from learning Torah in-depth. As *Chazal* say, "One who teaches Torah to his daughter has taught her foolishness."[28] Women only have to know the parts of Torah which apply to them, but this doesn't mean that women do not have a power of deep thought. Besides for learning Torah, we need to develop our power of thought so we can absorb proper *hashkafos* (outlook) on life that are in line with the Torah, and this applies to both men and women alike.

So we need to use our power of thought to constantly think about important matters. Take a particular deep Torah thought, like a saying of Chazal, and keep thinking about it throughout the day. If you keep doing this, consistently, you will be able to get to your soul.

4: Constant Mental/Verbal Repetition of Hashem's Presence

There is also a fourth way of how you can reach your soul; but it is a very high level to practice, so it is not for most people to practice.

The Rambam and the *Vilna Gaon* both wrote that the possuk "*Shivisi L'negdi Tamid*" ("I place Hashem before me always") contains every quality of *tzaddikim* (the righteous), and therefore a person should always think about it. Therefore, if a person keeps reviewing this special *possuk*, he has the power to reach his soul.

The review can be done either mentally or verbally. Men have an easier time doing this method, because they are used to mental review, whereas women have a hard time doing mental review; but what women can do is to constantly review this possuk verbally.

In any case, this method (constant mental/verbal repetition of a *possuk*) is a high level of *avodah*, and thus it is not for everyone to practice.

Summary of the Four Approaches of How To Reach Our Neshamah

We have mentioned here four general ways of how we can reach our soul: **(1)** through choosing to do a certain *mitzvah* with *mesirus nefesh*; **(2)** through working on our worst *middah;* **(3)** through constantly thinking about a certain Torah thought **(4)** or through constant mental/verbal review of "*Shivisi Hashem L'Negdi Tamid".*

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28 Talmud Bavli: Sotah 20b

A Woman's Challenge

These methods take a lot of time in our life, and they also take a lot of energy to work on. A married woman in particular is involved with her husband and children, and she has to somehow find how she can work on her *Avodas Hashem* together with all her roles in life. It takes a lot of wisdom how to balance her household role together with her *avodah* in reaching the soul.

We generally find two kinds of [*frum*] women in the world. One type of woman takes care of her house very well, exhausting all her efforts in life into taking care of her spouse and children, but, she never has time for developing her inner world; she has no time for any *Avodas Hashem*. By contrast, there are other women who are very spiritually-oriented and are thus very involved with developing their inner world, but they go extreme with their idealism, and they tend to ignore their home situation and neglect their responsibilities. Both of these lifestyles are extreme and they are not truthful ways of living.

What we need is the fine **balance** between our various responsibilities in life together with developing our inner world - and it indeed takes great wisdom to know how to balance out our roles in life.

Every Jewish woman should know, clearly, the following fundamental. We understand that a man's main *mitzvah* is to learn Torah, yet we also know that this does not exempt him from keeping *halacha*, from *davening* with concentration, from working on his *middos* and from smiling at others, etc. In the same way, women, also have many responsibilities in life – their household, raising the children, maintaining their *tzniyus* (modesty), etc. but this is not all there is to a woman's life. Although a woman's main responsibilities are towards her household, this does not exempt her from working on her *Avodas Hashem*.

The *Gemara* tells us that there were 48 men prophets, and there were 7 women prophetesses.[29] We see from this that a woman can reach prophecy, the highest spiritual level possible, in spite of the fact that these seven women obviously had responsibilities in their life.

It is impossible to give exact guidance on how a woman can balance out her responsibilities and *Avodas Hashem.* If a woman is not sure on how she can do it, she can ask her husband or someone who can advise her on how to go about it.

In Conclusion

In the previous ten chapters, we described methods in how we can reach our inner self. In the next chapters, with Hashem's help and assistance, we will discuss the next step in *hisbodedus*, which

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29 Talmud Bavli: Megillah 14a. The seven prophetesses were: Sarah, Miriam, Channah, Devorah, Avigayil, Chuldah, and Esther.

is to **talk to Hashem,** after we have hopefully reached a deeper place in ourselves, from all that we have learned and practiced in the previous chapters.

The coming chapters, however, are based on this first step described in the previous chapters, which explained how we connect to our inner self.

The matters discussed in the previous chapters are not so known to most people. The topic which we will discuss, *b'ezras Hashem*, in the future classes - talking to Hashem - is known to most people as a familiar part of *hisbodedus*, but, I will add on some subtle details that are not so well-known.

May we all merit to receive the light of the Torah, through the coming Yom Tov, completely.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *In the previous chapter, where the Rav explained about "inner listening", the Rav spoke about accessing the "kol demamah dakah" (the "soft, silent voice"). What exactly is it?*

A: Hashem created the world in ten expressions. When we all stood at *Har Sinai*, we heard the Ten Commandments, and the *possuk* says that there was a *"great voice [of Hashem], which did not stop."* This voice continues until today. *Chazal* say that it is a Heavenly voice, a "*Bas Kol*", which goes out every day and bemoans the degradation of the Torah when it is neglected. We can all hear this *Bas Kol*, to a certain extent, if we reach into our soul. There are some *tzaddikim* reach a high level and can hear it on Shavuos, and they can hear it also during the rest of the year after that. But we are not speaking of how to reach this high level. Rather, we are describing of how we can hear the simple level of hearing spiritual kinds of sounds. Just like we understand that an animal can pick up on sounds, so can we learn how to pick up on spiritual sounds, when we deepen our sense of listening to become sensitive to the spiritual.

Q2: *Is it a feeling or a thought?*

A: It is heart matter, so it cannot be described in words. We can hear about it, conceptually, and thus draw ourselves closer to the matter, but it cannot be actually described in any way. It can be felt as a feeling or it can come to you as a thought, but we cannot actually describe it; you have to be *there*, and then you can understand it.

Q3: *How do I know if I'm feeling it as a real feeling, or if I'm just imagining it?*

A: When we hear something, what are we hearing? Are we just hearing the words, or are we hearing the details contained in the words? Sometimes even when we listen to a person talking to us, we aren't really hearing them, and we are just *imagining* that we are hearing what he's saying! So of course we can fool ourselves, both when it comes to physical listening, as well as when it comes to spiritual listening. It is very possible that we are just imagining it and fooling ourselves. We can be making mistakes with inner listening, but the more you develop it, the more you will be able to relate to it and come to really differentiate between a real feeling and something that's only imagination.

Q4: *In the method of choosing to do a certain mitzvah with mesirus nefesh, does this have to be a Torah-level mitzvah (m'doiraisa) or can it be a mitzvah of Rabbinical nature (m'drabanan)?*

A: It is more usual that our soul is connected to a Torah-level *mitzvah,* but it doesn't have to be; it can also be a Rabbinical *mitzvah*.

Q5: *Can we use two methods at once of reaching our soul?*

A: Each method takes massive inner work; it is not good to take on too much, so it is not recommended to work on more than one method at once.

Q6: *I tried doing something enjoyable when I'm alone in order to get used to being alone, as the Rav said in the beginning of these classes to do [class #02, Preparing To Be Alone] but it didn't work for me. Should I keep trying to enjoy the quiet, or should I instead try one of the methods said here in this class?*

A: The methods we discussed here are both easy and hard. Each person has a different method that works better, but it is still challenging to work on any of the methods. What we discussed earlier – calming our senses in order to attain quiet – is both easy and hard. Yet, as hard as it is, it doesn't require *mesirus nefesh* on our part. But the methods we spoke about today have a different challenge: they are certainly more enjoyable than getting used to the quiet, but they are methods which require *mesirus nefesh*. So each of the methods (getting used to the quiet, or any of the methods described in today's class) are each uniquely challenging.

Q7: *If I write a diary when I'm alone, is that considered doing something I enjoy while being alone?*

A: It's a very good thing, but it should not be all that there is to your *hisbodedus*.

Q8: *When we view ourselves from outside of ourselves, as described in the previous classes, can this also help us develop our power of hakshavah/inner listening, just like it helps us develop our power of habatah and hakarah?*

A: It is definitely helpful. That is not all there is to it, but it can definitely be helpful to you.

Q9: *Is there a sefer we can learn that helps us discover what our worst middah is?*

A: There is no one *sefer* you will find that explains how you can do it. Currently, we are giving classes on each of the bad *middos*; we have already given classes on sadness and laziness, which are the traits that result from the element of earth in the soul, and we are in the middle of giving classes on the trait of lustful desire, which stems from the element of water in the soul. The methods for fixing our *middos* are spread out throughout the *sefarim*, such as in *sefer Pele Yoetz*; but they are not concentrated in any one *sefer*.

Q10: *I feel that I can do all of these three methods in this class all at once. Can I do it?*

A: You will end up getting flustered from working on so much at once. Instead, take one of these methods and stick to it and focus on it.

Q11: *When a person has self-doubts, from which element in the soul does it come from (earth, water, wind and fire)?*

A: This is a very general question. What is the nature of the doubt? A doubt can be coming from any of the four elements. [**Editor's Note:** See the book *Getting To Know Your Feelings*, Chapter 6].

12 | Beginning To Talk To Hashem

Hisbodedus With Ourselves, Then Hisbodedus With Hashem

With the help of Hashem, we explained the first stage of *hisbodedus,* which contains two parts - *cheshbon hanefesh* (making a soul-accounting), and the various methods that help us reach inner silence.

Practically speaking, at first a person needs a few minutes of inner calm, and then he should begin his *cheshbon hanefesh* (which we did not discuss that much)[30], and then he should try to enter deeper within himself, using the methods we gave in the previous part of this series.[31] All of this is yet the first part of *hisbodedus,* which is how we become "alone".

Summary of Hisbodedus With Hashem

Now we will discuss the second part of *hisbodedus*, which is to have *hisbodedus* with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. This generally contains two parts – **developing our personal bond with Him**, as well as to come to **recognize** Hashem.

Two Stages In Our Bond With Hashem

There is a kind of bond with Hashem in which a person realizes that we receive everything from Hashem, that He is the Giver and we are the receivers. In this kind of bond, we *daven* to Hashem to give us our needs. We think about what Hashem gives us, we thank Him for it, and then we ask Him for whatever else we still need.

But there is another kind of bond we can have with Hashem, not through give and take, but because we cherish the very connection. It's about the love itself, not about what we want to "get" from the one we love. (On its deepest level, this is to recognize *Ain Od Milvado*, in which we come to truly realize that "there is nothing besides for Him.") But on the basic level it concerns the connection that the lover has to his beloved.

Thus, based on this second view, *hisbodedus* is not about thanking Hashem for everything in our past, present or future. It is about (1) **thinking of Hashem's greatness** as well as (2) **to speak words of love with Him** – about how much *He* loves us, and how much *we* love Him.

There are two kinds of relationships - a relationship of give-and-take, and a relationship that is intrinsic. Parents with their children, and husband with their wife, might have any of these kinds of

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30 See Chapter #07 of this series
31 Refer to Chapters #7-#11.

relationships. They can love each other either because they receive and give to each other, or because they enjoy the intrinsic connection. In the business world, it's all about what I get out of this relationship, and any giving here is for the purpose of taking.

Because we are so used to give and take relationships in our life, we must develop a new perception towards relationships, in order to develop a bond with Hashem: where the relationship is all about the love in the connection.

Hisbodedus in particular is about developing these two aspects of our bond with Hashem. First we need to at least realize what Hashem does for us and love Him for it, and then we need to arrive at the higher level, which is to enjoy our very bond with Hashem.

Realizing How All That We Have Is From Hashem

The first step, realizing what Hashem does for us, is to realize that everything comes from Hashem. We need to realize what we have, first of all, and then realize that it's all from Hashem. So sit down and make a list of what you have and how it's all from Hashem. Then make a list of what you are missing in life, and that it can only be filled by Hashem.

Hisbodedus is not an intellectual matter - it is a heart matter. Therefore, it's not enough to be aware intellectually of what you have and don't have. We need to reflect about it more and more, so that our heart can feel it.

So take 15 minutes and reflect about the things you have in your life as well as the things that you need, and realize that they can only come from Hashem. Our *tefillos* to Hashem will then come from a deeper place in our self, from our heart, and not just from our brain.

Thus, the first stage to review simple matters of *emunah*, to review that Hashem gives us everything so we can thank Him. Then we can realize that only Hashem gives us what we need and we can ask for what we are missing from a deeper place in ourselves.

Why This Awareness Is Necessary For Hisbodedus

Let's try to understand this deeper.

Hisbodedus is to be alone with Hashem. We realize that as we do *hisbodedus*, it's just "me and Hashem" and no else. But in order to be alone with Hashem, we need to believe and internalize that everything we have is indeed from Hashem, and from no one else.

Otherwise, one is not alone with Hashem, and it's as if someone else is in the room with us; that would clearly not called being "alone" with Hashem! Such thoughts would prevent us from having real *hisbodedus* with Hashem. Therefore, only when we internalize that ***only*** Hashem gives us all that we have, and no one else, can we truly feel alone with Hashem as we do *hisbodedus.*

Emunah – The Prerequisite To Hisbodedus With Hashem

Now we can understand a major fundamental principle: *Hisbodedus* is based on ***emunah*** (faith that everything is orchestrated by Hashem)! The stronger our *emunah* is, the higher quality our *hisbodedus* will be. The weaker our *emunah* is, the more superficial our *hisbodedus* is.

To clarify, it's not that we have the *avodah* to have *emunah* as well as the *avodah* to do *hisbodedus*, as if these are two independent, separate issues that we need to work on. Rather, *emunah* and *hisbodedus* are really intertwined.

Thus, throughout the course of the day, we need to utilize our *emunah*, and if not, we will [by default] attribute everything that happens in our life due to various circumstances. "This person hurt me", "This person insulted me", or "This person helped me." The true perspective is that Hashem caused everything to happen to you, whatever it was.

To give some practical examples, when we buy a car or if we buy a sofa or a table for the house, we tend to think it's from the store we bought it from, or because your parents or in-laws gave you the money to buy it. Let's say we sit down to make *hisbodedus* with Hashem and we want to thank Him for those items. It will be very hard for us to feel thankful to Hashem when we never realized in the first place where these items come from. We need to realize during the day that all these things are given to us from Hashem, and not from people, and then we can properly thank Hashem when we do *hisbodedus.*

We will give another example that brings out the point. *Chazal* say that one should love Hashem no matter what *middah* He measures out to you. The only way to do this is when we realize that everything is from Hashem. If someone does something bad to us and we think it's from the person and not from Hashem, then we aren't able to realize how everything that happens to us is from Hashem.

Make A List of Major Things In Your Life - and Realize Who The Provider Is

Thus, throughout the day, we need *emunah*, that it is Hashem who does everything. This is the basis of *hisbodedus* with Hashem!

We can give a few examples of how to work on this. First we will start to notice the major things in our life which we have, and to realize that Hashem gave them all to us. Take a pen and paper

and write down who gave you all the items in your house, such as who gave you: your life, your senses, your house, your children, your livelihood, your health. For each thing, say to Hashem, "Hashem, you gave me this, this, and this (fill in all the big things)."

Verbalizing Your Thoughts of Emunah; Saying The Words With Calmness and With Feeling

Don't do this as a lip service; say the words from your heart. "Words that come from the heart enter the heart." Do this calmly. Do so with a **calm mind**, and then say the words with feeling, **with your heart**, and with **joy**. Keep saying the words from your heart, and you will then reach deeper and deeper into your heart, where the words will then keep coming from a deeper place in yourself.

This alone can take days and weeks to work on until it penetrates [your innermost self].

After you feel that the *emunah* has become deepened in your heart, you can then proceed to the next step, which is to thank Hashem for all that you have, from a truer and deeper place in yourself. [This will be the later stage, which we have not yet discussed].

Bear in mind that each step of *hisbodedus* can take at least 2 months to work on. Think about both the big things and small things that Hashem does for you, then verbalize it with Hashem, so that your words of *emunah* can implant the *emunah* deeper and deeper into your heart each time.[32]

The *avodah* to work on for this month, as a result of this discussion, is to recognize what you have, as well as what you need, and to speak to Hashem about it.[33]

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32 See Bilvavi Part 5- Talking To Hashem About Emunah.
33 Refer also to Woman's World #013-Awareness of What We Lack and Have.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Since Hashem gives me everything, even my bad middos, how do I thank Hashem for my bad middos, when my bad middos clearly cause me to act improper?*

A: Thank Hashem even for your bad *middos*. Even our bad *middos* can help us have good *middos*, because it can cause us to work on ourselves. However, you can't thank Hashem for what *results* from bad *middos*, because that is the result of your free will; but as for the bad *middah* itself, you should definitely thank Hashem for it.

Q2: *Aside from the avodah of today's month, I have the following question regarding next month's avodah, which will be about thanking Hashem. How do we thank Hashem for situations that are impossible to change according to Chazal, such as someone who is blind or childless, who are considered to be dead while alive?*

A: Although this was not related to today's class, the answer to this contains two aspects. First of all, we know that *Chazal* say that "Everything that Hashem does is for the good." First we must realize that everything is good, since everything comes from Hashem, and this is how we can thank Hashem for anything. Included in this is a deeper belief we need to internalize, that even the "bad" things are also for the good, since they were all done by Hashem. We do not understand this with our intellect, yet we have an *avodah* to internalize with our heart that everything is really good, that even the "bad" things are really good, and thus we can thank Hashem for even the "bad" things.

Q3: *How do all of our actions come from Hashem, such as when a person sins?*

A: Hashem gave us the power of free will and He even enables us to live even if we perform an evil act, as *sefer Tomer Devorah* writes; but just because Hashem sustains us when we do evil doesn't mean that we are not responsible for our actions. We are still responsible for our actions, even though Hashem is in control of all our actions, as we do them. You should look at Rav Dessler's *Kuntres HaBechirah* (Essay on Free Will) in *sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu* (Volume I) where Rav Dessler writes that there are points that are above our free will and below our free will. However, it is very hard for a person to know which parts of his life are above his free will.

Q4: *Let's say my son didn't call me and I'm upset. How do I realize that this is all from Hashem?*

A: If your first reaction is that it's from Hashem, it's a sign that you have begun to recognize how everything is from Hashem.

13 | Gratitude To Hashem

Summary of the Previous Chapter

We will quickly review the previous chapter and then continue.

There is *hisbodedus* between man and oneself, and we explained this at length in the first part of this series. The second stage of *hisbodedus* [which we are up to learning about] is between man and Hashem.

We explained that first aspect of *hisbodedus* with Hashem is to realize that *we are receivers of Hashem's goodness*; and the second aspect of this is to realize our *intrinsic bond with Hashem.*

Thus, it is fundamental requirement to first acquire the *emunah* that Hashem is the One who provides us with everything. Only after we attribute everything to Hashem, can we thank Him and ask Him for things.

Emunah: Recognizing The Source

Here in this chapter, we will elaborate on how *emunah* is the basis for our *hisbodedus* with Hashem.

Everything in Creation contains a *havayah* (essence) and a *tenuah* (movement). The essence of something is its very *havayah* - its actual essence; and each thing also "moves" (*tenuah*), which expresseses its *havayah*. That expression is the *tenuah* (movement). The higher aspect of something is always its *havayah*\essence, and its lower aspect is represented by its *tenuah*\movement.

With regards to our *emunah*, we believe that Hashem is behind everything, and this is the "*havayah"* aspect of *emunah*. The "*tenuah"* (movement) aspect of *emunah* is, to believe that Hashem *does* everything, *because* it is He Who is behind everything.

First we will deal with the lower aspect of this, which is to recognize the *"tenuah"* aspect of our *emunah*; and hopefully we will get to progress to the higher aspect, which is "*havayah"* aspect of our *emunah.*

Let us begin the *avodah* of *hisbodedus,* with regards to *tenuah* (movement, or expression), of our *emunah.*

We have a power to move; it seems that it is *we* who do things. But behind all that we do, Hashem is making anything happen. He allows us to have free will to choose, but other than this allowance of free will which we are granted, Hashem is the one who is doing every single action.

Before we continue, let's point out the following. Most people are somewhat self-absorbed throughout the day, and in the better situations, a person does *hisbodedus* for 15 minutes a day, and maybe for an hour a day. Can it be, though, that those who don't do any *hisbodedus* should be leading a more spiritual lifestyle than those who are doing *hisbodedus*? *Hisbodedus* is really supposed to lead into the rest of the day as well; so there has to be a discernible difference that we can recognize between those who do *hisbodedus* every day and those who don't. That is the kind of *hisbodedus* we need – the kind of *hisbodedus* in which you can tell on the person that it's making him into a better person.

Hisbodedus is not supposed to be viewed as a separate part of the day; rather, your whole day needs to revolve around it and be affected by it. It is not a side thing. It is supposed to illuminate your whole day. We shouldn't look at our *hisbodedus* time as just another thing in our day; when done properly, our *hisbodedus* affects us for the entire day.

Now we will explain how your time of *hisbodedus* can indeed carry over into the rest of the day. During *hisbodedus*, you must feel totally alone with Hashem, and separate yourself completely from the world [both outwardly and inwardly]. Whatever you went through during the day – whether it's something you are grateful for or something you need from Hashem – you are meant to bring all that into your time of *hisbodedus*, and talk about it with Hashem.

This can create a problem, though. If we don't feel connected to Hashem throughout the day, then when it comes time for *hisbodedus*, it is very hard to connect yourself to Hashem, because we are not used to talking to Hashem about all that we have went through. Therefore, whatever understandings we reach during *hisbodedus* needs to affect us throughout the day. If we reach the understanding that Hashem is behind everything, then this understanding needs to be carried over into the rest of the day as well. When you are around people during the rest of the day, you need to realize that Hashem is behind everything.

In this way, your *hisbodedus* is not just for *hisbodedus* time, but it is rather an understanding that you carry over into the rest of the day. So *hisbodedus* is not just a time to do *hisbodedus* and to *daven* to Hashem and make a self-accounting. It is to reach a certain recognition, that Hashem is behind every action - and this recognition needs to continue into the rest of your day as well. Thanking Hashem for the past, and asking Him for future things, is really about recognizing that only Hashem is our Giver, and that no one else can give us these things. This recognition is not just for *hisbodedus*. It is meant to be taken with you for the rest of the day as well, even when you're not in the midst of the actual *hisbodedus*.

So *hisbodedus* is really all day long! If we think of *hisbodedus* as mere physical seclusion from society, than we think it means to be secluded all day from people, which is really only a level for *tzaddikim.* Only our *Avos* were able to sit all day in the mountains and be secluded all day. The

essence of *hisbodedus* is not about seclusion – it is really about to live it all day long, to let it affect us all day long.

We can see people who have been doing *hisbodedus* for years, yet they haven't really changed. They engage in *cheshbon hanefesh* and *tefillah*, which is wonderful, and it is better than nothing, but they miss the point, because they don't realize that the lesson of *hisbodedus* is supposed to carry over into the rest of the day as well.

Continuing Hisbodedus: Beginning With Gratitude

Now we will see how to work on this practically. When you do *hisbodedus*, think about what you have and what you don't have.

(1) First, reflect about the big things and the small things you have.
(2) Then, reflect about Who gave you all those things.
(3) Realize that anyone who gave you these things were just Hashem's messengers.
(4) Think about each of your five senses, about all that what you have, about your spouse and children, about your *parnassah,* and realize that Hashem sent you all these.

Keep repeating to think about these things and remember that Hashem gave you all those things. Do this passionately and with joy.

That's what you do **during** *hisbodedus*; now we will discuss how you can let these understandings carry over into the rest of your day.

Let's say you have a house and children that you thanked Hashem for during your *hisbodedus*. Now when you come back to your house at the end of the day and when you come home to your children, feel thankful to Hashem again. During *hisbodedus* you thank Hashem for one thing; then you can increase it to ten things to thank Him for, and then you can increase it to a hundred things. This trains you to become appreciative towards Hashem throughout the rest of the day as well.

There are several stages to *hisbodedus,* as we have mentioned. Rather than trying to progress from one step to the next step, let's instead take one step at a time. First thank Hashem and let it extend into the rest of the day; let it internalize, before you begin to work on the next step.

Chazal say "to praise Hashem for every breath" - this is a very high level, and we can only get to it if we have become more appreciative to Hashem.

After we have worked on *hisbodedus* with ourselves[34] and after we do *cheshbon hanefesh*,[35,] we need to progress to thanking Hashem, and then let that extend into the rest of the day.

The more we do this, the more we will see that even though we are around people most of the day, we can still feel like we are with Hashem as we are around people. *Hisbodedus* is to live with Hashem, not just "time of *hisbodedus"* – it is to ingrain in ourselves a life of *hisbodedus,* a life spent with Hashem, and this brings us to the true kind of life which our *Avos* lived with. *Hisbodedus* is the key to live a true life.

The words here might appear strange and foreign at first, but the more you practice them, you will transform. There will be massive internal changes. You will go from loneliness - or attachment with people - and instead attach yourself with Hashem.

In Conclusion

We have explained, with Hashem's help the first part of *hisbodedus* with Hashem, which is about thanking Hashem. The next part of *hisbodedus* will be about asking Hashem for what we need in *tefillah.*

May we merit the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* in its glory, Amen.

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34 which we explained at length in chapters 1-11

35 The Rav mentioned that if one wants to learn about how to make a cheshbon hanefesh (self-accounting), he\she should learn ***Sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh*** *and in* ***Chovos HaLevovos: Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh***

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *I usually do hisbodedus in the morning, so when I review my day, what should I thank Hashem for?*

A: Thank Hashem the fact that you woke up today, as well as for the previous day.

Q2: *Does this aspect of hisbodedus (thanking Hashem for all that He gives us) also apply to thanking Hashem for my bad middos, and can doing this change my bad middos?*

A: To thank Hashem for our bad *middos,* we must be aware that we still have *bechirah* (free will) to change, and therefore, we must certainly work on our *middos*. But along with this we also need to thank Hashem for even our bad *middos*.

Although we thank Hashem for our bad *middos* too, we still need to work to improve ourselves and *daven* to Hashem for help to change ourselves, and we will deal with this aspect next month. So thanking Hashem alone will not fix our *middos*.

Altogether, we need three things to change our bad *middos*: to thank Hashem for even our negative *middos*; to practically use our *bechirah* and try to work on ourselves to change; and to *daven* to Hashem for help to fix them.

Q3: *Should a person always start with thanking Hashem? Are there are ever times where a person can ask Hashem for something, like if he is going through a time of pain?*

A: Very good question – for every rule, there are always exceptions. Your need to really know if this is a situation where you can skip the order and go straight to *tefillah.* There are definitely times where you can go straight to *tefillah*, but this is hard to know; you a lot of self-understanding to know if you should do this or not. If a person goes straight to *tefillah* he might become sad and then he can't thank Hashem. So it needs to be considered very well.

Q4: *A while ago [in Chapter Eleven] the Rav mentioned the method of reviewing "Shivisi L'Negdi Tamid" again and again. How can a person practically work on this? And can a person think of this even in an unclean place?*

A: On the minimal level of this, it is to think of it once in the morning and again before you go to sleep. The higher level of this is to think about Hashem all day. As for thinking about it in

unclean places, there are opinions in our *Poskim* who say that you are allowed to think about Hashem.

Q5: *Can a person speak to Hashem in an unclean place?*

A: This is not so simple to answer. Thinking about Hashem, in a very simple way, is permitted, but deep thinking about Hashem is questionable, and so is speaking to Hashem questionable in an unclean place.

Q6: *Can I thank Hashem for difficult situations and at the same time ask Him to remove them?*

A: At this stage just thank Hashem for everything, even your problems, and in the next chapter we will continue with the next stage, which is *tefillah*. Just thank Hashem this month for simple things in your life, big and small.

Q7: *Is this current discussion on hisbodedus connected with inner silence?*

A: This stage of *hisbodedus* we are discussing, *hisbodedus* with Hashem, is based on the first stage of *hisbodedus* we discussed in the first 11 chapters of the series, which was about how to attain inner silence.

Q8: *So if I am beginning inner silence now can the Rav give a practical suggestion on how I can work on this along with hisbodedus with Hashem?*

A: If you are beginning now, at first you should start with *hisbodedus* with Hashem. The more you get used to *hisbodedus* with Hashem you should do both stages of *hisbodedus*. There are no rules to this and each person should do what he feels he should work on.

Q9: *So are we supposed to do the two stages of hisbodedus simultaneously (inner silence, and hisbodedus with Hashem)?*

A: If you feel you can work on both simultaneously, it is fine, but if you feel that it is too much for you, then don't try to work on both stages at once. Either way, whenever you begin *hisbodedus*, you need to be a little calm, because you can't immediately start talking to Hashem if you aren't calm beforehand.

14 | Praying To Hashem

The Next Step: Tefillah/Prayer

With the help of Hashem, we discussed in the previous lesson how to incorporate *hodaah*, the power of gratitude to Hashem, into *hisbodedus* (meditation). Now we will progress to the next step, which is the step of *tefillah*: prayer. We will explain how to incorporate *tefillah* into *hisbodedus*.

Tefillah during *hisbodedus* is similar to *hodaah* (thanking Hashem) during *hisbodedus*. To express *hodaah* to Hashem means to feel grateful only to Hashem; if a person feels grateful to people but not to Hashem, it's not *hisbodedus*. The same is true with regards to *tefillah*: when we ask Hashem for things, it should be only from Hashem, and not with the hope that some person will give us what we need.

Whom Do We Depend On For Our Needs?

In *tefillah*, we can ask Hashem for anything we want – whether it is material matters, or spiritual matters. But it is all about asking for our needs. Our soul has a power of *bakashah,* to "request" - and this is what we use in *tefillah*. We must therefore make sure that our *bakashah* is being turned towards Hashem, and not towards people.

If we reflect about how we use *bakashah*, we will discover that when we need something, we mainly ask it from people. We need to reflect about this and see that we feel reliant on other people, and not on Hashem, for our needs. Although we certainly *daven* to Hashem for our needs, we often feel dependent on people as well, to fulfill our needs.

In fact, we mostly feel dependent on people, and we only feel partially feel dependent on Hashem, for our needs. For example, spouses ask things from each other and from their children, and they feel dependent on each other for the most part. So even though a person can *daven* to Hashem for his needs and even feels dependent on Hashem, he mostly feels dependent on people, and only a small part of himself is feeling dependent on Hashem to take care of his needs.

So we need to develop the attitude that we can turn to and ask for things only **from** Hashem. In *hisbodedus* we can feel internally that our only "address" is Hashem. A person might do *hisbodedus* and *daven,* but it can all be superficial, because he hasn't yet realized this.

Being Dependent on Hashem, and Less Dependent on People

We will now explain how to internalize that Hashem is the only One we need to feel dependent on.

The first thing we need to is to ask Hashem throughout the day (for at least tens of times, and if you can do even more, even better) for all the things we feel we need. We can talk to Hashem either verbally or mentally, and ask Him to give us what we want. So get used to asking Hashem for your needs throughout the day, and the more you get used to this, you will feel more and more how Hashem is the only One whom you can rely on.

The second thing to do is: to lessen your requests from people. With the more you do this, you will find that you need people less, because you will naturally turn to Hashem for help, so you will be less dependent on people. This will happen as a gradual process.

Doing one of these steps without the other is like a body without a soul. You need to do both: know that only Hashem can give you your needs, and that all people who do favors for you are merely His messengers. This is not just an intellectual concept to "**know**" about. You must internalize in your **heart** that only Hashem gives you your needs – a much deeper awareness.

In addition, when you do have to ask people for things, first ask Hashem, and only after that should you make a request from someone.

Summary of the Three Steps

So we have explained that there are three steps in *tefillah* during *hisbodedus*: **(1)** Getting used to asking Hashem for your needs; **(2)** Avoiding requests from people; and **(3)** That when you do have to ask a person for something, you should first ask Hashem for help.

Regarding the third point we mentioned, you should keep doing it until you are asking Hashem more often than when you ask things from people.

How To View People

We do need people to help us, but we must view people as the messengers of Hashem who can help us. The only reason why we need people is due to the sin of Adam, when we fell from our pure state of relying only on Hashem for everything. We were punished with having to be reliant on people, with the curse of having to make effort, thus we became dependent on people for our needs. In the deeper layer of our existence, though, our soul recognizes that it is totally dependent on Hashem, and not on people.

Awareness

Therefore, whenever we have to make requests of people, we must be aware of which layer in our soul the request is coming from. When we ask things from people, it's coming from the outer layers

of our soul that are unrefined, which do not feel *emunah* so clearly. It should bother you that you don't feel *emunah* so clearly and that you feel dependent on people.

In this way, you purify and refine your soul, with the more you feel pained at the fact that your *emunah* in Hashem is not dominant.

Deeper Awareness

There is also a higher aspect of the *avodah*: after you have internalized these points, the next step to take is that even as you are asking people for things, you can talk to Hashem (mentally) and say to yourself, "Hashem, I know that it is really You Who is enabling me to be helped."

As an example, *Chazal* say that when Esther stood in front of Achashveirosh to nullify the decree of genocide upon the Jews, she was really focused in her heart on Hashem, the King of all Kings, and praying to Hashem that the decree should be nullified. She had to make a request of a person, but even as she did so, she was focused on how Hashem is in charge of anything happening.

Slowly Acquiring These Stages

In order to achieve all of these points, it takes time. This is all a gradual process. But you can slowly work on each of these points, internalizing them more and more, and progress slowly but surely.

Without working on these points, a person will end up asking for things mainly from people. When he *davens* to Hashem, he mainly feels dependent on people, and not on Hashem. [36]Although this can still be considered *tefillah,* it is not *tefillah* of *hisbodedus*.

The Two Parts To Our Existence

Now we can come to the following fundamental understanding.

All of us are multi-layered; our soul is vast and deep. The outer layers of our soul are more connected to the world and to people, while the inner layers of our soul are less attached to this world. The deeper we enter into our soul, the more we feel less dependent on people, and in turn, the outer layers of our soul become purified along with this.

We should now understand the following. We must certainly feel gratitude to people, so our outer layers of the soul are to be validated. But we must view that part of ourselves as the less important part of our existence. The more integral part of our existence is the deeper layer of our soul, which does not feel dependent on people, only on Hashem.

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[36] *Refer to the Rav's derashah* ***"Talking To Hashem"***

Hisbodedus vs. The Rest of the Day

This leads us to the following deep point.

Because we have these two parts to our existence, our *hisbodedus* can never be perfect, because there is always a part in us that is not inwardly connected to Hashem. If so, what is the point of *hisbodedus*?

The answer is because as we are in the time of *hisbodedus*, we enter the deeper layer of our soul which understands that only Hashem is in charge. That's the whole point of *hisbodedus* – a time of the day in which we go inward into the soul and we access its depth. During the rest of the day we can't be in touch with our deep understanding of the soul.

Thus, there are two parts to the *tefillah* stage of *hisbodedus*. Get used to talking to Hashem throughout the day, and not just when you *daven* three times a day. (And included in this is making less requests of people). This applies for the rest of the day as well, not just during the time of *hisbodedus.* But during the actual time of *hisbodedus* you set aside each day, you can access the deeper part of yourself, which turns only to Hashem.

Two Methods of Beginning Tefillah During Hisbodedus

The *tefillah* stage during *hisbodedus* has two approaches.

One way is to first silence the soul [as explained in earlier lessons] through methods of inner calm, and after that, *daven* to Hashem for your needs; when you silence the soul, you are calmer, and then you can *daven* to Hashem from a deeper place in yourself.

A second method is to first begin through the outer layers of your soul, even though you haven't yet attained inner calm, and then to keep *davening*, each time entering deeper into the soul. Here the *tefillah* itself can assist you in getting deeper and deeper into the soul, whereupon you can come to feel that only Hashem is in charge of your needs.

This is how you can realize the meaning of the possuk[37], *"I lift my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come? My help will come from Hashem, Who made the heaven and earth."* When a person looks at the world and he sees that no one can help him, no one but Hashem, it is then that he truly realizes how he must turn to Hashem for help.

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37 Tehillim: 121

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Is the Rav saying here that the more we recognize the inner layer of our soul (which only feels dependent on Hashem), the less we need to ask people for things?*

A: Yes - but only if this awareness is a true recognition coming from the heart, as opposed to a mere intellectual awareness. It is not enough to know about this concept; it must be internalized in the heart.

Q2: *Does this apply as well to making requests of your spouse (that it's better not to ask your spouse for things, because we should rather ask Hashem for things)?*

A: There is a part in our soul which feels dependent on people, and therefore, spouses do need to ask things from each other. But one needs to recognize that the main part of our soul feels dependent on Hashem and not on people. If a couple feels entirely dependent on each other and not on Hashem, this is the opposite of a true life.

Q3: *How can we know if our hisbodedus is being internalized in our heart or if it is just intellectual?*

A: This is a very fundamental kind of question. If you feel that in your requests from people that you are afraid of what will happen if your request isn't answered, it shows that you haven't yet internalized the awareness of *emunah*. Another question to ask yourself is how much you are relying on people.

Q4: *How should we feel towards someone who does something for us after we have davened to Hashem and we are answered?*

A: You should feel gratitude to the person, because the outer layer of your soul connects with people, and therefore, you should feel gratitude towards someone who has done something for you, because that part of your soul recognizes that this person has done something for you. At the same time, you should know and feel [through internalizing] that only Hashem gave you what you needed.

Q5: *Is there a way that our requests to Hashem during hisbodedus should be accepted by Hashem?*

A: There is much advice written about this in the *sefarim*. But there is one root way: the more you *daven* from the depths of your soul - and on a more subtle note, from a more truthful place in your soul - the more your prayer is readily accepted by Hashem. The more superficial the *tefillah* is, the less it is answered.

Q6: *If I don't like to ask things from people and I find it easier to ask Hashem for things, is that a bad thing or a good thing?*

A: It's not healthy if you never ask things from people at all. You need to get past that difficulty by asking yourself why you have a hard time asking people for things (and here is not the place to discuss it, because there's not enough time here). But you can practically work on this as follows. Once a week, ask someone for something, then increase it to twice or three times a week; and only ask for small things.

Q7: *When people ask me for things, how should I feel?*

A: Feel that you are a messenger of Hashem. Also, bear in mind another aspect: there is a deep statement of Rav Zusha of Anipoli *zt"l* that the way to use the power of *kefirah* (heresy) for holiness is that when someone else needs help, don't rely on Hashem that he will be helped, and instead do all you can to help that person.

These are each opposite concepts, but they need to become intertwined. Most people understand either the first perspective or the second perspective and they can't balance out the two ideas together, but the true perspective is to balance both of these contradicting perspectives together: have *emunah* and recognize that you are but a messenger of Hashem to help people, and detach from *emunah* by understanding that you must help people and not rely on Hashem that others will be helped.

15 | Expressing Love To Hashem

The Next Step: Beyond What We "Get" From Hashem

In the previous chapter, with Hashem's help, we discussed *hisbodedus* with Hashem – first to thank Hashem, and then how to ask Hashem for things. Now we will progress to the next step of *hisbodedus.* This will be about revealing a love for the Creator.

The essence of *hisbodedus* is not just about thanking Him and praying to Him; that is just the beginning. When we recognize that Hashem gives us things and we want to give back to Him, this can only come from love to Hashem.

Hashem gives us our needs and therefore we thank Him, but the essence of *hisbodedus* is that we reveal a love for Him; He loves us, and that is *why* we must thank Him and why we need to receive from Him. The giving and taking is the external aspect of our relationship with Hashem, but the inner aspect of the relationship with Hashem, which is the essence of the relationship, is to love Hashem.

We will now discuss this inner layer of how we can reveal love for Hashem.

Examining The Source of Our Self-Love

It's impossible for anyone to live without love in his life. There are different kinds of love that exist. People get love from others, and if a person sees that others don't love him, he might get his love from his own self-esteem. In any case, there is no person who can survive without love. Either he knows that there are others who love him, or he knows how to draw self-love from within himself; but we all need some source of love in our life.

Hashem created all of us with a nature to love ourselves. Just like we love ourselves, so do we want others to love us. This is not "another" kind of love that we seek, however. Rather, our own self-love causes us to want that others should love us; we wouldn't be able to love ourselves if we feel that others are not loving us. Thus our need to feel loved by others is a part of our own self-love.

The love that a person has for himself, such as the fact that one thinks and worries for himself and his needs, is entirely *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives). Just as a person wants his physical needs to be nourished for his own purposes, so does a person love himself for his own purposes. One's self-love can also be motivated by some degree of *lishmah* (pure motives) in it also, but self-love mostly *shelo lishmah*. A person wants others to love him as an extension of that "*shelo lishmah* aspect" in his self-love.

Self-love is the root of all love that we experience. If we use our self-love and channel it towards a love of the Creator, then just as we love ourselves and wish for others to love us, so will we want Hashem to love us. In this way, we can form a bond with Hashem out of love: Just as I want others to love me, so would I want Hashem to love me. Yet we should remember this is all a love that comes from the *shelo lishmah* aspect of the soul; for it is the kind of love in which we want to be loved for our own self-gain.

First we need to realize that we have a love for ourselves. After becoming aware of that self-love, we should then expand that need for self-love to include Hashem's love for us.

If one doesn't first come to terms with the concept of self-love, then he won't be able to get to the next stage, which is to expand that self-love.

Defining The Very Essence of Love

Most people feel that they love themselves. After all, all day we are all taking care of our needs, both physical and spiritual. That implies that we do love ourselves, because if we wouldn't love ourselves, then why we would be spending the whole day taking care of our needs? However, the fact that we are busy all day taking care of our needs still doesn't show that we have uncovered genuine self-love for ourselves. Taking care of our needs is certainly a *result* of self-love, but it is not the very *essence* of the self-love.

Self-love, itself, is really an inner force in us which *results* in taking care of our needs, but in its essence, it is an ability in and of itself, so it is not always the same thing as the act of taking care of our needs.

To illustrate, those who small children are certainly worrying for the needs of their small children all day. We show love towards our children by caressing them, hugging and kissing them. We worry for their needs - and we also *express* our love to them, by caressing them. What happens when they get older? We still continue to take care of their needs, but we put less focus on *expressing* love to them. The love we have for our children when they get older is of course still there, but it becomes more *hidden*, because we stop *expressing* our love so much to them.

It's not that we stop loving them. We certainly continue to love our older children. But the love that we have for them becomes more hidden and less obvious. The *results* of our love to them still remain, however, so we still take care of their needs. But the *essence* of the love itself goes into hiding. [So it is clear that self-love and taking care of needs are two separate matters.]

If we reflect a little, we can see that the parent-child relationship is similar to how we relate to our own self: We have a certain love for ourselves, and we also want to take care of our needs. But most people only know of the second factor: we take care of our needs - while our actual self-love

for ourselves often remains hidden. We often treat ourselves like how we treat our older children: we are concerned for *our needs,* but we don't access the *love* itself.

We express love to our small children, and when they get older, we stop expressing love to them. What happens as a result? We do not consciously relate to them with *love*, but only out of *concern* and *worry for their needs*. When people try to take care of others' needs but they don't see this as an *expression of their love* for others, the *love is actually missing* from all of these acts of giving. It is missing the root of the love - and it is left with the external shell of love.

Thus, our point is that we need to learn how *to reveal an actual love* for others, along with looking to fulfilling their needs.

There is actually very little real love in the world, for this reason. Most acts of giving for others are not coming from an extension of one's own self-love to others, but from concern for the needs of others, without being consciously aware of the love. So, what happens? Although the act of giving for others and worrying for them looks like an expression of love, it is still coming mainly from the *concern* for others's needs, but not from a *love* to them. The acts of giving and care for others is often there, but the love behind it isn't. For this reason, the quality of love that is found on this world is very minimal.

Expanding Our Love Towards Hashem

This is all an introductory point to what we are discussing in this current stage of *hisbodedus*: to reveal a bond of love for Hashem.

If one doesn't access his self-love and only knows of taking care of his needs, the most he will be able to accomplish in his bond with Hashem is to thank Him and to *daven* to Him - because he is concerned with getting his needs, and he will know how to do that part well. He will thank Hashem so he can get things from Him and then *daven* to Him for his needs; that part he will identify with, because he is already involved with taking care of his needs. But he won't be able to develop an *actual love* for Hashem.

This is in fact why most people do not develop a love for Hashem. They haven't even learned yet to love their own self properly! If one does not have proper self-love yet, he surely will not be able to expand his self-love to include Hashem in it. One might understand the concept of love unto itself as something that we express to children, but as for love towards one's own self, a person has a harder time relating to this idea.

To give a more subtle definition of it, self-love consists of two parts. The love itself is the inner layer of the self-love, whereas the concern for our needs is the external layer of the love, which is the result of the love.

Thus, our actual self-love is the *lishmah* (non-ego) aspect, while the concern for our needs is our *shelo lishmah* (self-serving) aspect. If one is able to produce a love for himself that has nothing to do with self-concern, this is a love that is *lishmah.* If one takes care of his needs because he loves himself, there is both *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* involved.

There is also a third possibility: one who doesn't know how to love himself, and he also takes care of his needs, but not because he loves himself. This kind of person takes care of his needs simply because he is worried for his needs, and not as a result of his self-love. This kind of self-love is an example of a self-love that is total *shelo lishmah*.

Thus, the essence of one's self-love itself is *lishmah,* while love to fulfill our needs is coming from the *shelo lishmah* in the soul. One who loves himself purely *because he loves himself* - is one who loves himself "*lishmah"*; whereas when one loves himself in the sense that he is just concerned for his needs, this is a love that is "*shelo lishmah"*.

So the deep perspective to have is that when one loves himself purely for the sake of loving himself, this is a pure kind of love, and it is *lishmah*. By contrast, if one loves himself solely because he takes care of his needs, this is the ego. The ego in us really takes the power of our pure self-love and makes a person become self-absorbed, when he could have extended his self-love to others.

The popular way of thinking by most people when they hear the word "love" is to equate it as "to take care of needs [whether it is my needs, or another's needs]", but this is really a misconception. Love is really an inner power that has a use unto itself; it is a separate factor than taking care of my needs or another's needs. Just like enthusiasm, sadness, and happiness are all powers in our soul, so is a love a power in our soul, and it has a use unto itself, unrelated to taking care of one's needs.

When one realizes this deep understanding about love, he becomes opened to a pure kind of love which will be the key to developing a bond of love to Hashem through *hisbodedus*.

Identifying This In Yourself

Based upon this, in order to proceed with *hisbodedus*, one must identify these two parts of himself: the *essence* of the love we have for ourselves, and also what *results* from that self-love.

There is a part in us which has a love for ourselves, simply because we have a love for ourselves; and there is a part in us which worries for our needs. The worry for our needs is the result of our self-love, and it is the external layer of our love, but it is not the love itself, as we explained.

When we thank Hashem for what He gave us in the past and we *daven* to Hashem for our future needs, we are really using the external layer of our love, which is to be concerned for our needs. But

in order to develop a love for Hashem, we need to use the inner layer of love, the essence of our love – the very *love itself* that one has for himself.

It is that place in ourselves which we need to use in order to turn to express our love for Him. It is a deep place in our soul, and it is clean from self-interests.

Examine yourself deeply and identify the two parts in yourself. First identify the part of yourself which is concerned for your needs, and use that part in yourself to thank Hashem and *daven* to Him for your needs; and identify in yourself a deeper part of yourself, a part which loves yourself simply because you love for yourself - and now use that power in yourself to turn to Hashem with that love.

We can see that most people who do *hisbodedus* are mainly busy with self-accounting[38], thanking Hashem[39], and *davening* to Hashem[40]. This is all because most people have not developed the proper self-love for themselves which was described here, and therefore, they only know how to worry for themselves and take care of their needs. Their level of *hisbodedus* cannot go further than self-accounting and thanking Hashem for the past and *davening* to Hashem for what they still need.

But if one develops a proper self-love for himself, by revealing actual love for himself, he will open a new treasure in his *hisbodedus*. He will be able to reveal a true and pure love himself that is non-ego oriented, and from that deep place in himself, he can turn to Hashem amidst that pure love.

Reaching Your Pure Self-Love: Acquiring The Power of "Someiach B'chelko" (Inner Happiness)

Now that we have explained the concept, we will progress and explain how one can indeed reveal his true self-love, and how to take that pure self-love and use it to turn to Hashem in *hisbodedus*. We will now explain the first part of this: how one can develop a simple and pure love for himself that is solely about love, unrelated to any ego-oriented concerns.

Usually, when one feels a love for himself, he will also find that he worries for his needs, for the things he wants.

Chazal say that a person should be "*someach b'chelko*", "happy with his lot". This describes an inner ability we have to simply be happy with ourselves, and not let our happiness be dependent on things that we seek and wish for.

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38 Described in Chapter #07
39 Described in Chapter #013
40 Described in Chapter #014

As long as one hasn't yet reached his *someach b'chelko,* as soon as he thinks about his situation and his needs, he will immediately seek to fulfill those needs, but he skips over the love for himself. But if one has reached his *someach b'chelko*, since he is happy with whatever he has until now, he will find that the immediate impulse to seek the things he wants is really an impulse that can be calmed and stilled. Although he will still want things, he won't feel an immediate need to quickly get what he wants, because his self-love will be awakened, and the love he has for himself will give him a deep feeling of satisfaction.

In fact, the pure kind of self-love is an even deeper kind of power than *someach b'chelko*. He loves himself *not because* he is *someach b'chelko*; [rather, his *someach b'chelko* that he has reached will awaken his self-love, and his self-love will calm him and help him let go of pursuing whatever he wants.]

Without *someach b'chelko*, the things he wants will awaken concern to get what he wants. His self-love remains out of access, and instead his self-love gets used solely to take care of his needs. When one has reached *someach b'chelko*, he is happy with what he has, and his soul is calmed because it doesn't want more things. When one has that inner calm, he is able to awaken his pure self-love, and that will satisfy his needs; he will discover that he can let go of what he wants, because he has an inner satisfaction with himself.

The Way To Reach "Someiach B'chelko" Is Through Emunah

"Someiach b'chelko" is developed when we acquire *emunah* (faith in Hashem). The clearer our *emunah* is, the greater will be our quality of *someach b'chelko*.

Emunah tells us that whatever we *have* now is what we are supposed to have, and what we don't yet have is what we don't *need* to have. We can absorb *emunah* by reflecting on how Hashem is in charge of everything and runs every last detail in Creation. This can give us *someach b'chelko* in what we have. In addition, it can even give us happiness even in what we don't have, because we realize that we don't need the things we don't have.

Absorbing this, more and more, gives our soul the ability to reflect on our situations and realize that we do not have to get the things we think we are lacking since we are happy with ourselves since we are content with whatever we have until now. We can get used to the concept that just because we want things, that doesn't mean we are missing anything. The more we implant *emunah* in ourselves, the more we can silence our will for wanting things, and in its place, we acquire deep *simcha*, happiness. It is the deep power of *simchah* in the soul that is called *someach b'chelko.*

When *emunah* is internalized in you, it gives you the power to be *someach b'chelko*. As a result, whenever you think of your situation, you will immediately feel content towards yourself. Your soul will get used to the idea of accepting yourself for who you are, and that you don't need to use your

will for the things you want in order to give yourself something. This will calm your soul, and when the soul is calmed, you will begin to feel your true self-love.

Without developing *emunah*, a person cannot be *someach b'chelko*, and then the more a person wants things, the more he experiences worry for his needs, which has nothing to do with real self-love. But when one internalizes *emunah* – that whatever you have is what you need, and whatever you don't yet have is what you don't need – this gives you *someach b'chelko*. Slowly but surely you will gain the ability to accept yourself for who you are, and you will find inner happiness at this.

The obstacle which prevents us from accessing our true self-love is when we want things, and therefore we are uneasy and anxious until we get those things we want. When our will to get what we want is calmed, it opens up new inner wellsprings inside ourselves: the feeling of what it *really* means to love yourself. It is a pure kind of love for yourself that is clean from any ego-oriented concerns; it will be an experience of just a love for yourself in its pure state.

Unconditional Love Towards Hashem: Just Like You Love Yourself For No Reason

When one hasn't yet uncovered his true self-love, he won't be able to get further in his *hisbodedus* than thanking Hashem and davening to Hashem for his needs, as we already explained. In addition, even if he tries to awaken a love for Hashem, it won't work, because he only relates to Hashem as the One who worries for him and gives him his needs, and he doesn't know how to relate to Hashem beyond that level. His entire relationship with Hashem is self-concerned.

But if one has uncovered his real self-love, he can face Hashem from that part in himself, since he relates to Hashem not out of anything he will get, but simply because he loves Hashem. This is called the "unconditional love" that one can have in his relationship with Hashem. Just as you can love yourself for no reason, you love Hashem for no reason; you can love Hashem not because he gives you your needs and takes care of you, but simply because you can just love Hashem.

Expressing Your Love To Hashem

When you reach that state in *hisbodedus,* now you can go further with this: Think loving thoughts towards Hashem and express your love to Him. You can use *pesukim* or statements of *Chazal* which express love for Hashem, or you can use your own language.

Here are some examples of some *pesukim* you can use which describe love of Hashem, which are contained in *Tehillim:*

1) **נפשי בלילה אויתיך** - "*My soul desires You at night*".

2) **נכספה וגם כלתה נפשי** - *"My soul yearns".*

There are many other verses in *Tehillim* as well which you can use that express love for Hashem, and there are many other statements of Chazal, as well your own expressions, which you can say to Hashem and express love to Him. You can do it mentally or verbally, and it's better if you do both.

From your own true self-love, you can turn to Hashem from that place in yourself and think thoughts of pure love to Hashem, and then verbalize them. Your enthusiasm will increase as you say the words, but it will not just be superficial. It will be a reflection of the deep love you have reached towards your own self which you are using to love Hashem with.

This is the true and inner essence of *hisdodedus,* and it is the very essence of man: to bond with Hashem.

Summary Of The Avodah Until This Point

Thus, we have seen thus far that *hisbodedus* is firstly to gain inner peace with yourself, and after that, to turn to Hashem (and *only* to Hashem) from that calm state of inner peace you have gained.

Finally, one has to then concentrate solely on his bond with Hashem.

To summarize:

1. The first part of *hisbodedus* is inner peace with yourself,
2. The second part of *hisbodedus* is to bond with Hashem from your inner peace,
3. The final part of is to simply bond with Hashem.

One who hasn't yet acquired unconditional love for Hashem is missing a major part of *hisbodedus*. He is only found externally with Hashem, but he is missing the inner bond with Hashem in his soul – he won't get to the desired goal of *hisbodedus*. Only from unconditional love – first towards the self, and then to expand it towards Hashem – can one reach the goal of *hisbodedus*.

May Hashem help us that all of us reach a *gmar chasima tova* (to be sealed for a good year) – and the true "good" is to reach the total bond with Hashem, which we can reach in the innermost depths of our soul.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Rav Dessler (in Michtav M'Eliyahu: Kuntres HaChessed) writes that self-love is evil, because it is the power of taking, while the Rav seems to be disagreeing with Rav Dessler's approach, because the Rav is saying that even self-love is pure.*

A: Rav Dessler is talking about the result of self-love; when the result is evil, it is the power of taking, and when it is positive, it is the power of giving. But they are both the results of self-love. Here in this chapter we were addressing the essence of self-love [which is not evil]. That is why we emphasized here that there is the essence of self-love, and there is the result of self-love. The result of our self-love can either be good (giving) or evil (taking), but that is a separate factor than self-love itself. Here in this chapter we explained the *essence* of self-love, and we did not discuss its *results* of either giving or taking.

To illustrate the difference between love itself and taking care of others' needs, when two friends meet, if they hug or kiss, we can say that this describes the essence of their love. If they give each other presents afterwards, this is the results of their love, but it is not the love itself.

Q2: *When one is trying to uncover his pure kind of self-love, how can he avoid worrying about his needs?*

A: It was addressed in this chapter that we need to develop the power of "*someach b'chelko*", and this requires us to greatly internalize *emunah*. When one hasn't reached "*someach b'chelko*", it will usually be very difficult for him to feel a real self-love for himself.

There are some people who are born with a natural self-love and a love for Hashem, but most people are not gifted with this, and for this reason, most people need to work on their *emunah* in order to reach *someach b'chelko*, and from that, one can get to real self-love.

However, as soon as one starts thinking about himself, his will gets awakened, and he wants things. His heart feels anxious, and even if he tries to tell himself verbally that he is happy with himself and that he is letting go of what he wants, his heart is not at peace with his mouth is saying. Of course, verbalization can affect the heart, but it will be mostly useless if one's heart is full of many desires that it wants (which is the case with most people).

Therefore, the more advised approach is to change our heart's perspective [which is the method being used here], and then what we tell our heart with our mouth will be more effective on our heart to help it let go of the things we want that are making us anxious.

Q3: *Does the concept of someach b'chelko (being happy with our lot) apply as well to our ruchniyus/spirituality, such as being happy with our middos, or is it only with our physical areas?*

A: That's a classical question which is discussed. When it comes to our physical areas, we need to be totally *someach b'chelko*, and when it comes to our *ruchniyus*, we have a two-sided *avodah*. We need to be happy with even our current level of *ruchniyus* that we have, as the Vilna Gaon says; at the same time, we also need to aspire to reach more and more levels in our *ruchniyus.* We need a certain amount of inner happiness towards ourselves so that we can "feel good about ourselves" somewhat, and at the same time, concerning our future, we need to aspire for more growth.

So yes, there is a degree of *someach b'chelko* in our *ruchniyus*, and it is a very subtle *avodah*.

Q4: *How can one access his self-love? It seems like there are too many steps to take in order to get there – internalizing emunah, then someach b'chelko...it takes a lot of time! How is it possible then to reach our self-love?*

A: Every word you said is true [so indeed it is a long road to get there!]

Q5: *Rav Dessler writes that giving to others awakens love for others, so it sounds like giving is not just a result of love, but that it is an actual cause of love.*

A: Giving to others certainly causes love towards people, but it is only the external aspect of love, not the essence of love. If love is based on giving to others, then the love that results from it is love that is happenstance, for it happened to come from an act of giving. We discussed here about the essence of love itself, which is above happenstance love. Love that results from giving is happenstance love, because giving is act that might happen or might not happen. But the love that comes from our own essence is the kind of love in which we love ourselves for no reason, and when it comes to extending that love to others, we can be unconditionally bound with others, for we have a soul connection with others that is intrinsic, and it is not dependent on the act of giving to others. It is this kind of love that we spoke about here.

Q6: *Is proper self-love an automatic result from someach b'chelko?*

A: When you feel your *someach b'chelko* as you have inner calmness, you will feel the pure self-love. There are people who reach inner calm through the methods that were described earlier to reach self-recognition (Chapters 1-10), and this is a long path. When one reaches the end of that path, he will also feel pure self-love as a result from the inner calm he acquires. But even if one doesn't do all those things to reach inner calm, and he only uses his power of *emunah* and he becomes *someach b'chelko*, as was described here in this class, he can reach self-love as well.

If one tries the second path (*emunah/someach b'chelko*) to reach inner calm, which was addressed in this class, he will get to pure self-love, without having to do all of the methods of inner calm that was described earlier. If someone tries the first path, he will arrive at self-love even without acquiring deep *emunah*. However, he will be missing the quality of *emunah*. But in either method, one attains a deep inner calm which leads him to a pure self-love.

Q7: *If I know that I'm not yet holding at the level of someach b'chelko, can I talk it into myself "as if" I really am someach b'chelko?*

A: You can't convince yourself that it's "as if" you're on that level if you are really not. But what I can tell you is that it can cerrainly work *temporarily* than one can calm himself a bit through this, just like we find that a pain in the body can be relieved temporarily; it doesn't take away the pain, but it relieves it temporarily. So if you are temporarily calm, you can feel "*someach b'chelko"* then and from there you can find your self-love. But you will only feel it temporarily, until the next time you feel a desire for something you want, and then once again you are taken out of your calmness. But you will at least experience some times that you feel calm with yourself and happy with yourself, so that you can at least have a temporary experience of true self-love.

Q8: *Is there some feeling in the body that can one can feel (throughout the day, and not specifically during time of hisbodedus) in order to identify if he has truly reached "someach b'chelko"?*

A: I'm not sure if I have understood this entire question, but if I understood the question, the answer is that there are two separate factors: there is "*someach b'chelko"* itself, and there are other factors that come along with it. Sometimes during the day you can feel the pleasant feelings of *someach b'chelko* that you previously reached during *hisbodedus*, even though you are not consciously aware that you are *someach b'chelko*; and those pleasant feelings that come to you throughout the day can certainly awaken you to being more *someach b'chelko*.

If I understood the question correctly, the answer here is only true if it is done with conscious awareness to awaken the *someach b'chelko* when you experience the pleasant offshoots of it throughout the day. If you don't consciously awaken your *someach b'chelko* when you experience

these feelings, you will become too caught up in the pleasant feeling of it, and the *someach b'chelko* part of it will end up being ignored, because you won't be consciously aware of it.

Q9: *Do we need to first love Hashem in order to be someach b'chelko?*

A: We must first believe in Hashem, before we work on trying to love Hashem. A person can believe that all that Hashem does is good, and from that, a person is *someach b'chelko*.

There are people who are naturally happy with themselves, because they have a very pleasant nature that is drawn towards calmness and pleasantness; these are people who were born with a dominant element of water in their souls (which is the root of pleasure). There are only a few people who are like this, but they do exist.

As for those of us who do not possess this nature, we will need to make use of either of the paths described in the earlier chapters, or we need to use our power of *emunah* in order to reach our *someach b'chelko*. Altogether, there are three ways to get to *someach b'chelko*:

1. People who are born with a pleasant nature, who are automatically "*someach b'chelko*" [these people do not have an *avodah* of trying to reach their *someach b'chelko* point, because they are already there].
2. Using methods of inner calm [as described earlier in Chapters 1-10);
3. Developing the power of *emunah*, as described in this chapter.

16 | Temimus: Earnestness (Part One)

Getting Closer To The Inner Point of Hisbodedus

With the help of Heaven, in the previous chapters, we were able to explain the stages of *hisbodedus* with the Creator: *hodaah* (thanking Hashem), *tefillah* (praying to Hashem for our requests), and more recently, we explained how to reveal the depth of our *ahavah* (love) for the Creator.

All of these stages are essentially the preface of how we can bring ourselves, with Hashem's help, to the **inner point** of *hisbodedus*. The inner point of *hisbodedus* is not about thanking Hashem or *davening* to Him, nor is it mainly about revealing our love for Him. The essence of *hisbodedus* which we are coming towards is: to **feel the very existence of Hashem**.

This is not a superficial kind of emotion, inspiration, or enthusiasm. It is to experience a **recognition** of the true reality of Hashem (***hakaras hametzius***).

This is the outline of the goal, and we will hopefully expand upon these words and explain how we can get there.

Internalizing The Purpose of Life

Firstly, every Jew needs to know, that our entire purpose in life – whether you are a Jew or not, but it is especially applicable to a Jew - is to come to recognize the Creator. We must come to recognize Him, and **that is the purpose of our entire life**. We must know, and internalize in our hearts, that there is nothing besides Hashem, as it is written, *"And you shall know today and you shall return the matter upon your hearts, that Hashem is G-d, and that there is nothing besides Him."*

Even if a person knows this intellectually, it is not enough, because life takes us in all kinds of directions that hold back this recognition from us. Therefore, each of us must deeply ingrain in ourselves what the purpose of life is (to come to recognize how Hashem is the true reality and that there is no other point to life other than this). We must be very clear that this is the goal of all our life. It should be clear to both your intellect and your heart of why you live, what the purpose of life is: to recognize the reality of Hashem.

This is the purpose of life, and it is also the depth of the goal of *hisbodedus.* The goal of *hisbodedus* is to become separated internally from everything, and to be **concentrated fully** on the knowledge of this goal: that the goal is to recognize how Hashem is the reality. Everything else that we explained so far with regards to *hisbodedus* were just the rungs in the ladder we climb to get to the top of the ladder. The top of the ladder is the goal.

The stages of *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting)[41], *tefillah*[42], and *ahavas Hashem*[43], etc. were all **tools** we need to get to the goal, and they are necessary, but they are all there to bring us to the inner point of our soul, where the true *hisbodedus* is reached. It is in the innermost point of the soul in which one can become totally secluded from everything around him and be fully **immersed in recognizing Hashem, with his entire mind and heart.**

Purity of Heart and Inner Calm

There are two fundamental inner abilities in our soul which can bring us to that innermost point of recognizing the reality of Hashem.

One inner ability to get there is through attaining **"purity of heart"** (*taharas halev*). Every day (in the blessings before *Kerias Shema*) we daven, *"And purify our hearts to serve You in truth*." The more a person purifies his heart, the more he experiences the recognition of the reality of Hashem [Soon we will explain the ways of how to attain this purity of heart].

The second ability which can us help us get there is the ability of "**inner calm"** (*hashkatah*, or *sheket pnimi*). The more "inner calm" that a person reaches in his soul, the more he can palpably feel Hashem.[44]

1) Purity of Heart: Keeping The Mitzvos

"Purity of heart" (*taharas halev*) can be attained not only during *hisbodedus*; it can be attained throughout the rest of the day as well. All of the *mitzvos* are able to bring us to purify our hearts more and more. The 365 negative commandments that we have are meant to keep us away from contaminating our soul, and the 248 positive commandments we have are given to us to shine a pure spiritual light upon our soul.

Thus, purity of heart can be attained throughout the course of the entire day, and it is not attained exclusively through *hisbodedus.*

2) Purity Of Heart: Fixing Our Worst Middah

In addition, ***tikkun hamiddos*** (improving our character) also provides us with purity of heart. When a person remains with negative and unfixed *middos*, they remain entrenched in the heart and they cover it from receiving spiritual purity, preventing "purity of heart" from entering the person.

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[41] *refer to Chapters 7-10*
[42] *refer to chapter 14*
[43] *refer to chapter 15*
44 refer to chapters 2-4

Therefore, a person has to find out what his good *middos* are and what his bad *middos* are. He should then **discover the worst *middah*** that he has and then sensibly go about trying to uproot it from within himself. The more a person works to uproot his worst *middah*, the more purity of heart that will enter him.

So far, we have explained two general ways of how to attain "purity of heart". The first way to attain purity of heart is through being careful with the 613 *mitzvos*, by keeping the *mitzvos* properly and by avoiding committing any sins of the Torah. A second way of attaining purity of heart is by improving one's *middos;* specifically, to uproot one's personal worst *middah*.

3) Purity of Heart: Temimus (Point of Simple Belief in Hashem)

There is also a third abililty which enables a person to receive "purity of heart": the power of ***temimus*** (earnestness)[45]. It is written, **"תמים תהי' עם ה' אלוקיך"**, *"You shall be wholesome with Hashem your G-d"* The concept of *temimus* also written described in the verse, **"כגמול עלי אמו"**, *"Like an infant on its mother's lap."*The first two parts requirements to attain "purity of heart" – keeping the *mitzvos* and improving our *middos* – are not exclusive to *hisbodedus*. They are needed outside of *hisbodedus*. But the third way of attaining "purity of heart", uncovering our "*temimus"* (earnestness), is only possible through *hisbodedus*.

Temimus is an inner experience, where a person enters deep into his soul and feels the *temimus,* the simple earnestness that is there. When a person feels this deep point of *temimus* [during *hisbodedus*] in the soul, he will feel a "purity of heart" that comes along with it.

Hisbodedus and Temimus Are Mutually Exclusive

We must know that *hisbodedus* is required in order to reach the deep place in your soul of *temimus*. If someone practices *hisbodedus* and he isn't interested in reaching his point of *temimus*, he will be missing the whole point of *hisbodedus*.

He would be trying to bypass the main gate that he needs to enter in order to discover Hashem's presence. The Torah says that "You shall be *tamim* (wholesome) with Hashem your G-d" – in other words, the more a person is a "*tamim"* (the more he uncovers this simple earnestness), the more he is "with" Hashem, for he has penetrated the main obstacles.

Although this is not such a well-known concept to those who are involved in *hisbodedus*, that doesn't take away from the importance of it. It must become a very well-known concept to you.

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45 Editor's Note: It is somewhat difficult to translate the word "temimus". It can either mean "simplicity", "earnestness", "innocence", "purity", or "wholesomeness". In the context of this chapter, we have gone with the translation of "earnestness".

The inner essence of *hisbodedus,* [if one ever hopes to reach it], requires one to reach his point of *temimus* in the soul. We will soon try to explain, with the help of Heaven, how exactly we can get to that point.

Getting Back Your Long Lost "Temimus"

The point of *temimus*\earnestness in the soul is not some ability found "outside" of you which you need to acquire. All of the abilities you need to acquire are actually found *inside* of you, in their *potential* state, and it is merely upon you to *bring them out* from the soul into their *active* state.

Temimus is already in you! Even more so, it is already *active* in you. It has merely become covered over by many layers. You already had *temimus* when you were a child. When you were a child, you were "*an infant on its mother's lap*" – you were earnest and believing. As you got older and you went through life, your *temimus* became buried under many layers, and now it is covered.

If the situation would be that your *temimus* was never activated yet in your life, it would be much more difficult to try to activate it. But it was already activated in you before in your life, and it has merely become covered, so it is much easier for you to remove the coverings and reveal it again.

Just like every other ability we have, *temimus* can be used for either good or evil. It is used for evil when a person believes everything he hears, which is foolish naiveté. It is holy when a person is a *tamim* in his relationship with Hashem – when he believes in Him simply with no questions.

If a person thinks that *temimus* means to be naïve and foolish, then he does not recognize the benefits of having *temimus,* so he will not be able to uncover it from within himself. He won't be interested in acquiring it.

Therefore, the first thing a person needs to think about here is to realize that *temimus* is a power that can be used for either good or evil. Realize that you can use *temimus* for holiness, and then you can awaken in yourself a yearning to reveal it.

With the help of Hashem, we will now explain a few ways of how we can awaken our *temimus.*

1) Revealing Your Temimus: Identifying Temimus In Your Life

The first thing to think is as follows. Examine your daily life and try to identify where you have *temimus*\earnestness. Where do you see your *temimus* manifesting itself in your life?

For example, in which parts of your life are very trusting of others? Most of us can remember a time in life in which we trusted someone only to be deceived by the person, resulting in a loss of money or in some kind of betrayal. If you can remember such an experience in your life, you can

begin to conceptualize that you had *temimus* at one point of your life, but that you just didn't know how to use it properly.

The fact that you were betrayed or hurt by others doesn't mean that being pure and trusting is a bad thing. It is merely a sign that you didn't know how to use your *temimus*, and that is why someone else took advantage of your *temimus* and harmed you. It is merely upon you to know how to use your *temimus* properly.

After you discover a time in your life in which you didn't know how to use your *temimus* properly, now is the time to regret having used it improperly.

If you identify in yourself how you use your *temimus* constructively (such as the fact that you trust your spouse or friends, and you see that trusting them enables you to gain from them), try to concentrate on that part in yourself and try to bring it out of yourself, by seeing opportunities which can utilize your *temimus.* Don't just imagine yourself bringing out your *temimus*. Instead, become self-aware of your already existent *temimus* in the parts of life in which you see it, and try to expand it further from how much it already is present in your life.

2) Revealing Your Temimus: Returning To Your Inner Child

Another way how you can bring out your *temimus* is as follows.

When we were all children, we were all pure and trusting, but as we got older and we got a taste of life, we encountered betrayal from others; we realized that not everyone on this world is so nice to us. People tricked us or took advantage over us or spoke about us behind our backs. It is a long time already that we have lost our *temimus*. How do we return to our *temimus*? How can we get it back?

The way you can do it is by returning to the inner childlike state that is still in your soul. There is a place in your soul which contains your childhood, in which you were pure and trusting. There are many aspects to this inner "child" that you have in your soul, but we are currently discussing one of the aspects of the inner child - which is the point of *temimus* in your soul. When you were a child, you had *temimus*, and you can return to it when you concentrate on it.

For example, look a picture or a family video of yourself when you were a child (most of us have such pictures), and think about how pure and trusting you were then, by examining your facial expressions and the like. Don't just think about what you were doing in the picture - that's not the point. Just concentrate on the fact that you were so innocent and trusting when you were a child, and now try to attach your current self to the way you were then: pure and trusting. Let yourself concentrate and meditate on this part of yourself.

It is difficult to describe this in words; indeed, not everything can be described in the word.[46]

3) Returning To Your Temimus: Reading A Story of A Gadol

Another way of revealing your *temimus* is by reading a story about a *Gadol* and to see how much *temimus* they had.

You can do this by reading the *Chumash* and you learn about the lives of our *Avos*. Or, you can think about people even in this generation, such as people in your surroundings, who clearly possess *temimus*.

This will cause your soul to become awakened to *temimus*, a wish to become close to Hashem.

4) The Deeper Method of Revealing Your Temimus

We have so far brought three ways of how to awaken *temimus.* However, there is a fourth method as well, and it is the deepest and most fundamental of all of them: to reflect on how Hashem is above our understanding, and believe fully in this.

This is a way to directly penetrate into your *temimus*. It is the most inner method to awaken your *temimus*. The deeper your belief is, the more you will feel the *temimus* of it. The higher of a spiritual level that a person reaches, the more internal a person becomes, and the more he is in touch with his *temimus*.

All of our *Gedolim* possessed great intellect and comprehension, but at the same time, their *temimus* (their simple belief in Hashem) developed along with their minds.

Yaakov *Avinu* is called the "*ish tam"* (man of wholesomeness), and he is also called by our Sages as "the choicest of the *Avos*". The depth of this is that because he reached the most *temimus*, and that is why he is considered the most prominent of the *Avos* - because *temimus* is the barometer that measures a person's true greatness.

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46 For more on the concept of "temimus" (simplicity\earnestness), see: ***Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Building A Sanctuary In The Heart) Part 2: Chapter 28*** *and also* ***Bilvavi Part 5-Fundamentals In Avodah.***
For more on the concept of "inner child" according to the Torah approach, refer to the following derashos of the Rav: Women's World #020- ***Revealing Your Inner Child****, and Tefillah #086-****The Purity Within*** *and Tefillah #0132-* ***The Essence of Hearing Shofar*** *and 3) Tefillah #0133-****Sanctuary*** *and 4) Derashos #056-****Returning To Our Simplicity*** *and 5) Melaveh Malka #02-****A New Meal.***
Editor's Note: The concept of the "inner child" is also explained by Rav Wolbe zt"l in sefer Alei Shur vol. I p.159, and it is attributed to a verse in Koheles; it is also mentioned in the works of the Vilna Gaon.

The more that a person has simple belief in Hashem and that He is in charge of everything, the less he will have worries and fears with regards to people in the world. By contrast, the less *temimus* a person has, the more he will have fears and worries of people of this world.

Enjoying Temimus In Yourself and In Observing Others

The more a person reaches his *temimus*, the more he should strive to enjoy it. We all love to see the pure look on a baby's face, and the inner reason behind this is because our soul loves to experience *temimus*, innocence and purity. So too, when we reach on our own *temimus*, within ourselves, it should be to us a deeply enjoyable experience.

Talking To Hashem From Your Point of Temimus

If a person comes to actually enjoy his point of *temimus* – not just that he recognizes what *temimus* is, but that he actually enjoys seeing *temimus* in others and in himself – he now has the power to penetrate into his point of *temimus* in his soul when he does *hisbodedus*, and from there, he can talk to Hashem from an entirely deeper place in himself than before.

The Chofetz Chaim, as is well-known, would practice *hisbodedus* for 2 hours a day. He would talk to Hashem during that time, and someone overheard him once talking to Hashem like a child asking something from a father, with such earnestness. In the recent video that was released of the Chofetz Chaim, you can see the pure and innocent look on his face. Although the Chofetz Chaim possessed intellectual brilliance, at the same time, he was utterly a *tamim* in his relationship with Hashem.

The Pure Place Within Yourself

Entering the point of *temimus* in your soul is essentially how you can free yourself from this entire world; it will feel so relieving!

The world, ever since the sin of Adam and Chava, has become a world mixed with good and evil. Once the evil *daas* (knowledge of good and evil) of the *Eitz HaDaas* entered mankind, the world really became a deceitful place, a world that tends to deviate from the truth and from purity and innocence. When a person connects to the point of *temimus* in his soul, he essentially disconnects from this devious world. It is a deep and inner kind of enjoyment that one can experience, for two reasons: the fact that he has disconnected from this big bad world of trickery and evil, and because he has entered a place in himself which is true, pure and pleasant, the place of *temimus.*

Temimus – The Essence of Hisbodedus

As we explained in the past, the external part of *hisbodedus* is to be physically secluded from the surroundings and be alone in the physical sense. But the inner part of *hisbodedus* is to enter deeper and deeper into the soul, deeper and deeper.

Just like we see in the physical world that there are places such as a *shul*, a *beis midrash*, a house, etc. so are there places in our soul, and there is a place of *hisbodedus* in our soul. Where is the place of *hisbodedus* in our soul? It is found in the place of *temimus*. When you reach your point of *temimus* - **that** is the place of true *hisbodedus*! Yaakov was called the *ish tam,* and we also fought the angel "alone" – this hints to us that the "alone" in the soul is reached through the place of *temimus.*

What Hisbodedus Looks Like Without Temimus

Many people are doing *hisbodedus* but they aren't successful, and there are many reasons for this, but the main reason for this is because they aren't reaching their *temimus.* They are trying to do *hisbodedus* in a place in their soul where they can't really do *hisbodedus*!

This can be compared to someone who is trying to do *hisbodedus* in middle of the marketplace… Some people are on a very high spiritual level and they can be very deeply concentrated in their internal world, even as they are amidst a lot of noise; the *Chovos HaLevovos* describes such a level. But most people are not able to concentrate so deeply when there is a lot of noise. So too, one who does not reach his *temimus* does not really know how to do true *hisbodedus*, because without entering the place of *temimus* in the soul, he's really amidst a lot of inner noise.

In Conclusion

When a person enters deep within [through concentrating on his point of *temimus*], and he has also purified his heart through keeping the *mitzvos* and through attaining the deepest possible inner silence (as was explained in the earlier chapters), he will be able to completely feel and sense the reality of Hashem. May all of us merit - the entire Jewish people, as well as all of Creation – to completely recognize the Creator.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *I want to reach my "temimus", but how do I nullify my yetzer hora which is telling me that I must understand things that take place in the world?*

A: We cannot fight completely our connection to this world, therefore, practically speaking, we should find parts of *temimus* in our life and identify with them, as opposed to trying to fight our connection with the world head-on. It is more practical to focus on the positive than to try to get rid of all the negativity; this current chapter was based on that approach.

Q2: *But how do I nullify my will to understand things?*

A: A very fundamental question. Do you think you understand everything? How much percentage do you think you can understand, and how much percentage do you think you can't understand?

Q3: *I know in my intellect that I can't understand everything, but how do I nullify my will to understand things?*

A: The will to understand things can either come from curiosity or from conceitedness. If it is coming from curiosity, you can train yourself to pull away from the questions, slowly but surely. If it comes from conceit, the way to fix this, generally, is to become more humble.

Q4: *Is "temimus" the essence of the soul? Or is it one of the middos that are in the soul?*

A: It is a *middah* , but it is not just one of the *middos* - it is the root of all the *middos*. The Torah is called "*Toras Hashem Temimah"* – it is perfect because it contains everything. So too, *temimus* is the root power of all the powers in our soul, because it can lead us to everything else.

Q5: *If I read a book about a Gadol and I am trying to relate to temimus within my own self, how can I identify if I am identifying my good temimus or my evil temimus?*

A: It depends. If you are reading about a good story which brings out the point of *temimus*, then you have identified your good *temimus,* and if you read a bad story which makes you believe and accept things that are not good, you are identifying your evil kind of *temimus*.

Q6: *When I think about my childhood I am reminded of negative experiences that took place when I had my temimus, so is this negative temimus?*

A: The point of looking at a picture of your child self is so that you should focus on the positive side of your *temimus*, and do not think about the negative experiences. If you had experiences when you were a child and you get reminded of it when you look at the pictures of your child self, then you can get rid of the scars through increasing your *emunah* in Hashem and that He was behind it all.

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After the shiur, the Rav was asked to speak about the current situation in Eretz Yisroel (the recent wave of terror attacks since the start of Tishrei 5775):

Question: *Can The Rav please speak about what's going on in Eretz Yisrael?*

Answer: There is a spiritual dimension of reality, and a physical dimension of reality. The spiritual reality is currently mixed up, confused, and lacking clarity - because it is so mixed up. There is almost no beacon of light visible, except for a few rays of light every here and there. When this almost total confusion carries over into our physical dimension, it manifests in our physical world as the confusion and chaos that we see.

As long as everything looks fine in this physical world, the spiritual world cannot be revealed. But, when the physical world becomes overwhelmingly chaotic, mirroring the chaos in the spiritual dimension, then the confusion increases, until the physical dimension finally explodes. And when the physical dimension in front of us finally explodes, *Moshiach* comes.

An additional reason for [the chaos now] involves the concept of *hisbodedus*. Throughout the generations, most of the wars fought were between nation and nation, but in the last few years, we can see, in Israel as well as outside of Israel, that there all kinds of wars being fought. The people fighting in Syria are a gathering of many people; they are not the nation of Syria alone, they are a combination of many different nations who are fighting each other. The depth behind this is because we are living in a generation of "individuals", in which each person fights "alone" [an evil use of the power of *hisbodedus*].

Yaakov Avinu fought "alone" with the angel, and this reflects the holy kind of being "alone", which is essentially *hisbodedus*. This is "the generation of *hisbodedus"* and, therefore, we have a unique ability to tap into this innate power of *hisbodedus*. But the evil kind of "alone" is the evil

kind of individualism which we see rampant in today's time, in which each person acts individually, for evil purposes [doing their "own thing"].

A person in this generation must separate from their surroundings and live internally, "alone" with Hashem. The light that is created by the individual can of course shine onto the rest of the world and raise his surroundings in holiness. Practically speaking, a person needs to live internally, alone, where it is just him and Hashem.

So, when should a person do *hisbodedus*? Will he wait until the grave to be alone…? *Chazal* explain that "*Gog* and *Magog* will merit burial". In order to survive "the war of *Gog* and *Magog"* (the final war), one must be "alone" (to live internally with Hashem), in order to merit the meaning of *"And Yaakov fought alone, until the dawn of the morning."* Before the final redemption will be the war of "*Yaakov fought alone …"* [Each individual needs to persevere *until the dawn of the morning.*]

One can be involved with his environment, of course, and help people; but he must build his internal world, so that he will be able to survive the "war of *Gog* and *Magog"*. The war which we are in today, in the world and especially in Israel, is a war reflecting our struggle of the *hisbodedus* we do.

May we merit the coming of the dawn, in which the recognition of Hashem will shine completely, may it come speedily in our days, Amen.

17 | Temimus: Earnestness (Part Two)

(In the previous chapters, with Hashem's help, we dealt with hisbodedus between man and Creator, which included emunah, hodayah, tefillah, and ahavas Hashem. In the last class we explained the concept of ***temimus*** *(wholesome simplicity) in our life in general, and how it applies specifically to hisbodedus).*

Temimus and Inner Child: The Longing to Be With Another

As we mentioned, the purpose of our entire *avodah* on this world is ***hakaras metzius haBorei*** – to recognize the Creator as a reality. When a person develops the power of *temimus*, he will naturally want to be "with" another, because part of *temimus* is to yearn to be with another.

As an example from our physical world, a child also wants to be with his parents, and he does not like to be alone. Just as a child wants to always be with his parents, so also there is a power in our soul for holiness to yearn to always be "with" Hashem, very much like a child.

If we reflect, we can see that part of our life is spent alone, and part of our life is spent with others; and even when we are with others, it can either be because we happen to be with others, or simply because we fear being alone and therefore we prefer to spend time around others. But although we spend a lot of time around people, much of the time spent around people does not emanate from a yearning for connection. Most people, most of the time, are not experiencing connection with others on an ongoing basis.

A child doesn't only seek to be with his parents; he needs a lot of attention. He wants connection; he wants to feel that his parents are with him, and it is not enough for the child to know that he is with his parents. Of course, a child cannot express this, but the nature of a child is that he always seeks connection with another. A child does not like to be alone; he always wants to be around another. Not only does he want to physically be with others, but he demands emotional connection with others all the time. This is a yearning that comes from the soul, and it is very dominant in a child.

All of us have this yearning, but it is often covered over, now that we have gotten older. We have learned how to be on our own, more or less, and we can survive being alone; we don't feel a need to always be with others. When a child is in his younger years, he needs a constant friend, but as he gets older, he feels less and less of a need to be with others so much. He learns how to be by himself, and even when he is with others, his connection to others is superficial and purely external, because he doesn't feel that much of a need to connect. This is the natural course a person takes. But deep inside us, there is still an inner child in us that seeks connection all the time with another, and it has merely become covered during the course of time.

A person grows up knowing that the purpose of life is to recognize Hashem, but he is used to being alone as well as not being connected with others. What happens? Even if he does *hisbodedus* and he uncovers his inner "alone", his connection to Hashem is only revealed when he does *hisbodedus*, but during the rest of the day, a person does not feel a need to be connected with Hashem, just like a couple feels connection to each only when they are around each other and not throughout the day.

Hisbodedus is not the same kind of connection you have with people. It is no less than how a child needs to connect with his parents. Just as a child wants to always be with his parents, so does true *hisbodedus* cause you to feel a constant longing for Hashem, when you do *hisbodedus* from an inner place in yourself. Therefore, *hisbodedus* is not just the time in which you connect with Hashem; it can cause you to feel connected to Hashem all the time, and not just during "*hisbodedus* time."

So when you do *hisbodedus*, it is imperative that you access your inner child again. That is the inner and true way to do *hisbodedus*. Reach a place in yourself in which you feel that you want to connect Hashem all the time and not just during *hisbodedus* time.

Four Methods of Reaching Your Temimus

[There are four methods to reach one's *temimus*. The first two methods are an external way, and the last two methods are an inner way.

1) "Returning To The Inner Child In The Soul".

The external method is a commonly used approach which has several applications [which was mentioned in the previous chapter]: You "return to your childhood" - either through your memory, or through looking at pictures or videos of yourself; in their method, you are using your imagination/memory to return to your childhood experiences. Don't just remember it superficially; it should be a soul experience. You can return to your childhood in your soul. And when you imagine yourself being a child, your *temimus* is awakened.

However, this method contains pros and cons. The benefit is that it's easier for you to identify with your childhood experiences so it can affect you even in the here and now. But the negative side of this method is that when you go back to your childhood, you might become a little kid again, with all your childish mischief. Also, when you remember your childhood, you naturally think about how you got along with your parents and how you trusted them, and this takes away your concentration from thinking about Hashem. Therefore, when such thoughts are awakened, you need to know how to redirect this towards your relationship with Hashem.

There is also a stronger point to consider. If a person didn't get along with his parents when he was a child, or if he suffered negative experiences from them, his *temimus* was damaged. This isn't

the case in every Jewish home, *Baruch Hashem*; but there are definitely children who had negative childhood experiences with their parents, and therefore, the *temimus* of such a child has taken a hit while he was still developing.

For example, if a child woke up in middle of the night with a nightmare, and he woke up his parents to soothe him, and the parents didn't have the patience to deal with him, this is a negative childhood experience which has been absorbed deeply into the child's subconscious. A child's mind is not fully mature to understand what he is experiencing, but deep in his subconscious, there is a trauma from the experience, and it tells him that his parents had no patience for him.

Therefore, returning to your childhood experiences is not always a preferred method to access your *temimus*, because there are some bad memories that can come with it.

2) Awakening Your *Temimus* in The Present.

The second method to access your *temimus* is the more inner and **preferred** approach, but it is more difficult to use than the above way: One can awaken his *temimus* which he has in the present point in his life. A person can directly use the power of *temimus* in the soul, even without getting involved with the "inner child".

When you were a child, you used your *temimus* towards your parents. You don't need to use your imagination or your memory of your childhood to reach your actual power of *temimus*; you just need to access it as it is right now. Maybe you are already using your *temimus* right now towards others in your life. You need to use that very power of *temimus* in yourself which you recognize from the current stage in your life, and instead channel it towards how you relate to Hashem.

This power of *temimus* is the root power in a Jew's soul. Yaakov *Avinu* was called "*ish tam*". This is the inner and pure kind of *temimus*.

The first kind of *temimus* we mentioned, which is the power of the "inner child", is a power that gentiles as well can access, and indeed, there are gentiles who know how to tap into their inner child. There are Jews too who are using this external approach and are being helped - and they are using it in the exact way that a gentile uses it…

But the inner kind of *temimus*, which is to access it directly (without getting involved with the "inner child"), is a power that only a Jew has in his soul. Of this *temimus* it is written, "*Be **tamim** (wholesome) with Hashem your G-d.*"

We can make use of external *temimus* too (inner child), but we need to mainly use the **inner** kind of *temimus* [which we will soon explain how to access]. We have explained with Heaven's help how to bring out the potential of our power of *temimus*. It is the strongest power we need to make

use of in order to reach true *hisbodedus* between ourselves and the Creator. It is not only a power we use during *hisbodedus* – it is an ability which we can use all the time and all day. Now we will discuss how we can bring out the inner kind of *temimus*, unique only to a Jew's soul.

We mentioned that a child doesn't like to be alone, therefore, he seeks connection with others. This is because a child doesn't have *seichel*, a developed intellect, so he is missing the power to guide himself when he is alone. With a developed intellect, we can take care of ourselves and tolerate being alone, more or less. But without the power of the *seichel*/intellect, a person does not have the inner strength to guide himself, and that is why he feels dependent on others for guidance. Thus, a child is very dependent on others, because he has no developed intellect yet and thus he fears being alone.

A child has no *seichel* or *daas*, so he can't guide himself, and that is why his *temimus* is dominant; he is thus dependent on others for guidance. So *temimus* is a power to feel dependent on another for guidance. When a person gets older and he matures, he is often self-confident and feels that he can guide himself using his intellect. If so, how can a mature adult connect to the concept of *temimus*? This point leads us to the secret and depth about our entire life.

Although it seems that we have our *daas* (thinking, intellectual mind) and that we're dictating all our movements, the truth is that all of our movements are only being allowed by Hashem, and He is above all our understanding. Therefore, even if I think I understand my movements, I can tell myself that I really don't comprehend this at all, because I am being entirely guided by Hashem. True, we have free will to choose what we will do, but we are still not in control of moving ourselves – it is Hashem who lets anything happen. Since Hashem is above my comprehension, I can't even understand my simple movements. This process of reflecting enables a person to leave his *daas* and enter his *temimus*.

When a person lives with a superficial perspective, when he views how others are moving, he thinks they are controlling how they move, and that he is controlling his movements as well. For example, he sees everyone getting on the bus and crossing the street, and he does the same, so doesn't it seem that we are in control of our movement? A person thinks, "Sure, Hashem runs the world, but in the end of the day, it seems like we're in charge of our actual movements."

But a person who lives with an inner perspective towards life knows that all movements are but a garment of Hashem's movements. And since that is the truth, we can tell ourselves that since we have no comprehension of Hashem, we have no comprehension either of the simple movements we see. This is a very deep kind of recognition. *"Hashem is the Creator and Conductor of all creations, and only He does, did, and will do, every action."*

This kind of awareness changes one's perspective towards life entirely; it's a new world that one uncovers. It is a kind of life in which you surrender yourself to Hashem and you let Him guide you. This is the depth of using the power of *temimus.*

In summary, we have so far explained two ways of how to reach *temimus*. The first way is to return to your childhood experiences, but as we mentioned, it is a superficial method which hamper your own *temimus* in the process. This method is a power in every soul, both Jew and gentile alike. The second method is the inner method, the power of *temimus* in a Jew's soul, in which one can use his *temimus* towards Hashem, realizing that he is totally reliant on Hashem.

3) Reviewing *Pesukim* About *Temimus*

There is also a third way to reach your *temimus,* and in a way it will come easier to someone who possess both strong intellect and feeling: take *pesukim* (verses) of *Tehillim* (Psalms) which describe *temimus* and review them, with enthusiasm. Keep reviewing them, with enthusiasm and with depth, and you can do it for 100 and even 1000 times, until your *temimus* begins to come out of your heart. Be very concentrated and focused with your entire being as you do it.

4) Reading Stories of *Gedolim*

A fourth method which can reveal your *temimus* is by reading stories of our *Gedolim* which exemplify *temimus.*

In Conclusion

We have explained here four methods how to reach *temimus*. If a person merits reaching his *temimus*, he will naturally relate to Hashem as very real, and his *hisbodedus* will feel much more truthful. He can then build then upon that, with the stages that we will later describe (with the help of Hashem). But this current step we are describing, *temimus,* is a major step in *hisbodedus*.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Can the Rav give a few examples of how we can feel like a "tamim" (to be "wholesome") towards Hashem and realize that He's in control of everything?*

A: We are in a world being dominated by attacks from all kinds of forces, such as Islamic extremists, wicked people who are constantly contemplating ways of how to kill. If one tries to think logically of what causes terrorism, either he'll conclude that it's Arabs from Syria or from Iran, or from some other place in the world. But you can realize that they are all messengers of Hashem, and Hashem is using them to carry out His will – it is really not possible to handle them using our puny human logic. Hashem is leading them, and this is above the understanding of our human intellect.

The wisest people in the world perhaps can wonder of how to deal with them, but do they know what's enabling them to act? No, because it is Hashem Himself who is letting them act. The wise people in the world can try to think and think of what to do about them, but Hashem lets them act as He wills, and all of their rationalizations are for naught.

A person can see that all that he does understand is but a drop of understanding in the incomprehensible. We don't even understand the tiniest detail of Hashem's ways. Reb Noach of Kobrin *zt"l* said that without *emunah*, it's not possible to leave the house, and with *emunah*, one can conquer everything. Most people though are leaving their homes each day without *emunah*, out of immaturity towards life. But when a person has true understanding, and he thinks, he can see how the entire world is being led by Hashem, and that we have no comprehension of anything, and we can't predict even the next moment. So how do we survive in this world? Only through using the depth of the power *temimus*.

Q2: *If a person has emunah, can he understand terrorism today?*

A: There is some small amount of comprehension we can have in Hashem's ways, but to know all of His ways is above our understanding.

Q3: *If a person has emunah, will he be protected from the terrorism of today?*

A: The Rambam[47] says in *Moreh Nevuchim* that a person will receive individual protection by Hashem the more *emunah* he has. The more a person has *emunah*, the more he can prevent the forces of evil from breaking loose upon this world. We can't stop it totally, because Hashem has His ways that we don't understanding, but yes, to a certain extent, we can definitely lessen the terrorism in this world, by strengthening our *emunah*.

Q4: *Are there things today we are doing which prevent us from having temimus?*

A: All that we see with our physical eyes can take away our *temimus.* For example, you see your house, and you naturally think that some contractor built it. You get used to thinking that people do everything in this world. When a person reads and hears the news all the time and he keep hearing/reading the opinions of others people, how each person understands things, and this makes us think that people are in charge of this world.

It is the opposite of *emunah* which is to believe that Hashem runs the world, and the only thing which we can do is to use our power of free will. All of the news outlets – secular media, Jewish newspapers, and even the most *Chareidi* newspapers contain outright heresy. They all are indicating that people run the world. The more a person lives a life of *temimus*, the more he views the world through different lenses. He is aware that whenever a person does something, he is merely a messenger of Hashem.

But when we get used to reading [or hearing] the news on a set basis, we get used to thinking that people run this world, which is the opposite of a *temimus* kind of life. If someone can hear the news all the time and tell himself that Hashem is running the world even after all that he hears, then it would be a point open for discussion. But if a person regularly listens to the news, he probably isn't reacting that way, and it gets a person used to heresy on a regular basis!

Q5: *How can a person feel how Hashem is doing everything when we feel all the time that we live in the real world and that it is we who do everything?*

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47 see Moreh Nevuchim47: Chapters 51-53

A: This is a very good question. One must know that "I have to do what I need to do, but after I do what I do, I must tell myself that it's not up to me, and that only Hashem does everything and let everything happen". On a more subtle note, this deep awareness can also bring one to *bittul* (self-nullification) and humility towards Hashem.

Q6: *How can we feel calm and that Hashem is doing everything when there are so many troubles surrounding us?*

A: This question goes against all our *emunah*. The Kotzker Rebbe *zt"l* said, "If I could understand Hashem, I would not want Him to be my God." We do not understand Hashem or His ways. We do not understand His good ways and surely when He has to inflict pain upon us we don't understand.[48] There is a little we do comprehend but for the most part, we don't comprehend His ways, so we must not question Him.

Q7: *What can I do to actually calm myself down, in the meantime?*

A: When you truly believe that Hashem is doing it all, then you will be calmed. On the contrary, if you believe that "this bad person" did this and "that bad person" did this, then indeed, everything seems bad. But tell yourself that no one is running this world but Hashem Who is endlessly merciful – all that He does is good. If you truly come to feel that Hashem is really doing everything in this world, not people, you will be calmed which is the depth of using your *temimus*. Perhaps one can try to "explain" the troubles we face today as an "atonement for our sins" or because "*Moshiach* is coming", etc.. However, the way of our *emunah* is to simply believe that Hashem is behind it all, therefore all is good.

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48 See Tefillah 075 for an in-depth analysis of suffering.

18 | Speaking Continuously with Hashem

Getting Back The Long Lost Art of Speaking With Hashem

With the help of Hashem, we will continue to explain *hisbodedus* (Jewish meditation). Recently, we explained *hodaah* (thanking G-d), *tefillah* (prayer), and how to speak to Hashem from a place of *temimus* (pure simplicity) in yourself. Now we will progress to explain another fundamental point which is acquired through *hisbodedus*.

When thanking Hashem, we explained that a person needs to do so from the depths of his heart. During *hisbodedus*, one must understand that it's not just a time to speak with Hashem from the depths of the heart; rather it is to acquire the nature of the soul which is hidden in every Jew. It is really enjoyable to speak to Hashem! This is because talking to Hashem is an inherent nature of our souls.

Thus, *hisbodedus* is to be understood as a time to access our deep nature to speak with Hashem. True *hisbodedus* is not just to talk to Hashem during *hisbodedus* per se. It is rather that during *hisbodedus*, a person acquires the nature to talk to Hashem, and from that, it can extend beyond the actual time you set for *hisbodedus*, enabling a person to speak with Hashem naturally throughout the rest of the day.

A true Jew not only speaks to Hashem for three times a day during *davening* and during *hisbodedus*; he talks to Hashem much more than that. Of course, we can't talk to Hashem every second. But the point is that talking to Hashem is not just limited to our set times of *tefillah* and *hisbodedus*. Talking to Hashem is a practice meant for the entire day!

To illustrate, a husband and wife don't only to speak with each other during limited times; they speak all the time with each other, on an ongoing basis. The home would be unlivable if they wouldn't speak to each other all the time. People are with others all the time and socialize with others; we understand that we can naturally speak to other people all the time. So, too, we have a nature to speak with Hashem – and not because it's an "*avodah*", but because it's our soul's nature!

The Way A Jew Is Supposed To Look

Before we explain (with Hashem's help) how to speak with Hashem throughout the day, firstly, we must internalize that the way a Jewish life is supposed to look like is to speak with Hashem all the time.

We aren't used to this perspective at first, because we see that our almost everyone in our environment are not into it. We usually only see people who talk to Hashem during *davening* for three times a day, and maybe perhaps a little more than that. The inner way for a Jew to live, which

we are usually not used to seeing in the society we live in, is to speak with Hashem all the time throughout the course of the day. It is a change of perspective to us that we are not initially used to, but it is the true and inner lifestyle of a Jew.

Therefore, we must get used to this new perspective of thinking and accustom ourselves to reflecting on how a true Jew is supposed to live like.

Avraham *Avinu* enacted the prayer of *Shacharis*, but did he only talk to Hashem during *Shacharis*? Yitzchok *Avinu* enacted the prayer of *Mincha* - did he only talk to Hashem during *Mincha*? And did Yaakov *Avinu* only speak to Hashem during *Maariv*? Obviously, not. They spoke with Hashem in between their prayers as well.

The Spiritual Reason of Why Women Have More Speech

Hashem gave us a power of speech. The Sages explained that ten measurements of speech were created, and nine were taken by women. Today in particular, there is a lot of speech, especially in the recent years with the advent of cell-phones. Nowadays, people talk wherever they are, on the go, wherever, and whenever. For what reason did Hashem intend us to use our power of speech for?

The power of speech was given to men to use to learn Torah with. *Chazal* expound on the words of "*And you shall speak in it* [the words of Torah]" that a man must speak the words of Torah, and the Sages exhorted men as well not to speak idle words of empty chatter, which wastes time from Torah study. This is true for men, who have a *mitzvah* to learn Torah; but what about women, who are not commanded to learn Torah?

For what reason do women possess the power of speech, if they do not use it to learn Torah with? Must they only learn how to be silent from empty talk…? Or is there more meaning to the nine measurements of speech that women have? Surely a woman needs to use her speech to speak with her husband, children, and friends and those whom she needs to speak with, and we are not implying otherwise. But that cannot be the main reason that a woman possesses much of the power of speech.

A woman was given more speech because she can use it for the most part to speak with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*!

If we would think about how many words we say each day and how much of it we use to speak with Hashem, we would discover that most of our speech is used towards people, and not with Hashem. Of course, we need to speak with people, but Hashem gave us the power of speech to mainly use it to speak with Hashem.

That is the way a Jew lives, man and woman alike! A man must mainly use his speech to speak words of Torah and to speak to Hashem, and a little bit to speak with people. And women, who do

not learn Torah, must therefore use their speech to mainly speak with Hashem, and only a little bit with people.

This is the way our holy matriarchs acted. It would be unthinkable for our matriarchs Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah to sit on a bench in the park and talk on cellphones, for hours on end. It would be unthinkable for them to speak on cellphones all the time wherever they go and in their houses. Most of their speech was spent with Hashem, and this is the way a Jewish mother looks like. This is the way it always has been throughout the generations.

The True Jewish Woman

A woman who lives an inner Jewish life is one who is modest, and she performs acts of kindness modestly, and even more importantly, she speaks with Hashem throughout the day. Let's try to imagine vividly how a Jewish woman is supposed to look like.

We hope to merit soon the redemption, in which the dead will be resurrected, when we will then see our holy Matriarchs, and then we will see how a Jewish woman looks like. In the meantime, let's try to conceptualize: What did our holy matriarchs, look like? After that we need to think how we can put that into practice. But first, we need to at least conceptualize it.

Step One: Asking Hashem For Help

Besides for the times of the day when we daven and do *hisbodedus,* we need to make sure that we are talking to Hashem throughout the day-to-day stuff. When you do something, *daven* to Hashem for help before you do it. When you're sitting in your house, ask Hashem for help in something. Get used to asking Hashem for success in general and in specific areas you need help in.

Step Two: Including Hashem In All Aspects of Your Life

After we have gotten used to this first step – talking to Hashem throughout the day and asking Him for help – we proceed to the next step. Don't just ask Hashem for help – speak to Hashem about what you're doing. Here the focus is not on the request, but simply to include Him in what you are doing. We will soon explain how to do this.

Here is an example. You get up in the morning and wash your hands, etc. A woman sends her children to school, etc. If one just goes about this without any thoughts about Hashem, he gets up by himself and thinks he's in charge of his life. One can turn this into a spiritual experience by instead including Hashem in it. He can talk to Hashem throughout all of it and thereby include Hashem in the picture.

Here are more examples: When you're washing the dishes, or sweeping the floor, or cleaning up the house, you can talk to Hashem at the same time. You can say, "Hashem is with me and sustaining me, and from Him alone do I receive the strength to do all these things."

This should not just be done mentally in your thoughts; you should **verbalize** it with your mouth. When you get up in the morning, say: "Do I get up alone? No. Hashem woke me up. Am I alive because of my own energy? No. Hashem is keeping me alive. How can I get the kids ready and get them to school? Because I have the energy to do so? No. It's because Hashem helps me do it."

Becoming A "Partner With Hashem"

There are many statements of our Sages in which we are taught that man is a partner with Hashem, so to speak. *Chazal* state that if one says "*Vayechulu"* on Friday night, he becomes a partner with Hashem. *Chazal* also said that a judge who gives a truthful judgment is a partner with Hashem. There are other such statements of *Chazal* that describe this concept of being "a partner with Hashem".

What does it mean to be "a partner with Hashem"? Does it mean to just ask Hashem for things, or does it mean to include Him in our matters? Husband and wife are terms "partners"[1]. Does that limit them to asking them for things, or do they also include each other in their lives? If the entire relationship between spouses is the fact that they ask each other for things, and they don't include each other in each of their lives, such a marriage is unlivable.

Of course, spouses need to ask each other for things, but an essential ingredient in marriage is to simply include each other in their lives. They must share their lives with each other. Most of the conversations in a healthy marriage are not about requests; they are about including each other in their lives. If most of the conversations are requests from each other, this is an example of a dysfunctional marriage. So too, we must share our life with Hashem.

Most of the time when people speak with Hashem, it is about things that we want from Him. Others are more mature and they also thank Hashem for things. But we must acquire a new kind of connection with Hashem, which is not only about the give-and-take relationship we have with Him.

Our Relationship With Hashem: Like A Marriage

The inner dimension of our relationship with Hashem is as it is written [in *Shir HaShirim*]: "*Open up to me, my sister, my dove, my friend*." The Jewish people's relationship with Hashem is compared to that of husband and wife.

In a marriage, the main aspect of their relationship is not about requests; it is about including each other in their lives. So too, Hashem is our Beloved to us, and we must relate to Him only minimally with requests; the main aspect of our relationship with Him should be about including Him in all aspects of our life.

Summary

Let this be clear: first, we must absorb this perspective, that the way a Jew looks (man or woman) is to speak to Hashem all the time, on a natural and regular basis. Secondly, most of our speech with Hashem should not be about requests or thanking Him, rather, most of our speech with Hashem should be for the sake of including Him in our life.

After a person has gotten used to acquiring the art of talking to Hashem in tefillah and *hisbodedus* [as it was explained in the previous chapters], one needs to open a new dimension in the soul: to include Hashem in what we are doing, throughout the day.

Getting Started

One should first start to include Hashem in the "small stuff" and then he should slowly increase this, both in quantity and in quantity.

Sometimes a person ends up asking Hashem for things as a result of including Him in his life, and this is fine. But most of the talking with Hashem should be for the sake of including Him in your life and not for the purpose of asking Him for things. The majority of your speech with Hashem should be for the purpose of including Him in your life, and a minority of your speech with Hashem should be about requests from Hashem.

Two Forms of Talking To Hashem: Verbal and Mental

We will now proceed to the next step, with Heavenly assistance. Including Hashem in our life is expressed in two ways: verbally, and mentally.

Either one can talk to Hashem verbally, or he can speak to Hashem mentally. One can speak with Hashem as well in his thoughts. Just like you can speak to Hashem with your mouth, so can you speak in your thoughts to Hashem. This is called *hirhur* (thought). Each ways has its pros and cons.

Verbally talking to Hashem has the advantage of making an impact on your soul, because when you speak from the depths of your heart, the speech moves you and can connect you closer to Hashem.

Mental communication with Hashem is a more internal kind of power. It changes your thinking process, because until now you were used to thinking only with yourself, and now you realize that you can think with Hashem present. It removes feelings of loneliness and shows you how you are never alone, because you are always with Hashem.

There are people who must always be around people and they don't like to be alone. An internal kind of person is also never alone, not because he is with people, but because he is with Hashem in his words and thoughts. Such words and thoughts are alive. This is actually the depth behind *hisbodedus.*

Hisbodedus: All Day Long

True *hisbodedus* is not for an hour a day. As we explained in the past, *hisbodedus* is a way of life. The *Chovos HaLevovos* describes an inner kind of life as one who is alone with Hashem and never feels alone, because he knows he is with Hashem. Reb Nachman of Breslov wrote that although he told people to do *hisbodedus* for a set amount of time a day, such as an hour, he himself would do *hisbodedus* the entire day.

How can one do *hisbodedus* the entire day? It means that he was verbally and mentally connected to Hashem the entire day. His being was wrapped up with Hashem the entire day, in his words and thoughts. *Hisbodedus* for an hour a day is wonderful, of course, but it's still only the partial level.

The words here are far from the lifestyle of most people, but they are not too hard to keep either. It's a matter of habit and as well as a change of perspective. One merely needs to get used to a change of perspective: life is about including Hashem in all aspects of your life, every day and throughout the day.

A Third Method: Writing Letters To Hashem

If one feels that it's too hard, there is another method which can work for some people: to **write to Hashem**. When you write your words to Hashem, write from the depths of your heart. Dovid HaMelech wrote *Sefer Tehillim,* and so can each person write his words to Hashem, to a certain extent and on his respective level. Of course, none of us are like Dovid HaMelech. But all of us have inherited gifts from our forefathers, and therefore, we can each write our words to Hashem, on our own level.

So we can write letters to Hashem. Don't just write a small note. Write Him a long letter, just as a friend writes a long letters to his friend who lives on the other end of the world.

In Conclusion

It is my hope that you have opened your ears and heart to listen to these words and thereby absorb the concept of this inner kind of life we are describing here. It seems far away from you at first, but "*the matter is very close to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart to do it.*"

Absorb this kind of life, this true kind of life, which is how a Jew lives: to converse with Hashem, regularly, to include Him in your life. Include Him in the external aspects of your life as well as in your feelings and experiences. Include Him in all aspects of your life!

May we merit to live the inner kind of life, a life of connection with Hashem, to be truly, truly connected with Him.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *What is the balance between how much one should talk to Hashem verbally and mentally?*

A: There is no exact answer to this. Try to feel from within yourself and discern which method is more for you. To illustrate, how much should we eat and how much should we drink? There's no exact answer. Sometimes we need to eat more and sometimes we need to drink more. So too, there are different ways to connect to Hashem (verbal and mental), and it depends on each person. Sometimes a person is talking to Hashem verbally and he feels that he needs a quieter kind of a connection, so he should use the mental method. Another kind of person isn't satisfied with the mental method because although he has quiet, he feels that it's lacking excitement, so he needs to make use of the verbal method. So each method depends on each person's taste as well as on the particular time in his life.

Q2: *How much time should we spend on tefillah and how much on hisbodedus?*

A: *Tefillah* is our collective relationship with Hashem, whereas *hisbodedus* is one's personal connection with Hashem. We need both aspects of our life. Therefore, the three *tefillos* we *daven* each day are not enough, and neither is *hisbodedus* enough. Through *tefillah* we can integrate with the collective unit of the Jewish people, and through that we connect to Hashem; through *hisbodedus*, one brings his soul to have a personal connection with Hashem.

Q3: *I am enjoying hisbodedus a lot, and because I have reached the understanding that I am always with Hashem, I never feel alone, and as a result, I am finding that my hisbodedus causing me to become anti-social. I don't talk to my friends as much as I used to now that I am so immersed in hisbodedus. Is this a bad sign about my hisbodedus?*

A: If a person is too isolated from his surroundings, yes, it is problematic. If *hisbodedus* is causing a person to separate from actions he doesn't need to do anyway, this is actually the ideal state, and it is not bad at all.

But there is also a more inner understanding, of how *hisbodedus* improves our relatioships. Most conversations with others are self-serving. Once we eliminate our need for people through *hisbodedus* - and we are speaking with people a lot less - now we need to learn how to speak to others for the betterment of others. We then will be speaking to others as a form of giving to them, and not because we need things of them.

Q4: *How can I talk to Hashem as I am in middle of going through a negative emotion, such as if I am in middle of anger?*

A: As you feel yourself getting angry, say to Hashem, "Hashem, You gave me the power of free will to choose if I will overcome my anger or not. I don't want to get angry, because I know that it is your will that I should not be angry. Please help me choose correctly and overcome my anger." In this way, you don't just ask Hashem to help you overcome your anger; you include Hashem in all aspects of it, because you ask Him to help you choose.

Q5: *Should I also add in the words "I am doing this because it is the will of Hashem?" How important is this?*

A: It is very important, but one must be honest with himself and know if he's really doing something for the will of Hashem or for himself. Although our soul deep down wants to do Hashem's Will, our lower soul (*nefesh habehaimis*) doesn't want to, so if one recognizes this, he must be aware that there is a contradiction between his body and soul, and then he should *daven* to Hashem for help and to be able to reach that level in which he is doing Hashem's will for the sake of doing Hashem's will.

On a deeper note, we need to become aware of the two parts in ourselves, a part that doesn't want to do the will of Hashem and a part that wants to do the will of Hashem, and then daven to Hashem that we should listen to our higher part of our soul and not to the lower part of our soul.

Q6: *I have given up my pastime of art in favor of studying spirituality. It helped me on a psychological level, but is there a way for me to use my art in my relationship with Hashem?*

A: Surely. You can connect everything with Hashem. You should just try to uncover your motivations: Why do you like to draw? There is no one reason. We can't say it's good or bad to be into art. For one kind of person it is good and for another it is not good. So one should try to discern why he likes art, and then when he discovers that reason, he should try to learn how to connect it to his relationship with Hashem.

Q7: *When I have conversations with myself in my thoughts and I know that Hashem is listening to my thoughts, is there a difference between that and a focused conversation on Hashem?*

A: When you think directly about Hashem, that is a much stronger connection with Hashem.

Q8: *When a person has verbal or mental connection with Hashem, does it give a nachas ruach (satisfaction) to Hashem, and if yes, how?*

A: Everything Hashem created is all so that we can connect with Him. There are three parts to how we connect with Hashem in *d'veykus*: through action, word, and thought. In action, we connect with Hashem by not sinning and by doing the mitzvos. We connect to Hashem through word and thought by having verbal and mental connection with Hashem. This is the meaning of true *d'veykus* with Hashem. The purpose of Creation is to come to have true *d'veykus*, and this is how we give Him a *nachas ruach.* Life is not just about connecting to Hashem through actions, for a gentile can also connect to Hashem through proper actions. Life is not about action alone. We must connect to Hashem as well through our words and through our thoughts.

Q9: *Can these recordings of these shiurim be given out to those who aren't part of these phone conferences?* ***A: If truth was said here, then I do not own it, because it belongs to Hashem. If what I said here was not true, then no one should hear it. If the words here are true, though, then the words here are not mine, for they are all a gift from Hashem to Klal Yisrael [and therefore I am not the owner of these words].***

[1] Niddah 31a

19 | Feeling Hashem's Presence

"Nochach P'nei Hashem": To Feel That Hashem Is In Front of You

When we discussed *hisbodedus* previously we explained about talking with Hashem all the time. Now we will progress to a more complete level of *hisbodedus,* which is to feel: "*nochach p'nei Hashem",* to feel that we are literally "opposite" Hashem, face-to-face with Him when we speak with Him.

The concept of "*nochach p'nei Hashem"* is more than just a mere knowledge or feeling of Hashem's existence. It is to feel that He is literally in front of you when you speak to Him, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes: "As a man talking to his friend."

"*Nochach"* is personified by the word "*Attah*" in the words "*Baruch Attah Hashem*", (Blessed are You, Hashem) – that when we talk to Hashem, we are talking to Him face-to-face, in first person, "You."

The inner way that a Jew is supposed to live life is to feel that he is literally facing Hashem. When a person has an external relationship towards Hashem, he thinks that Hashem resides in Heaven, while he resides on Planet Earth, far away from Hashem, (*chas v'shalom*). A person, when he *davens*, might have the mentality that he lives in America, while Hashem is far away in *Eretz Yisrael*, somewhere in the *Beis HaMikdash….*

But "*nochach"* is to acquire the perspective that Hashem is literally in front of you. It is to feel how Hashem is "*Attah*", "You" in first person. So when we say the word "*Attah"* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we must feel the meaning of what "*Attah*" implies. When a person does *hisbodedus* with Hashem only periodically, then sometimes he will feel how Hashem is with him, and sometimes he won't. Sometimes he will feel how Hashem is in front of him, and sometimes he won't feel it. He'll feel far from Hashem.

But when a person gets used to speaking with Hashem regularly throughout the day, he will find that he can always converse with Hashem, and that will give him a constant bond with Hashem. It is though continuously talking to Hashem throughout the day that a person can slowly work on acquiring the level of *nochach/attah.* One must clearly feel that the purpose of life which we need to direct ourselves towards is: to reach this step of *"nochach p'nei Hashem,"* which we will further describe in this chapter.

Alone, Not Lonely

"Nochach" means to live a life in which the reality of Hashem's existence is constantly revealed to you. It means that in any given time or place or situation, you can feel that you are never really alone as it appears. We can always feel Hashem as reality in front of us. We can feel this no matter what ups or downs we are going through; whether we are going through a joyous time or a difficult time. No matter what level we are up to in serving Hashem, we can always live the reality and experience of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Until now we have explained the concept of "*nochach"*. Now we will explain how exactly we can practice it. However, it can only be reached if we've already worked to acquire all steps that were explained in the previous chapters. The more we have worked to acquire those levels – both intellectually and emotionally – the closer we can come to the level of "*nochach".*

Step One: When You Find Yourself Alone

The first step is to keep reflecting on the fact that we are never alone, for Hashem is always near us. Every day we always have times in which we are alone, by default. We need to use those times to our advantage and use them as times of quiet solitude, when we can reflect on the fact that you are not alone - for Hashem is next to you.

So when you find yourself alone, take the opportunity to have the following conversation with yourself either verbally or mentally: "Am I really alone? No, I am not. Hashem is always with me."

When you get used to this each day, you train yourself each day, week after week, month and month (and year after year!) to use your times of being alone for reflecting about how you're really not alone; that Hashem is with you.

The point of having this conversation with yourself is to do so in a question-and-answer format with yourself, because that helps it internalize better in your heart.

Remember: Yaakov *Avinu* fought "alone" with the angel, but even when he was "alone", Hashem was really with him and helping him.

Step Two: Have Fixed Times of Being Alone

Besides for the times of the day in which you find yourself alone, though, you also need to set aside specific time in your daily schedule in which you can be alone and have this reflection.

When you choose a place to be alone in, try not to be in a place which will disturb you; don't be in a place in which your evil inclination can get aroused, and it's also better to be in a place that's far from people. When you're secluded from people, it's much easier to feel "alone"; that is to say,

your *nefesh habehaimis* (lower, animalistic part of the soul) can sense that you are in a secluded place.

When you feel that aloneness, now you can start to go in the other direction: tell yourself that you're really *not* alone! With the more you do this, you can eventually reveal the depth of your *neshamah* – the light of your Divine soul.

Step Three: Utilizing Our Times of Loneliness

So far, it was explained the two steps to feel *nochach p'nei Hashem*. The first step was to utilize the times that we are alone to "reflect" and have a conversation with ourselves that we are really not alone, for we are with Hashem. The second step is that we also need to set aside specific times of the day in which we are alone in order to "reflect". But there is also the following third step we need to do, which is very important.

Every person has periods in his life in which he feels intensely alone. This can go on for an amount of days, or it can be felt at certain times of the day in which loneliness just hits you. This happens even to people who have family, parents, and friends that they are close with. There can be all sorts of reasons why we get lonely – external reasons, or more spiritual reasons. Either way, we all have times in which feel lonely.

How does a person react to it? It appears to be something difficult we must "deal with". We might try to comfort ourselves by saying "*Gam Zu L'Tovah*" ("This too is for the best"), or we tell ourselves that we are supposed to accept suffering with love, as *Chazal* tell us.

That is true, but there is a more inner way to react to the loneliness. The deeper reason of why loneliness happens to us is because that's the way Hashem made us – we get lonely because we are supposed to transform that initial feeling of loneliness into an opportunity of feeling "alone" with Hashem! Which means that we are **never alone** at all. Loneliness is therefore a great opportunity in which a person can acquire the level of *nochach p'nei Hashem.*

Examples of Utilizing Times of Loneliness

There are many different periods of loneliness a person can experience in his life.

Here is a very common example: being in *shidduchim* (dating). A boy or a girl in *shidduchim,* as time goes on, can begin to feel very lonely, like when many of his/her classmates are all getting married one by one, leaving him/her all alone.

Sure, coming home to be with your parents can ease some of the loneliness, but as time goes on, a boy or girl realizes that being at home with the parents does not take away the gnawing loneliness that he/she feels. And it begins to get intensely lonely.

What will happen? Either it will breed on some form of sadness or depression, or, a person will simply take his mind off the loneliness, by getting involved with other pastimes.

But the truth is: it's an opportunity for a person to transform this loneliness, into feeling Hashem next to him in his life. You are supposed to feel that pain of loneliness, and you can feel it intensely. When you feel it, tell yourself that you're really not alone, because you can really choose, if you want, to find *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in this "lonely" situation.

Upon a deeper understanding, one can even look at it as a Heaven-sent opportunity to acquire the perspective of feeling *nochach p'nei Hashem.* There couldn't be a better time to work on it!

Here is another example. Often, between husband and wife, it will happen that there are times of marital discord. Sometimes a couple is having a harmonious relationship, and sometimes, the marriage is stormy. Every couple has their good periods and their bad periods in their marriage. When the *shalom bayis* (marital harmony) is not good, it feels intensely lonely for the spouse who feels abandoned and isolated by his/her spouse. He/she is hurting and it will feel very bewildering and lonely. But it is a great opportunity for one to feel that he is not really alone - for Hashem is still with him.

Of course, every couple must work hard for their *shalom bayis* and try to make it work between them, each doing his/her part. But, inevitably, there will be very rough times, inasmuch as they try to work on it; so there will always be times in which one of the spouses feels estranged from the other. It is during those times that a person can concentrate on this fact, that although it appears that he's alone, he is really not, for Hashem is always with a person, no matter how bad the situation looks.

Another example is that often, one of the spouses has to leave the home for a number of days due to a business trip, or because he/she goes to *Eretz Yisrael,* or when a mother has just given birth. These are situations in which one of the spouses will find him/herself alone, and it can feel very lonely. Another example is when the children are all in yeshiva, leaving the parents all alone, when they miss their children very much.

In all of these situations, a person can realize during his loneliness that he is really not alone: Hashem is with him. The more a person gets used to working on the steps described here, the

better he will be able to use these situations to uncover from his loneliness a relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, feeling Hashem in the loneliness and thereby banishing the loneliness he initially felt. Eventually, if a person keeps persevering with this *avodah*, he can uncover the depth of the light of his *neshamah* (Divine soul), and feeling closer and closer to Hashem.

Loneliness In Your Social Life

Now we will explain how to apply the concept of "*nochach*" within our family and social life.

A person, by nature, wants to connect with people. Indeed, *Chazal* say that one should get along with people. Some people have a reserved nature while others are more outgoing in their relationships with others, but all people wish to connect to other people and need it.

However, even when a person is social and outgoing, he will often find that there are times in which his friends are all reciprocating, and that there are other times in which he feels that others are isolating him. Sometimes we get smiles and compliments from our friends, but sometimes, we feel ignored by them, as if they're not interested in us; and this happens even with our closest friends.

There are also situations in which a close friend dumps you; this feels terribly lonely when it happens. Either it happens because your friend moves away or because he doesn't even have time for you anymore, or it happens simply because he has lost interest in the friendship, due to personality factors or another unknown reason. It doesn't really make a difference what causes it – either way, you feel horribly lonely when a good friend of yours is suddenly not your friend anymore. You then feel uneasy even as you're among your own friends.

When you're experiencing a period like this of anxiety from your relationships with others, first of all, it may be worth it for you to examine your social skills. Maybe you didn't realize that something in your behavior caused your friends to slowly want to pull away from you. Or, maybe you only had superficial kinds of friends, and you need to form truer and deeper friendships with others. So first look into yourself and get in touch with how you're using your soul abilities of connection with others, and try to understand how true connections with others can be achieved.[49]

But, in addition to this, you also need to realize that times of isolation from others happen to you as an opportunity from Hashem for you: to uncover Hashem in your loneliness. In fact, it's even possible that Hashem brought this upon you just so that you will realize that only He is your true Friend! *Chazal* say that Hashem is called the "Friend" of a person – He is our one and only true Friend.[50]

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49 See Getting To Know Your Soul, Part II, Chapter 12 – Hiskashrus: Connection
50 See Rashi to Shabbos 31a

So when you get badly hurt by a close friend, you have a two-fold introspection to make: you need to examine yourself deeply and learn how to use your soul's abilities to form healthy and lasting friendships (or maybe you need to seek a true kind of friend). But along with this, you also need to realize that the loneliness and isolation you are feeling was sent to you from Hashem so that you will feel that you are really not alone; Hashem is with you, and He is your real Friend.

Alone From Others, Alone With Hashem

Now we will mention an additional point which is more subtle.

Every person's soul is multi-layered – there are external layers and more inner layers of the soul. The outer parts of our soul are the parts of our life in which others are included. When you find that your friends are involved in your life and they understand you, what do they understand? Your friends understand the outer parts of your existence and are included in your life on that external level.

But the more you merit to enter inward into your soul and you live an internal and soul kind of life, you will also discover that for some reason, there are certain areas of your life which you just can't include others in. With the more innerness you uncover in your life, getting further and further into your soul, the less you feel a need for companionship with others, because it is "alone" from others, and it is there that you experience the deepest part of your relationship with Hashem – and it's totally private, between you and Hashem.

No one else knows of it – no one but you. Your friends won't understand that part of your soul because it's a private part of your soul that no one can understand.

The more inner you become, you'll discover that it's harder to include your friends in your life, because your life has become so much deeper and so much more inward. It's almost impossible to bring others into your soul kind of life. You realize more and more that there are fewer people who understand what's going on deep inside you. And the more you enter inward into your soul, it seems that less and less people are really involved in your real life.

When you truly reach the very depth of your soul, you will see that it is so private from others that you have no friend at all who can understand what you've reached in yourself. This can make you feel lonely if you don't know how to view this properly.

Indeed, the innermost point in your soul cannot be revealed to anyone at all except yourself. It is best described by the statement, "My heart cannot be revealed by the mouth" ("*Liba l'pumei lo galisi*"). There, in that most private place of your existence as a soul, you are utterly and truly alone from others, and thus it is there, and only there, that you can really feel alone with Hashem. It is hinted to in the words of *Chazal* that "Man was created individual."

There's a deep place in your soul which feels totally individual from others, because no one else can be there but you. There's no way for you to describe it to others because by its very essence, it is a place in yourself that is entirely designated to be used in your private relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu.*

This concept will not be understood or felt by most people. The individuals who have merited to get very far into their innermost depths of their souls can relate to this. There is a place in the soul which others are not able to be included in; it's simply indescribable to another person, and you're the only who knows what it is.

We have described here how a person needs to channel his loneliness towards developing his relationship with Hashem, and how he needs to feel "*nochach p'nei Hashem"*, that Hashem is literally in front of a person, and thus we can talk face-to-face with Him. The second step, "*nochach"*, has been explained here in concept. Now we will say a practical point in how one can develop this concept of feeling a constant relationship with Hashem in which he also feels "*nochach p'nei Hashem".*

Talking To Hashem In First-Person

The way to talk to Hashem is to talk to Him in first-person context: "*Attah*", "You." You can talk to Hashem and say to Hashem, "You created me. You sustain me." You can ask Hashem for things and thank Him for things, addressing Him in first-person.

Alone With Your True Friend

So there are really two parts that are including in talking to Hashem. The first part is to tell yourself that you're not alone and that you're with Hashem. This part emphasizes how you are receiving from Hashem; that it's for your own good when you're alone, because even when you're alone, Hashem is always with you, keeping you alive and sustaining you.

The second part of talking to Hashem is, that as you talk to Him more and more throughout the day, you can feel more and more that he's in front of You, no less than how you're talking to a friend. At first, this will feel unnatural to you, because you don't feel that He is literally in front of you. But the more you get used to it (even when you don't feel it), slowly but surely the depth of your soul will become more and more revealed out in the open, and then you'll feel the awareness of "*nochach p'nei Hashem".*

A person can try this as he says the word "*Attah*" [in the blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*]. When you say the word "*Attah"*, don't just say it in a superficial manner; try to say it from an inner place in yourself. Don't pressurize yourself to do this; instead, say the word "*Attah*" slowly and patiently, with concentration on the fact that Hashem is in front of you. The more you get used to this, your

sensitivity to it will slowly increase; you will feel it not just as an emotion, but as a holy feeling that comes from your *neshamah.*

In Conclusion

To summarize briefly, we explained with the help of Hashem, that a person needs to utilize the three types of times of being alone, and in addition, one needs to slowly increase his awareness of the concept of feeling "*nochach p'nei Hashem".*

Getting used to this will increase your sensitivity to these concepts, and it bring you to resemble the level of what it's like to standing at *Har Sinai* - when we all stood "*nochach p'nei Hashem",* when Hashem spoke with us; as it is written, *"Face-to-face I spoke with them*."

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *When I concentrate on this awareness as I say the word "Attah" that I am with Hashem face-to-face in a very real way, won't that compromise on my feeling of yirah/awe for Hashem?*

A: We need both *ahavah* (love) and *yirah* (awe) of Hashem. From our love for Hashem we can come to have awe of Hashem. While it is definitely true that a person can be lacking awe of Hashem and thus overdo the love towards Hashem and get too comfortable with Him, we still need both *ahavah* and *yirah* in our relationship with Hashem, and with the more of a real sense of *ahavah* that we develop towards Him the more we can have *yirah*.

Q2: *Isn't it a contradiction to have both ahavah and yirah towards Hashem?*

A: Our entire existence is a contradiction, for we are made up of body and soul, the greatest contradiction possible. Hashem is called "*yoshev b'seiser elyon*", "He resides in the hidden upper chambers" - in a "*seiser*", from the word *stirah*/contradiction, to show us that we are supposed to serve Him amidst all the contradictions in our *Avodah* towards Him. Although *ahavah* and *yirah* towards Hashem are two contradictory concepts, we need both of them and each of them needs other one in order to properly thrive.

Q3: *Doesn't feeling "nochach p'nei Hashem" imply that I am apart from Hashem? If so, how can I feel that He is near me when I am still far apart from Him?*

A: When you're talking to your friend, is he near you or far from you? He is near you. So too, when you talk to Hashem and you know He is in front of you, you can feel that He is near you.

Q4: *When I say "Attah" and I am supposed to feel "nochach pnei Hashem", is that the same concept as feeling like I am part of Hashem? Is it the same thing as "hiskalelus" (integrating with Hashem)?*

A: No, it is not the same thing as *hiskalelus* (integrating) with Hashem. Here we have described a much simpler lever: to feel that Hashem is in front of us. A person can feel that Hashem is "with" him, which is the first level of feeling Hashem, and then he can work on feeling that Hashem is "in front" of him, which is the level that we described here in this class. The level of *hiskalelus* is a far deeper level and we did not address it here.

Q5: In *Shemoneh Esrei, why do we refer to Hashem as "Hu" (Him), and why do we sometimes refer to Him as "Attah" ("You")?*

A: The Men of Great Assembly established *Shemoneh Esrei*, having in mind that there are different layers in our soul; there are external layers in our soul which relate to Hashem only in third-person, as "*Hu*", and the more inner layers of our soul can relate to Hashem in first-person, *Attah*.

There are actually two perceptions of how to understand "*Hu*." The lower level of *Hu* is to simply relate to Hashem in third-person, "*Hu*", (Him), where a person feels that Hashem exists but he doesn't yet feel a part of Hashem. The higher level is to integrate your own existence with Him, which is a much higher perception of relating to Him as "*Hu*".

Q6: *If I relate to Hashem as the Being whom I must draw forth His great rachamim (compassion) on me, is that also called living a life of "nochach pnei Hashem"?*

A: *Rachamim* is a *middah* of Hashem, but it is not the same thing as "*nochach*". "*Nochach*" is to feel Hashem as a reality in front of you.

Q7: *What is the purpose of hisbodedus with Hashem – is it to feel alone with Hashem and thus become isolated from people, or is the purpose of hisbodedus to be able to relate to others in a better way after I do hisbodedus?*

A: Of course *hisbodedus* improves your interpersonal relationships, but it is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal of *hisbodedus* is to feel how you're alone with Hashem, and this of course improves your relationships, but that's not the point. In a sense, though, the purpose of *hisbodedus* is really meant to be carried over into your relationships, because when you do proper *hisbodedus*, you reach greater connection with Hashem, and then you are able to shine that light of *emunah* onto the rest of the world. Avraham *Avinu* excelled in the *middah* of *chessed* towards others, but what did he mainly do? He taught people about *emunah* in Hashem.

20 | Disconnecting From Materialism

Hisbodedus In The 21st Century

We have explained previously, with the help of Hashem, the depth of *hisbodedus*: to bond with the Creator. That is one side of the coin - the other side of the coin, which we will now explain, is to learn how to separate from the materialism of This World.

As long as a person is feeling very connected with This World, it's not possible to have a true bond with Hashem. *Chazal* compare This World and the Next World to fire and water, which cannot co-exist[51]; either you have one or the other, but you can't have both. So too, it's not possible to bond with Hashem if one is very attached to this world; the two are a total contradiction to each other. Thus, in order to have true *hisbodedus*, one must lessen his connection to materialism.

Avraham *Avinu* said, *"I am a stranger and a settler to the land."* He said he is a settler, but he also said he is a stranger. He knew that he inhabited the physical world, but he also placed himself above it and apart from it. *Chazal* say that one should be *daato m'ureves im ha'beriyos,* to get along with people; so we need to be involved with this world to some extent. But we must feel that our stay on this world is only temporary, as if we are a "stranger" here to this "land" – to separate ourselves from being overly attached to This World. We are here, we must be connected with people here, but we also need to be able to disconnect from it.

We have our family; we have a spouse and children; we have friends. We have a home, we have a car, the things we own, our clothing, our health, etc. If we are too connected to it all, we are too connected to the physical dimension.

Of course, Hashem does not want us to totally disconnect from the world. He does not want us to leave our spouse or family. If so, what does Hashem want from us? Especially in our generation, where there is so much more physicality that we need to disconnect from – how do we disconnect from it in a healthy way that will not damage us?

The Materialistic Lifestyle We Live With

The *Avos* (our forefathers) were all shepherds who spend their time in the quiet, tending to the sheep and away from all the noise of people. They were thus able to concentrate better and feel solitude with the Creator. *Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem* (written by *Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam*) writes that because our forefathers spent their lives this way, amidst silence, that was

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how they were able to become so close to Hashem. The forefathers were very close to feeling like a 'stranger' to this earth, and that was how they bonded with Hashem.

But we, who live in in the year 5775, are very, very far from the olden days, and we are certainly very far from the lifestyle of old. So in the time we live in today, how do we have any way of returning to it?

We find that the *Avos* were partially connected with people, and they were partially connected with isolation. They had little materialism on this world, so it was easy for them to be spiritual.

The world we live in today, though, is very different. The world today, since we are born, is totally materialistic. Any child born into today's generation is born into a *"mabul*", a flood, of materialism. He is born into a flood of abundant clothing, interesting games, all kinds of sweets and tasty nosh, and lots of books to read. It's all a giant flood that connects him immensely to This World. As a child grows up, he/she makes more friends who are also materialistic like them, and then they become even more engrossed in materialistic pursuits.

A child today who becomes *bar mitzvah* or *bas mitzvah* is becoming an adult, obligated in the *mitzvos*, and a lavish affair is made for him/her that includes lots of food, music, and other things, which have nothing to do with *mitzvos*, and are instead a contradiction to the *mitzvos* that they are now taking on!

A boy or girl today entering the teenage years then absorbs tons of information about all kinds of topics, through reading, hearing, and seeing all of it. The connection to This World grows stronger with this. They become deeply connected with This World – totally and absolutely connected with physicality.

This way of life is considered the "average" kind of life that kids are experiencing today. With such a way of living, we attempt to make them spiritual, teaching them about Torah, mitzvos, and the will of Hashem. But when they grow up so materialistic, will the concept of *hisbodedus* with Hashem be a concept that talks to them? The entire way of life that we see today, in the year 5775 (or 2016) is totally opposed to a life of *ruchniyus* (spirituality). It is totally far from a life of *hisbodedus* with Hashem.

Why Many People Are Not Succeeding In Hisbodedus

Many people today are trying to *hisbodedus*, but they are spending more time trying to do *hisbodedus* than actually seeing success in it. There are many reasons why people aren't succeeding in *hisbodedus*. But one of the reasons, which is the main reason, is because the person is still living a very materialistic life and he doesn't realize that he has to change. He is remaining with the way of life he always lived with since he was a kid, and he is trying to put *hisbodedus* into it, and of course,

it doesn't work. People are not understanding that they are living a contradiction. *Hisbodedus* simply cannot go together with a materialistic life.

Let's understand deeply that success in *hisbodedus* is not achieved through merely spending time on any one path of *hisbodedus*, whether it's a path we described until now or whether it's any of the other paths that there are in *hisbodedus.* It only happens when a person uses his power of free will to choose a new lifestyle, in which he disconnects from materialism.

Caution: Avoid Extreme Changes

Now we will try to make this more practical, now that we have seen how materialistic life is a contradiction to *hisbodedus*. How, indeed, does Hashem want us to act? What is the right balance?

The first reaction that people tend to have when they hear about "disconnecting from This World" is that they get nervous. "You mean I have to change my whole life around?! Give me a break! I have to sell my nice house, my fancy clothes, and my CD collection, and everything I own?! Must I live very frugally? And then I'm really living a lifestyle of *hisbodedus*?" This is what comes to mind when people hear about the idea of disconnecting from This World.

There are actually people who are capable of living that way. But it only works for certain rare individuals who can do so, because they have a strong nature. It does not work for the general whole of *Klal Yisrael*, and it doesn't work either for those who really want to come close to Hashem. A person does not have the capability to disconnect from everything on This World. Most people will not handle it if they try. It will only cause marital discord and problems with the children as well.

So our only choice we are left with is to somehow find a way that's within our own lifestyle we are living on this world, which can incorporate some degree of disconnection from it.

Separating from materialism of This World has two parts to it: an external part and an internal part.

Learning To Let Go

The external part is for a person to be able to give up one thing of This World. We cannot detach from everything on This World, but what we can do is to try letting go of something and to keep this up for a long time.

What should you give up? That will depend on each person's situation. Each person can find something materialistic that is dear to him – and be prepared to give it up. Then, go ahead and give it up. Let go of it.

Of course, it should be something which will not cause any marital discord or any problems with your children when you give it up. It should be done calmly and from a sincere will to elevate your lifestyle. All of us can do it. We can all give up just one thing. We can't give up everything, but we can give up one thing. That is something we can all do.

This needs to be thought about sensibly. Don't overdo it, or else it will backfire. And *daven* to Hashem for help about it: that it should be something that you are capable of doing, and that it shouldn't bother anyone in your surroundings. Then, slowly train yourself to detach from something on This World that is dear to you.

Realizing That This World Is Temporary

That was the external part of the job. Now we will explain the internal process of how we detach from materialism. It is a deep acceptance in which one attains a new perspective towards This World. We should realize that our stay on This World is only temporary. All of us will one day leave it. The question is not *if* we can disconnect from it or not; the only question is *when* it will happen.

The average lifespan of man is for 70 years, and those who are stronger get to live for 80 years. Ever since the sin of Adam, death is the curse placed upon mankind. We do not live forever. Except for Eliyahu and Chanoch, no man has ever avoided death (And those *tzaddikim,* too, left This World, just not in the form of death!). So we will all take leave of This World one day. We can think about this, and this will help us realize that our stay on This World is only temporary, and then we can feel detached from it.

There are people who think about this and they get morbid and depressed, but that is because they aren't trying to come closer to Hashem, and they are still very attached to This World. For such people, thinking of death is, of course, very scary. But if one seeks to become close to Hashem, thinking about death is a thought that escorts us throughout life. It's a deep awareness about life that we all need to have. The thought of death is a very powerful tool we can use to help ourselves detach from the materialism of This World.

In today's times especially, people are very afraid of thinking about the day of death, which is really a very simple fact of life. People don't think about it and don't talk about it, and any thoughts about it are considered to be depressing, and that it's "best recommended" to avoid any talk about death, for the sake of emotional health and happiness. But our *Chazal* tell us to think

about death, and to think about it all the time. The *Orchos Chaim L'Rosh* wrote, "Place the day of death in front of your eyes."[52]

A Note of Caution

We will soon explain how one can come to accept this. But if someone feels at this point that the thought of disconnecting from This World is a scary or sad kind of thought, the following words are not for them. They will only be able to work on the ideas mentioned until now, not the ideas we are about to say. Perhaps reviewing the previous chapters will be helpful to the reader and enable the reader to develop the inner strength of being able to disconnect from materialism. So if the reader at this point feels that this *avodah* we are describing is scary in any way, it should not be attempted any of the following exercises, and it will only be detrimental to try it.

Examples of Detaching from Materialism

Let us now continue, with Heavenly assistance.

We all have a home, money, CDs, clothing, jewelry, and all other worldly possessions. Let's think: "Is it forever? Is my house forever? Is my furniture forever?

The room I am sitting in – will I always be here for as long as I want?" Even if one would never move from his house, eventually, we will all "move" from our "house" – when we die. So our entire stay here on This World is temporary. It is not forever.

Try the following: go through all of the things in your life and think into how temporary it is. Try it also with your clothing, your car, your jewelry, etc. First recognize that you feel connected to it.

Then, tell yourself that it's only a temporary connection, and that you are never forever connected to it. You can go through all of your items in this way and tell yourself that it is not forever with you. This will slowly help you accept that This World is temporary and it will help you slowly detach from it more and more, weakening your connection with materialism.

You can also try the following. If you go to a hotel for a few days, try the following. Look around the hotel room. You see nice furniture, a nice bed, a nice table, and nice flowers. Do you feel connected to it? If "yes", now ask yourself: Do you feel permanently connected to it? You know the answer is, "No". You know that you're only in a hotel, which you are staying in for a day or two,

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52 Additionally, see Tefillah #0152 – Death, Revival, and Destruction; if you are morbid about death it may be helpful to see Tefillah #0140 – The Fear of Death and Its Purpose

and then you know that you leave it. So, too, look at your home you live in right now, and realize that everything in it is temporary, comparing it to a hotel you're temporarily staying in.

Keep doing this thinking exercise and you will slowly be able to lessen the connection you feel to all your things. You will be able to realize that your home is not really your home, but more like a 'hotel' that you're only staying in temporarily. Think about this, and verbalize it to yourself too.

Another exercise to think about is the following.

We all know people who are not here anymore on This World. They had a home, furniture, clothing, jewelry, cars, and other things. Now they no longer have anything; they were connected to these things while they lived, and now they are not. We can learn from this that we, too, will one day leave all the things we own. Thinking about this will weaken our connection to materialism.

Additionally, you can think about the following: We all know people who had their houses foreclosed by the bank because they couldn't pay their bills. We can see from this clearly that all that we have is temporary. It will happen to all of us at some point, and the only question is, when. Think about it.

Another thing to think about: We all know people who had a good job, a job in which they felt successful, respected and well-paid – and in one day, suddenly, they lost their job, for whatever reason. They were very connected with their job that they liked, and then they lost it all overnight. So too, all of us will one day lose our job – when we eventually take leave of This World.

In Conclusion

So even if we feel connected to This World, we can weaken our connection to it when we think about these things, about how temporary everything is on This World. Through that, we leave our connection to materialism and then connect with spirituality, and then we can have true *hisbodedus* with Hashem.

We must emphasize that the mentality here can only help those who accept these facts happily, as opposed to someone who is afraid or sad when he begins to think about these things. A person who gets sad when he thinks about these things should not attempt these exercises.

Upon internalizing this new perspective on life, we can realize that although we live on This World and feel connected to it, we can use it to perform *mitzvos* and serve Hashem better, rather than to use it just for physical purposes.

In this way, we achieve the balance between getting along with people and with being detached from this world; that we can use this world for holy purposes, for mitzvos and for doing kindness - yet still feel like a "stranger" to this world.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *In Sefer Koheles it says that having yiras shomayim (fear of Heaven), and doing mitzvos is like living in the Next World already on This World, if so, why should we need to disconnect from This World, when we can just live a Next-World kind of existence already on This World (via having yiras shomayim and doing mitzvos)?*

A: Yes, *sefer Koheles* was written by Shlomo HaMelech to show us how to detach from This World, but we can only experience what *Koheles* says when we fulfill the entire *sefer*! We cannot experience a Next World kind of existence if we have never finished the entire *sefer Koheles* yet and if we are not yet doing every last thing it says there.

Q2: *Being that there is an argument in the Rishonim about what the Next World will be, if it will be spiritual or if it will be a soul within a purified body, we see that The Next World can already be on this world, when we live a spiritual life, if so why can't we just live a spiritual life within this physical world and that will be enough of a disconnection from materialism?*

A: As you mentioned, there is an argument of what the future will look like. Everyone agrees that there will be Moshiach, then resurrection of the dead (in which the soul will return to the body on This World). What will happen after that? This is a dispute. The Rambam says that after resurrection we will die again and then we will have a soul with no body. The Ramban says – and most held like him – is that after resurrection we will remain with our bodies, but our body will be purified. So according to the Rambam, the purpose of Creation is to exist only with our soul, while the Ramban is of the opinion that the purpose is to have a purified body.

Q3: *The Chofetz Chaim writes in Ahavas Chessed that doing chessed is what sanctifies us on This World. If so, why can't that be enough to disconnect us from materialism? Why doesn't doing chessed accomplish this too?*

A: The goal is to use the physical world for the spiritual, but before we do that, we need to already develop the ability to disconnect from This World, and then we are able to sanctify physicality, such as through doing chessed. If a person doesn't disconnect from materialism, he will end up becoming attached to This World even as he's doing mitzvos.

For example, there is a mitzvah of *oneg Shabbos*, but if a person is too attached to This World, he will end up becoming a glutton through *oneg Shabbos.* Therefore, we need to already develop

beforehand the idea of disconnecting from materialism, so that we won't become too attached to This World when we have to be involved in it for the sake of mitzvos.

Q4: *Giving up something from This World – must it be done permanently or temporarily?*

A: Do what you are capable of doing. It is better if you give it up permanently, but it is also effective if you give it up temporarily. Know what level you are capable of.

Q5: *Are mentally ill/delusional people considered to be more spiritual, since they are disconnected to a large extent from This World?*

A: If they already became connected to This World before they became insane. If they already were, then yes. If not, then they are not connected to anything – not to physicality and not to spirituality. They are nowhere – not here, not there; like "*Kaf HaKela.*"

Q6: *People who become sick and are deathly ill – are those people more spiritual and disconnected from this physical world?*

A: Sometimes you can see how connected deathly ill people are to the Next World. There are all kinds of ways to communicate with deathly ill people when they are unconscious and you can see what's going on inside them. If the illness is making them totally unconscious, it's very possible that they are very much connected with the spiritual, being that they are disconnected from physicality.

Q7: *The shiur here is similar to the words of the Mesillas Yesharim, that a person first needs perishus (abstinence) from this world, and then after one does that, he can know how to sanctify This World and use it correctly.*

A: Correct- exactly.

Q8: *People who are mentally ill or partially delusional – are they more spiritual, because they are disconnected from the world?*

A: I don't know if you are describing an actual illness, or someone who tends to be delusional, which is simply a bad habit and it cannot be deemed as an actual illness. I would have to know more details to be able to answer this question. I also don't understand what it has to do with being spiritual.

Q9: *If a person feels very connected to the materialism This World, he must change his perspective towards it, or he must change his actions that he's currently doing?*

A: Most people can't handle action and they can handle a change of perspective. Only a few individuals are capable of taking major actions in order to implement these changes, just as we find that there are *Baalei teshuvah* who changed around their whole lives. Only a few are strong enough to make such changes. Most of us can only handle a change of perspective towards This World without drastically separating from it, and we can give up one small thing from This World that's dear to us, but not more than that.

Q10: *Is this just an internal change of mindset, or is it supposed to manifest in something tangible in our life?*

A: Yes, it should be a change that affects something actually going on in your life.

21 | Hisbodedus & Ahavas Yisrael

Does Hisbodedus Compromise On Ahavas Yisrael?

With the help of Hashem, previously, we explained the concept of disconnecting from society; to lessen one's feeling of connection to This World, to feel towards it that it is only temporary.

This all described one side of the coin, however. The three parts to *hisbodedus* which we have explained thus far - *hisbodedus* with oneself, *hisbodedus* between man and his Creator, and disconnection from This World – cannot be everything. If it were, then a person would live entirely with himself and with Hashem, and then what will be with his *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the Jewish people), being that he is so detached from the world…?

True *hisbodedus* does not cause a person to become self-absorbed and to compromise on his *ahavas Yisrael.* Our Rabbis who guided us in matters of *hisbodedus* taught that *hisbodedus* is actually meant to increase our *ahavas Yisrael*. The question, of course, is *how,* but in concept, *hisbodedus* is not meant at all to weaken one's feeling of *ahavas Yisrael*; it is meant to increase the quality of our *ahavas Yisrael.*

In the materialistic side to life, when a person is absorbed in his various material pursuits, his feelings for others begin to get less and less, and surely he doesn't feel a love for others, being that he is very immersed in himself and in his materialistic pursuits. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those who are spiritual, who are mainly involved with becoming closer to G-d. Is a spiritual life of closeness to G-d supposed to weaken our relationships with others and feel detached from them? It seems to be that it should compromise on our love for others, being that *hisbodedus* is to be disconnected from This World.

The truth is that in the beginning stage of *hisbodedus,* a person has to get used to entering inward, speaking to himself and thinking to himself, alone, and he becomes more and more inward. Sometimes this leads to increasing his ego, *chas v'shalom*. In any case, the beginning stage of *hisbodedus*, which is the more "private" stage, is definitely a disconnect from other people, and the risk with it is that it can distance a person from *Ahavas Yisrael*. Let us see what we can do about this: how can we begin to become "alone" when we do *hisbodedus,* in a way that will not diminish our *ahavas Yisrael*?

We will explain how *hisbodedus* is not meant to increase the ego – to the contrary, it is meant to increase our *ahavas Yisrael.*

The Depth of Hisbodedus: Reaching The Root of The Soul

The depth of *hisbodedus* is for a person to enter deeper into himself, as we explained in previous chapters. The more that a person enters inward, the more he experiences his private self. But the truth is that when he reaches the inner point of himself, he reaches his root, and there at the root, he is "one" with *Klal Yisrael.* This is because all of *Klal Yisrael* are all "one" at their root.

If a person never gets to that inner point in himself, then it will be difficult for him to avoid becoming self-absorbed. But once he does reach the root of his soul, he will feel connected to the entire Jewish people. One who does *hisbodedus* in a true way will surely reach this place in himself of deep *ahavas Yisrael.*

Thus, the point of *hisbodedus* is not to reach one's own inner self and to remain there. It is a long journey to get to the self, and upon reaching that depth, a person reveals the root of his own soul, which is called "*Kneses Yisrael"* - the collective unit of the Jewish people. Once reaching this place, a person is not only connected to his own soul, but to the *root* of his soul – and the deep root of his soul is *Klal Yisrael.* There, not only does he retain his *ahavas Yisrael*, but he reaches the root of all *ahavah* (love), and there a person can come to love every single Jew – without exception.

However, even after reaching that deep *ahavas Yisrael* towards others, it's still possible that there are unrefined parts of his soul which are preventing his *ahavas Yisrael* from being revealed totally. But even so, it is a tremendous gain if a person reaches his deep place of *ahavas Yisrael* inside himself. It sharpens his perception of *ahavas Yisrael* and makes him feel a very great love for the Jewish people, even if it's not perfect yet.

Countering The Ego

If a person is doing *hisbodedus* on a regular basis and he finds that his love for other Jews is not increasing, the question is, how can he improve his *hisbodedus* in a way that will not cause him to become self-absorbed and to be able to love others?

At the beginning stage of *hisbodedus*, when a person is beginning to go deeper into himself, he needs to make sure he is not becoming self-absorbed. Therefore, he should try some acts of giving each day, so that he is involved with benefitting other people. In this way, he balances himself out, using the opposite nature of *hisbodedus.*

The second part to this is that along with this – giving to others and awakening the love for others – is that a person needs to begin lessening his self-worry, and to try increasing his feeling of care for others instead. This has to be worked on slowly and step-by-step, in order to slowly pull out of the ego and to instead channel the feeling of care of concern, for others.

We will explain this part more. There is a part in ourselves in which we worry for ourselves. Some of us are more self-absorbed than others, but all of us worry for ourselves. We are all aware of this. Now, if starting to do *hisbodedus* is causing us to become more self-absorbed, it is detrimental.

It merely increases our ego, because the more we enter inward, the more it increases our care and concern for our own self. So it is definitely possible that starting to do *hisbodedus* can cause an egotistical person to become even more egotistical.

Therefore, at the beginning stage of *hisbodedus*, a person needs to also work on lessening his ego, along with acts of giving for others. Those are the two parts which we will need in order to be balanced, when we begin *hisbodedus.*

Summary

To summarize thus far: at the beginning of *hisbodedus*, a person needs to disconnect from the world, but at the same time he needs to be involved with acts of giving to others and in increasing his love for others, in addition to lessening his self-worry by channeling his worry towards others. The end goal of *hisbodedus* is to come to feel a deep love for all other Jews.

Now we will explain the middle stage of *hisbodedus*, which we did not explain yet; it can only be worked on once the first steps have been reached.

The Middle Stage of Hisbodedus: Increased Awareness Towards Self and Others

With the more a person works his way through the first stages of *hisbodedus*, he will discover that his feelings have become more opened. His feelings have become heighted and more sensitive. In addition, he becomes more aware of himself in general.

If a person has not worked to lessen his ego – which was part of the first stage – what will happen, as he continues *hisbodedus*? He becomes more sensitive, but only towards himself. He becomes more aware of himself, but not others. But if a person did it right – if he worked to lessen his ego already in the first stage of *hisbodedus* – then when his feelings heighten as he continues *hisbodedus*, he will become more sensitive towards others, and he will become aware of others.

Compare this to a water pipe. The water will come out of the pipe depending on which direction we turn the pipe towards. With most people, the "pipe" is weak – there is a lack of awareness of one's feelings and self-awareness in general.

But once the "pipe" is opened – through *hisbodedus*, which increases one's feelings – all of feelings will come pouring out, like water from a pipe.

If the ego hasn't been removed yet, the feelings that will come out will only be about himself. All of the love that comes out will be a self-love, not a love for others. But if the ego has been worked on in the first stage, then the feelings and the love which results from *hisbodedus* will be towards others – one will have deeper sensitivity towards others, deeper love towards others, and more awareness of others.

Summary of the Three Steps

Thus, there were three steps which we need in order to increase our *ahavas Yisrael* as we begin *hisbodedus*; let us summarize them, so that it should be clear.

1) In the beginning stage of *hisbodedus*, a person has to make sure that he is involved with acts of giving toward others, with conscious intention to increase his love for others.

2) One needs to lessen his self-worry by channeling his worry towards worrying for others.

3) Then there will be opening of feelings and awareness towards others. This step will be reached only if the first two steps were reached.

Evil Hisbodedus

When all of these three steps are reached, a person is able to reach the root of his soul, which is *Klal Yisrael*, and he loves every single Jew, without exception.

Without going through this kind of preparation for *hisbodedus*, a person is ignorant of the concept of working on the ego, and when he gets involved with *hisbodedus*, although he will see an increase in his spiritual feelings and awareness, at the same time it increases his ego, which is detrimental. Unfortunately, *hisbodedus* only serves to increase the ego and causes a person to become even more self-absorbed, when he hasn't yet worked on lessening his ego before he began *hisbodedus.*

Love and Beyond Love

Another point to be aware of is that our love and feelings for others can only be reached if we ourselves have attained a proper and healthy self-love. Rav Shimon Shkop wrote that love for others means to extend our own love for ourselves, towards others. So we need to make sure that we love ourselves in the first place – in a healthy way – in order to be able to give that love others.

However, being that our love for others is based on how much we love ourselves, our love for others will be limited, when it is merely an extension of our ego. So in order to love other Jews with true *ahavas Yisrael*, we need to reach a love that goes beyond our own ego.

When people are not aware of this, they will remain their entire life at the second stage of *hisbodedus*, and they will never reach the third step of *hisbodedus*. Their love for others will be limited to how much they love themselves. This doesn't mean they will be self-absorbed and only worry for themselves. They will still be concerned for others, but it does not go beyond how much they love their own selves. It means that their love for others first has to pass through their "I", which limits the love for others.

Thus, we must be aware of the third stage. The third stage is to turn our "*ani*" (I) into "*ayin*" ("nothing"/self-nullification). It is to go beyond our own "I" and reach the root of the "I". The root of the "I" is called "*Kneses Yisrael*" - the point of integrating with *Klal Yisrael,* where the "I" is part of a greater whole. There, the love for other Jews is not coming from my own self-love, but from a higher source of love: to integrate myself with *Klal Yisrael*, and to love them from there.

Without being aware of this third stage, a person is still involved with his "I", so all of his love for others is limited, for it is stemming from his own self-love. But in the third stage, a person loves others not because he has extended his ego to them, but because he is integrated with *Klal Yisrael* on the collective level. Of course, in order to get to this higher kind of love, one has to first reach the previous level, of being able to extend his ego towards others.

At the third stage, an entirely new kind of awareness towards life is reached. It is the total kind of *Ahavas Yisrael*, which is beyond the "I" and thus it is not limited to the "I". It is to join the collective unit of *Klal Yisrael*, and to love *Klal Yisrael* on a personal level.

Another Difference Between The 2nd & 3rd Levels of Ahavas Yisrael

There is also another deep difference between the second and third levels of *ahavas Yisrael* that we are describing, which we will mention.

In the second level, the love for others passes through one's "I", so the person still sees himself as first place; as *Chazal* say, "*Chayecha Kodmin*" ("Your life comes first").

But in the third level, where a person's *ahavas Yisrael* transcends his own private self, although there is still a concept of '*Chayecha Kodmin'* even on this level, it is to a much lesser degree. The '*Chayecha Kodmin'* is still there because he is connected to the second and third stages at once, thus there is still a place for *'Chayecha Kodmin,'* due to the second stage that attaches him to the third stage. But his actual love for other Jews is above that place of '*Chayecha Kodmin'*. In this kind of love, a person is able to reveal a tremendous mesirus nefesh for another, and to greatly lessen his feeling of "*Chayecha Kodmin*".

The Fourth and Highest Stage of Ahavas Yisrael

Finally, above these three levels we have described, comes a fourth stage, which is the innermost level of *hisbodedus*.

The beginning of *hisbodedus* is to enter deep into the "I", and the end of *hisbodedus* is to join with the Creator and become attached with Him. When one is **truly** connected to the Creator, he loves other Jews as an automatic result, for *Chazal* say that "If one loves his friend, he loves his children", because the children are a part of their father.

To summarize: One has to first reach the depth of his soul. From there, he can love others as a result, being that his own self-love will increase. This is all within the stage of the ego. After that stage, it is upon him to reach the root of his soul, which is above his "I." This is the place of feeling *ahavas Yisrael* on the collective level, and it is a love that goes beyond the ego. After that, one can then reach true attachment with the Creator; if he truly loves the Creator, that means that he will love His children as a result of this.

Thus, we have seen how the complete level of *hisbodedus* does not lessen *Ahavas Yisrael* (or love for others in general); to the contrary, it is meant to foster an endless kind of *Ahavas Yisrael* and love for all creations – for they are all the children of Hashem.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *How can a person actually move from one stage to the next?*

A: Moving From Stage One to Stage Two is the actual journey of *hisbodedus*. Doing *hisbodedus* on a regular basis increases your spiritual feelings, as a natural process, with the more you are doing *hisbodedus* and getting more in touch with yourself. Step One is clear. Anyone who works on *hisbodedus* correctly will be able to reach Stage Two. Stage Three, which is to reach the root of the soul, is reached with the more a person enters inward, such as through the methods of breathing and the other methods we explained in previous classes[53]; along with prayer and intense perseverance to get there.

What we pointed out here in this class is that a person has to be aware that there is a third stage. If a person isn't aware of the third stage, he will always remain in the second stage and think that the goal of *hisbodedus* has been reached, thinking that he has reached the deepest place in himself.

What is the truth? There is really no end. The goal is to reach the *Ein Sof* of Hashem, which is endless. Thus, the more a person is aware of the third stage, he can penetrate deeper and deeper into himself to get there, along with prayer to get there. In this way he can reach Stages Two and Three as a natural process, and then he can reach not only his own soul, but the root of his soul, which is *Kneses Yisrael.*

Q2: *I do not feel this coming as a natural process, and it is very hard.*

A: Stage One is to decrease the ego as you begin *hisbodedus*, and at the same time you also need to feeling that you are entering deeper into yourself (along with davening to Hashem for this).

Q3: *How do we reconcile the third and fourth stages of Ahavas Yisrael with the concept of 'Chayecha Kodmin'?*

A: We spoke about this during the class. '*Chayecha Kodmin'* only exists in the second stage of *hisbodedus*, but if one reaches the third level and fourth levels, there is much less of a degree of *'Chayecha Kodmin'* (though it will certainly exist in the realm of *halachah*).

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53 See class #03 and #04

Q4: *Doesn't it say that the mitzvah to love other Jews is only 'like' yourself, and that it is impossible to love others just as much as you love yourself (and certainly then you can't love others more than you love yourself)?*

A: There is an argument between the Ramban and the Ramchal if it is impossible to love others like yourself or not. The Ramban's view is that you must love others as much as you can, but that you cannot actually love others as much as yourself. The Ramchal's view is that you can love others as much as you love yourself. In actuality, it is not a disagreement. The Ramban is addressing a lower level of love, in which a person loves others through his own self-love, and that is really the second stage we described in this class. The Ramchal is talking about a higher kind of love, which is the third level we described.

Q5: *I am reviewing what I learned in the past classes on hisbodedus and I am up to the stage of self-accounting and examining my actions, to view myself from outside of myself. I am having a hard time with this.*

A: In that chapter[54] there were several methods presented, such as looking at pictures or videos of oneself and other methods. Have you tried that?

Q6: *I am having a hard time, though, with visualizing what I did when I did it, as I watch myself perform.*

A: Using those methods we gave should be able to help you visualize, but if you are finding it too hard you may skip it.

Q7: *When I do hisbodedus I feel more loving towards others, but when it comes down to my actual day-to-day life, I find that I have lost those feelings and then wonder where it has gone.*

A: How do you love others – do you love others only based on the qualities you see in them…? The general way to overcome your disgust you feel towards others is that during your time of *hisbodedus*, concentrate on how much you would want to love that person. First imagine a person whom you find it easier to love and concentrate on how much you love for him, so that you can increase your love for him. After you do *hisbodedus* like that, you will find that you love that person even more in your actual day-to-life. When you realize that, you can now do this with all other people you know.

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54 See classes #07 and #08

It is better to try this one-by-one as opposed to concentrating on how much you love the general whole of *Klal Yisrael*, because you cannot grab too many high levels at once. Instead, it is better to focus on increasing love towards one person at a time.

Q8: *In order to review all that I've been though in these classes, what can the Rov suggest – should I start from the beginning of the classes, or is there perhaps a shortcut to get to the goal?*

A: Shortcuts are only through computers.

Q9: *How much time needs to elapse between each of the stages in order to progress to the next stage? Week by week, or month by month?*

A: Even a month between each level is not enough time to acquire a level. For this reason, Hashem gave us many years to live!

Q10: *Is it possible to keep listening to these classes even I haven't yet worked on the previous levels?*

A: Listening is fine, but make sure you are not working on two different stages at once. It is good to know the map beforehand of where you need to get to – "*sof maaseh, b'machshavah techilah"* (the end of actions, is first with thought). Therefore, it is good to listen to these *shiurim*, so you can see where you need to get to, even if you are not there yet. You can listen to a *shiur* even though you know that you can't work on its ideas yet, rather than attempting to work on the ideas after hearing each *shiur*. In fact, it is even better to listen to the *shiurim* even though you're not holding yet at working on them, just to see the general picture, and after that one can begin to work on the concepts he heard.

22 | Conclusion – The Calmer Life

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"[55], 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.[56]

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 *chesed.* 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.*

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55 Editor's Note: English translation of this sefer is available as "Sefer HaMaspik" (Feldheim publishers).
56 See Preparing For Hisbodedus, chapter #05 (Lifestyle of Hisbodedus) and chapter #06 (Essence 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 [who lived from 1186–1237]; and we also mentioned some of the methods of Rav Avraham Abulefia [who lived from 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 all of you 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 & 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[57]. 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.

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57 This idea is further elaborated upon in Search For Serenity (דע את מנוחתך)

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[58], 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*[59]; *Chazal* say there were seven women prophetesses[60], 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: it 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*).

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58 See previous chapter (GTYK Hisboddedus Practice_021)
59 The source for this is Sefer HaMaspik L'Ovdei Hashem
60 Megillah 14a

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".[61]

Q6: *In the material of these classes, are there any sources in Chassidus? Also, 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

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61 This concept is further elaborated upon in Getting To Know Your Thoughts, Chapter 8

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.)

23 | Appendix 1: Elul – Renewal

Hashem Recreates the World Continuously

Hashem created the world on the 25th of Elul. On the surface, it seems that Hashem created the world one time, 5,773 years ago.

But, Hashem also re-creates the world every single day, as is explained in the *Gemara*.[62] *"Hamechadesh betuvo b'chol yom tamid ma'asei bereshis."* (He renews, in His goodness, every day constantly, the act of creation.) Not only did this happen the first time on the 25th of Elul, 5773 years ago, but in fact, every single day, Hashem re-creates His world and renews it.

What difference does it make to us whether the world was created only one time 5,773 years ago, or if Hashem keeps re-creating his world every day anew?

With Hashem's help, we will try to answer this question and explain how the fact that the world is constantly being re-created is relevant and has practical implications for every one of us.

We will look into the immense repercussions of the fact that Hashem keeps re-creating the world. Hashem created the world, on the first day, on the second, third, fourth, fifth, and on the sixth day he created Adam.

On each day of Creation, it was said to be "*ki tov*,"[63] that it is good, and when Hashem completed the Creation, He testified that it was all very good. "*Vayar Elokim es kol asher asah, v'hinei tov me'od.*"[64]

But after Hashem had created the Creation, which was **all very good**, Adam and Chavah did not listen to Hashem, Who commanded them not to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil)*. By eating from it, they not only damaged themselves, but they also damaged the entire world.

If a person would not have the energy he needed for each day's spiritual work, then every morning he would start it from an imperfect, unclean, contaminated place.

But because Hashem continuously re-creates the world every day, He gives each person the opportunity to start each day from the depths of his soul, from a place that is totally innocent, totally pure and totally holy [thus providing perfect conditions for his spiritual growth].

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62 U'mechadesh bechol yom ma'asei bereisheis – "Who renews the Creation every day" (Chagiga 12:2). Also in the morning prayers, just before K'riyat Shema.

63 After each day, Hashem saw that it "ki tov – was good" (Bereishis 1)

64 Hashem saw that "v'hinei tov meod – and it was very good" (Bereishis 1:31)

Continuation Vs. Renewal

There are two frames of reference that Hashem gives us in order to observe the world. One view is that there was only one Creation, that Hashem created the world once 5,773 years ago and, ever since, the Creation continues every day from the previous day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Just about every one of us has been reincarnated many times during the 5,773 years since the "first" Creation. Sometimes we did good deeds, and sometimes, G-d-forbid, we did not-so-good deeds, sometimes we were good and holy and sometimes, *chas ve'shalom*, we were not so holy. If a person lived with only this perception, then they would live their life with all their past, which was sometimes good and sometime less good.

The second view is that Hashem planted in the world a force of re-creation continuously every day, every hour, every minute, every instant. Hashem re-creates and gives a person energy to always start with a new beginning that is not affected by the defects of the past– not affected from all the transformations the person has gone through in all the years since the world was created.

Knowing Our Strengths and Weaknesses

Each and every one of us knows their own soul to some degree. We all have our own weaknesses, which are expressed differently by different people. In some people, it is expressed by a tendency for sadness – some people get stressed easily while others get overwhelmed. For other people, it is expressed by fears. In other people, it is expressed by a tendency to be suspicious and in other people it is expressed in low self-esteem.

There are many other predispositions that people have, depending on their particular history. A great many of these tendencies are the results of the many situations that the person went through during his life in childhood, in adolescence, or at various other times in their life.

If a person would try to remember where certain difficulties stem from, he may be able to recall and sort through all kinds of adverse situations that he went through, along with the particular situation when this mishap was implanted in his soul.

Sometimes these situations happened in this life, but very often, these emotional difficulties do not stem from this lifetime, but from the many other lives that the person lived during his various incarnations *(gilgulim)* since the start of Creation.

Getting Rid of Our Emotional Blocks

Our soul, which is now clothed in our current body, went through thousands of years in This World, in *Gan Eden* or even in, *chas veshalom, Gehinnom*. We have a lot of baggage that has

accumulated in our soul– we are an accumulation of a lot of scars and many emotional disturbances. And these disturbances can combine generating whole new disturbances!

If each one of us had only one disturbance, or even a couple, it would have been much easier to deal with. But usually each one of us has at least a few disturbances, and many times dozens and even hundreds.

How can a person get rid of all these emotional blocks? Here we arrive to the special power we spoke about that is imbedded in the month of *Elul*.[65]

The advice seems to be to deal with one problem– to try to figure out how it started, what is its reason, and by finding its root reason, it would be possible to try to remove the source of that disturbance. Sometimes we can find the reason for a disturbance if we could track down its source. Sometimes, however, it is more hidden, especially if the reason for the disturbance was not in this life, but was in a previous incarnation. It is almost impossible to get to the bottom of any disturbance using the mind alone.

So, if it is difficult to solve one disturbance, how much more difficult is it to solve them all. Therefore, it is impossible to accomplish fixing everything. Of course, if we could clearly see the reason for the disturbance, we should go through it and fix it.

But for everything else, either because the reason is hidden or because there are too many disturbances, we have the power of renewal of *"Mechadesh betuvo bechol yom tamid ma'asei bereshis"*.

The *koach* (strength) that Hashem uses to renew the Creation every day gives us a new, tremendous and amazing ability to deal with the tribulations of our *nefesh* in order to attain a more *pnimi* (internal) and pleasant life.

The Renewal Within

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65 How do we balance this idea of concentrating on renewal with the avodah of Elul which is focusing on what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?

In response to this question, the Rav answered: "In fact there is an avodah of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a cheshbon hanefesh with their lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be on renewal.

The Ten Days of Teshuvah are also days of renewal, because if a person only does teshuvah, and only looks at the past, he will only focus on his shortcomings of the past.

The Rambam says that a ba'al teshuvah is called a breiah chadashah (new being).

If a person doesn't regret the past they cannot feel the renewal of mechadesh bechol yom … If someone does cheshbon hanefesh 5–10 minutes per day, then they should try to go back to the place of renewal also. This is the depth of a ba'al teshuvah who feels like a new being."

This force of renewal is found in the inner recesses of everyone's soul.

In the parts of the soul that a person is aware of which are closer to the physical, a person feels that every day is a continuation of the previous day. But in the very depths of everyone's soul, is the place of *"Asher yatzar es ha'adam b'chochmah* – That He created man with wisdom."[66] Iyov asked *"Chochmah mei'ayin timatza?* – Wisdom, from where is it found?"[67] The answer is that in the root of the creation of a Jew is the place that is known exclusively only to Jewish souls – Hashem is constantly re-creating continuously.

This phenomenon, that Hashem re-creates the world continuously (and one's private soul in particular) means that the soul is re-created without any defects, impressions, or disturbances imprinted from the beginning of Creation.

"Chadashim labekarim, rabbah emunasecha"– "They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness,"[68]; *"Briyah chadashah mamash"*– "In actuality, a new creation".[69]

As such, a person is like a newborn baby or like a new convert. He starts anew in that place in the soul, where there are no imprints. The *Mishna* in Avos explains, *"Kotev al neyar chalak v'lo kotev al niyyar machuk"*, that we can "write on a clean slate and not on an erased piece of paper".[70] There, a person can start anew; there he has a future that starts growing from a new beginning.

A person first must know that there is such a place in the soul, and then reach that place. He needs to understand that there is such a place in the soul where he could start anew, every day, every hour, and any time.

[When b*nei Yisrael* were in the desert for forty years, Hashem gave them *manna* from Heaven every single day for their sustenance.] What was the necessity for the *manna* to descend daily? Hashem could have brought it down once a week or once a month so that it would stay fresh. Hashem gave them the *manna* every day so that they will feel "*Chadashim labkarim rabbah emunasecha.*"[71]

Every morning when the *manna* fell, they felt that there was new food in the world, because it was a new world. This *manna* was white, and whitened their sins, and clearly allowed them to start every day from this new, white, blank page in their soul.

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66 Gamara Brachos 80b
67 Iyov, 28:12
68 Rashi, Eichah 3:23
69 "Briyah chadashah mamash" (Chesed l'Avraham 3:22).
70 "Teaching a child is like ink on a new page, and teaching an old man is like ink written on an erased piece of paper" (Pirkei Avos 4:25).
71 "Chachmah mei'ayin timatz – Wisdom where is its root?" (Iyov, 28:12)

Believe In Renewal, Then See It

First of all, as we explained, a person must know that the inner strength in his soul experiences a new beginning every day.

It is only the external part of our soul that feels the world as if it is merely continuous; a day follows from the previous day, from the previous week, from the previous month, from the previous year. But in the depths of our soul, we can access the power of renewal.

After a person knows and believes the fact, that the world is always being re-created, a person should try to observe the world and see all the things that are renewed each day.

Chazal say that a chicken lays an egg every single day.[72] *Chazal* also say that in the future a woman will be able to give birth every day instead of after nine months. This is simply because the world is constantly being re-created!

We need to observe this in order to silence the external noises in our soul in order to listen to the deepest internal place in us. If we do that, we can access the place of the inner wellsprings in the soul, where the soul is continually renewed. In the language of the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, it was said, *"Na'aseh k'ma'ayan hamisgaber"*. A person becomes like a flowing wellspring,"[73] which keeps renewing.

A person who does not quiet his soul is only aware of things that happen externally, so he only sees the world as a continuation of the past.

Internal Quiet

A person has to quiet his soul, either by listening to a *niggun*, or nibbling on something tasty, or by relaxing in a comfortable position. All these are tools to reach the place of internal quiet where he can quiet their heavy feelings and thoughts.

When he is in a place of quiet, he can then dwell on this simple thought: "I am being renewed. Hashem is in my heart, and is renewing me every moment."

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72 "Asida ida sheteled b'chol yom." The Gemara compares it to a chicken laying eggs every day (Shabbos 30).
73 Mishlei, 18:14

Repeat this sentence dozens of times. This should only happen when you are in this quiet place – the deepest place in the soul. Try to repeat this from total awareness and slowly try to experience them as deep as possible in your soul.[74]

Each one of us should try to do this "quieting" every morning for a few minutes, and feel the reality of Hashem in the heart, and then try to believe and try to experience that "Hashem infuses in me every day new *koach*, renewing me from the start." We can realize that "Hashem gives me a new *koach* to succeed. Even though I couldn't succeed in the past, I was given new energies to succeed and if today I will not succeed, tomorrow I will be given again new energy so that I will succeed then."

If a person starts each day with this process of internal observation it will fill him with mighty power. The whole day will be built from this great infusion from Hashem that resides in each of us and gives us power every day.

Also, during the day, especially after a person fell in *emunah*, or did something inappropriate, or expressed something that had disappointed him, the advice is to go back to the place where we were at, and to believe that "Hashem is planting in me new power, which is not affected by all the failures of the past."

If a person works on this correctly, with patience and clarity, from a stable place with the understanding that on one the hand the world continues forward to the next day, but that the world is also re-created every day, then he will receive great powers of strength and purity, beauty and liveliness.

The ones who work on this will merit, with Hashem's help, that their obstacles will become smaller so that they will be able to overcome them. But even more so, the person will live an uplifted and happier life.

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74 In response to a question, the Rav explained that the best time to try this is at the very beginning of the day, before you start your daily routine. It's best to get up a few minutes earlier, and do this before everyone else wakes up. Then you would start your day from this clean, pure and internal state.

24 | Appendix 2: Serving Hashem Through Breathing

Cheshvan – The Smell Left Behind From Yomim Noraim

We are now in the month of *Cheshvan*, after all the festivals of Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos, heading into the winter. We are taught by our Sages that every month contains a special ability which we can use to serve Hashem. In the *sefarim hakedoshim,* our Sages tell us that the power of the month of *Cheshvan* is the sense of *reiach*, smell.

Smell is unique from the rest of the senses in that it continues to linger with us even after what we have smelled isn't in front of us anymore. The senses of sight, hearing, taste, and touch can only be sensed when you're sensing it in front of you. You can't see, hear, taste or touch something if it's not in front of you. But you can continue to smell something even when it isn't in front of you anymore. For example, when a person smells flowers, he can remember how it smelled long after the flowers aren't here anymore.

This is why the month of *Cheshvan* is connected with "smell". During *Cheshvan*, we are left with the spiritual 'smell' of the *Yomim Noraim*, long after it's gone. What is this sense of smell that we remain with from the *Yomim Noraim*, and how we can use it?

Having Quiet Time Every Day To Reflect

Firstly, before we continue, we must know that if a person wishes to serve Hashem in a true and inner way, one needs to have quiet "heart time" every day (which we spoke about last month).

During each of the continuing months, we will explain what the *avodah* of each month is. But in every month, our goal is the same: to live a more inner kind of life. This can only be done with our "heart time" that we must set aside every day. We need this heart time in order to internalize any *avodah* we do.

If someone doesn't set aside time every day for heart time, it is not possible to really understand any of the coming ways of *avodas Hashem* which we will speak about in the coming months. We **must** have times of quiet every day in order to think and reflect into our inner world. Without this "heart time", not only will we be preventing from actualizing any of *avodah*; we won't even understand at any of the methods of *avodah* at all.

The purpose here is to open our *pnimiyus* (inner world) to us and reveal a more inner kind of life. This needs specially set aside time for every day; we must seclude ourselves a little from the world, in order to open up the internal world within us.

We have repeated this point several times, because it must be very clear: We must set aside time every day for "heart time". There is nothing to be gained from these words unless we have this time every day.

Smell Helps Us Sense Our Inner World

Having understood that, now we can start the *avodah* of this month: using our sense of smell (the *chush ha-rei'ach*).

When used in an in inner way, the sense of smell helps us feel beyond the external dimension of things. When we smell something, we are sensing something more internal than what it appears to be.

Every Jew's soul wants to know of the inner world of the soul, but we cannot sense it with the other four senses. The sense of smell is only the sense that is able to sense any *pnimiyus* (inner, spiritual layer of reality) in our life. The Sages say that the only physical sense which our soul has pleasure from is the sense of smell. Smell is the most spiritual kind of sense from all the senses. It is beyond the physical senses - it can "smell" spirituality. The external, superficial layer of our sense of smell only smells what is physical, but there is an inner layer to our sense of smell: the ability so 'smell' the spiritual.

Our sense of smell has two layers to it. The external, superficial layer of smell is when we smell the physical, such as smelling the scent of a flower. The inner layer of our sense of smell is to smell the spirituality in even the physical. Our smell is able to reach deep into the physical and smell something spiritual in it.

Smelling spirituality can show us how something which looks only physical can really be spiritual.

The Power of Breath

Our nose can do two things: it can smell, and it can breathe. The power of breath[75] in us is essentially the *nishmas chaim* (the "breathe of life") that was breathed into us from Hashem.

It is written, "*Every soul praises Hashem*", and the Sages explain this to mean that "for every breath a person breathes, a person must praise Hashem". Thus, one must be aware that his every breath comes from Hashem. If one is not aware of his breathing, he is not able to thank Hashem for it, because if he does not feel it, he cannot appreciate it. If a person is unaware of his breathing, maybe he will be able to express his gratitude to Hashem after every ten times that he breathes in and out, but he will not be able to feel grateful to Hashem for every single breath. Only when one

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75 In Hebrew, "breath" is "neshimah". It is also known under the terms of neshimah (inhale) and neshifah (exhale).

becomes aware of his breathing can he come to thank Hashem for every single breath that he breathes.

Beginning To Become Aware of Your Breathing

How does one begin to feel and become aware of his breathing? One needs to set aside time for this and **sit quietly**, and start exhaling and inhaling, with calmness. **Pay attention to the breathing**, and **listen, slowly, to the breathing**. Then you will begin to ***feel*** the breathing.

Quiet time is necessary for this, because if a person is harried, like if he is mentally anxious about something, and surely if he is physically bombarded, then there is no chance that he will be able to feel his breathing and become aware of it. But if a person sets aside time in his day for this, even if it's just **5 minutes a day**, or even **3 minutes a day**, and he tries to become aware of each breath that he breathes during this time – not only when will he become aware of his breathing, but he will begin to feel a more *inward* kind of feeling as he is exhaling and inhaling.

Without having this quiet time to feel your breathing, your breathing is only being experienced superficially, as if it is one of the many various functions of the body. But when a person makes sure to have this quiet time during the day to feel his breathing and to pay attention to his breathing, he will begin to uncover the *p'nimiyus* (the inner depth) that is contained in every breath.

Inhaling and Exhaling To Reach Our P'nimiyus (Inner Essence)

Many people, especially in our times where people are borrowing secular ideas that come from the gentile world, are practicing a method of breathing where a person imagines that he is releasing any negativity from his body upon exhaling, and upon inhaling, the person imagines that his breathing in new energy that will invigorate his body. However, this is just an external use of breathing. Our Sages revealed to us the inner way to use the power of breathing, which goes far deeper than this.

When we speak here of setting aside quiet time during the day to feel your breathing, we are not intending to copy the gentile approach. Our intention here is to tread the path that our previous Sages took when it came to this power, and it was they who taught us about it.

When we became of our breathing, we are essentially becoming aware that there is a *nishmas chaim*, a "breath of life", that was breathed into us by Hashem; and thereby become closer to Hashem from this depth that we reach. Our breathing, which is sustained by Hashem's breath, is thus our very life. We can find the very source of our life contained in our breathing. When we begin to become aware of our breathing, quietly and calmly, by listening to our breath, we begin to recognize and feel an entirely different and inner perspective towards what life is.

Let's explain what is meant here. In whatever action we perform, whether we use our sense of sight, hearing, speech, or anything else that we do, most of the time we are unaware of these actions. These actions are usually not connected to our awareness. Most of the time we are far from our own selves, and surely that will mean that we are far from Hashem – because most of the time, we are far from our own inner world.

Therefore, when we begin to take deep breaths and we are listening deeply to the breathing, we need to bring the breath into a deeper place in ourselves, and then we exhale that breathe and we go deeper from there, from the deeper place that we have already reached. Slowly as we keep doing this, we can keep penetrating further and further into ourselves, deeper and deeper into ourselves.

From all of the senses, the sense of smell (which our breathing is enabled by) is the deepest and most inner kind of sense. When we see something, sometimes it can have a deep effect on us, and sometimes it does not. When we hear something, sometimes we are deeply affected, but sometimes we are not. When we touch something, we are feeling the physicality of something, and we are not feeling anything deep in this. But when we inhale the scent of something, using our sense of smell, we can sense it deeply. We can keep taking in the scent of something, where we continue to smell it more deeply.

In the same way, we can also deepen our breathing. We need to try this in the actual sense. For every breath that you exhale and inhale, you can take the breath deeper and deeper into yourself. Train yourself to slowly deepen your breathing, deepening your breathe each time.

This is an amazing ability which Hashem has given to His creations. It is a physical act of exhaling and inhaling, yet it is a use of the sense of smell, which is the only physical sense that our *neshamah* enjoys, as our Sages taught. It is the sense which we can use to penetrate deeply into ourselves. When a person gets used to this, sitting quietly and calmly, taking in deep breaths and listening to them, it can open up before him a great opening that will help him get to deeper places in his soul.

Entering Our Inner World

The *avodah* of a person, as we have mentioned and as is known, is to enter into his inner world, and live an internal life, a life of the heart, a life of living the depth of the *neshamah*. The power of breathing which Hashem has given to man is one of the amazing powers which man can use to enter into his inner world.

Of course, the main *avodah* of a man is to learn Torah and to keep the *mitzvos*, and the main *avodah* of a woman is to keep the *mitzvah* of modesty. And the common denominator between all men and women is that we all have to work on our *middos*, so that our hearts can become more purified and so that the barriers between us and Hashem will be removed. Then we can enter into

the inner depth contained in our heart. But there is also another way for us to enter into our inner world, which works in tandem with keeping the mitzvos (and it is not independent of learning Torah and keeping mitzvos, *chas v'shalom*): the power of breathing can help us enter more inward into ourselves.[76]

At first, getting used to it will feel like a mere breathing exercise, and you will only feel it in the physical sense. But if you get used to deeply listening to your breathing as you take the deep breaths, concentrating deeply into this, you will suddenly feel that you have entered deeper places which you never knew about until now that were inside of you.

This is one of the powers that help us serve Hashem, but it is not necessarily meant to be the path that every person must take. Some people are more inclined to this *avodah*, and some people are less inclined to take this path. But for those who do feel inclined towards this path, this *avodah* can be a great key for them to enter their inner world.

It begins from a mere physical act of exhaling and inhaling, and at first it will not feel very inward or spiritual at all, but as you get used to deeply listening to the breathing, the breathing will first enter deeper into the physical heart, and eventually as you keep doing it, it will enter into the deeper and more spiritual parts. (This is the "*ruach chaim*", the "spirit of life", which penetrates into the "*Ruach*" that is found in the heart).

A Word of Caution Before Beginning The Breathing Exercise

We must emphasize that this *avodah* must be done calmly, slowly, and patiently. If a person will try to accelerate the process by taking in many deep breaths in quick succession of each other and he's anxiously trying to get inward with each breath, this is *physically endangering*, and it is spiritually harming as well. It must be done quietly and calmly, pleasantly, and not with pressure to get anywhere.

You need to strongly want to get there, of course, but it must not be forced and anxious. You need to want to get there calmly, with serenity. The desire should be calm. You are calmly trying to get to get deeper into yourself.

We have had to give special caution about this, because it is very possible for one to harm himself if he is ignorant of these rules. Now we can begin, with Hashem's help, of how to make this more practical. Although these are very subtle matters, we will try to explain it as much as Hashem allows us to, and to explain as precisely as we can.

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76 The sources in our sefarim hakedoshim that discuss the avodah of "breathing" are: in the sefarim of Rav Abulefia, and sefer Yesod Yosef (of Reb Shlomo of Zhevil). For more on the avodah of breathing, derashos of Tefillah_034_ Revival of The Living and in Fixing.Your.Water_006_The Desire For Movement, and more extensively in the Hebrew shiurim of the series דע את נשמתך

Step 1: Becoming Aware of Your Normal Breathing

The first step is to begin with your normal breathing. Become aware of your breathing, and don't try to manipulate your breathing in any way that you are not used to. Simply become aware of your normal breathing. This is the first step: sit with yourself each day for a few minutes, breathe normally, and just pay attention to the breaths.

Step 2: Deep Breaths

After you feel that you have become more aware of your normal breathing and that this is awareness has become more natural to you and that you're not straining yourself for this, now comes the next step. Try to deepen your breathing a bit more. Sit and take slightly deeper breaths than your normal breathing. The first time you do this, take a deep breath, and keep repeating this for a few times, with the very same kind of deep breath.

After you feel that you have reached a certain depth, and that it is natural to you and you are not straining yourself to feel it, try to deepen the breathing a bit more. Concentrate a bit more deeply on the breathing, and breathe in more deeply than before, and keep repeating.

We need to keep doing this until we can it easily without concentrating too deeply on it. Do not try to accelerate the process of trying to reaching a deeper place in yourself each time. Just go slowly in this process. Breathe in a bit deeper after a number of breaths, keep deepening the breathing this way, and slowly, you will see that you have reached a deeper place in yourself, but without concentrating so hard to get there.

Step 3: Sudden Inner Recognition

When you have reached a deeper place in yourself, at some point, you will suddenly recognize that you have the reached a deeper place in yourself. This might not happen to you right away as soon as you reach the deeper place in yourself. You might feel it sometime after you have slowly gotten there, where it will suddenly dawn upon your awareness.

This does not mean that you have simply learned how to take deeper breaths. If you have done it correctly and you have gotten further into yourself with the breathing, it is like entering into a new room in yourself, where you see what is inside of it. When you deepen your breathing and you have truly reached a deeper place into yourself, you will know that you are there. You will begin to recognize a deeper place in yourself that you were not aware of until now. If you do not feel that you've reached a deeper place in yourself, it must be that all of the deep breathing was done superficially, with not enough genuine intent to go deeper into yourself.

When you have reach a deeper place in yourself, of this Chazal refer to when they said, "For every breath, praise Hashem." The meaning of this statement is not that each breath is like the breath before it and that you must praise Hashem for the same kind of each of these breaths. Rather, it means that each new breath that we breathe can help us enter deeper into ourselves, which gives us greater inner recognition of ourselves, and thus there is new reason to praise Hashem for each of these breaths.

The power of deep breathing can provide a person with a great opening, a key, to a greater depth of feeling and inner recognition, because it takes you to a deeper place in yourself. Therefore, we must emphasize that it needs to be done slowly, and to keep repeating the process described until you are calm, which enables you to act from a deeper place in yourself.

Hashem says, "*My son, give your heart to me*." Hashem wants our hearts, and the kind of heart that Hashem wants us to give to Him is that we give Him the very depth that we reach in ourselves. Reaching a deeper place in our heart, which we can reach through the power of deep breathing, enables us to daven to Hashem from a deeper and more genuine place in ourselves. It enables us to be kind to others from a deeper place in ourselves. It enables us to really use our hearts for Hashem; "Hashem wants the heart" (*Rachmana liba ba'ee*).

There are many ways of how we can reach the depth of the heart: through exertion in Torah learning, through *tefillah*, through fixing our *middos*, and other ways as well. But an additional way to get to our heart, as we explained here, is to use the power of breathing: to get used to breathing deeply and to reach a deeper place in oneself, from the breathing.

When we reach deeper into ourselves, we are able to act from a more genuine place in ourselves, from our heart. When one gets used to this power and he is regularly reaching a deep place in himself via the act of deep breathing, he will see a transformation in his life, where his actions will be emanating from his heart.

Step 4: Reaching The Self

Let's try to continue explaining this *avodah*, although it's a matter that is very deep, subtle, and hidden.

After a person feels that he has reached a deeper place in himself and he feels that he has reached the deepest possible place in himself that he's aware of, now comes the next stage, where a person can slowly penetrate even further than this [as he continues the deep breathing]. He will eventually feel that he has reached the very essence of his "I" – the deepest possible place in oneself. One can reach it by continuing to breathe deeply, feeling that he is getting deeper and deeper into himself, until he eventually reaches his "I".

At that point, his breathing is helping him touch upon his very "I". His breathing has brought him into the deepest possible place in oneself. In order to reach such a place in oneself and to be able to breathe deeply to get there, it takes a lot of hard work before this. It will take a lot of time and effort to get there, lots of hard work, but again, it needs to be done calmly and peacefully. It will mainly require a lot of purity and holiness in one's life, which opens the heart more and makes it easier to get there. The more a person has purified himself internally, the more he has softened his heart, and his heart goes from being a "heart of stone" into a "heart of flesh". It will then become much easier for his breathing to get further into himself, where he can penetrate into the deepest part of himself.

Step 5: Sensing Hashem's Existence In The Self

Finally, there is one more step to reach. Let us explain it, with *siyata d'shmaya*, although it is a very, very deep and subtle matter.

The final step is for one to deepen the breathing to the point that he senses the reality of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

It is written, "*I will dwell amongst them*", and the Sages explain this to mean, "It does not say "in him," but "in them" – in the hearts of each person." Thus, we are taught that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew. This point is the deepest place to reach through breathing, and it is the true meaning of the *nishmas chaim* that was breathed into us by Hashem. When Hashem breathed into us a spirit of life, He breathed into us a breath of Himself, so to speak. That means that we are breathing due to Hashem's own breath that was placed in us.

When one accesses this kind of deep breathing, he is touching upon the revelation of G-dliness that is found deep in the heart. This is the deepest possible kind of breathing that a Jew can ever breathe.

In Conclusion

Part of the reason why we have had to explain this exercise very specifically is because there are many "breathing exercises" which have been gleaned from modern, gentile sources. We have tried to present here one of the paths explained by our Sages that describes how to use the power of breathing in a way that helps us reach a purer place in ourselves. The power of breathing is a way for us to reach the "I" in us, the pure soul which Hashem creates us with, and even more so, breathing can help us feel Hashem's breath as the source of our own breathing.

The words here were not ideas. They are about a way to reach an inner kind of life, of how to reach the depth of the *neshamah*, and of how to reach the Creator. But these are matters which

require a lot of effort and training and getting used to, as well as holiness and purity and Heavenly assistance, in order for us to be successful with it.

May we merit from Hashem to have a desire to enter into our inner world, and to at least choose one of the paths that help us get there, even if is not necessarily through the power of breathing.

Let us stress one last point. The power of breathing is just **one of the ways** of how to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. There are many other ways to serve Hashem as well which are proper and valid, and each person needs to choose one of the paths that are mentioned by our Sages. One should choose the path that speaks the most to his heart. The words here do not mean to imply that everyone must take this path [of using the power of breathing]; *chas v'shalom*. A person should only use this path of serving Hashem if it is close to his heart.

The common denominator with all people is that all of us need to enter our inner world, in order to live a more inner kind of life, so that we can reach our essence and reach a more complete recognition of our Creator.

Questions & Answers With The Rav

Q1: ***What's the connection between breathing and the sense of smell? Is it simply because both of these come from the nose?***

ANSWER: A very good question. The sense of smell utilizes our nose, and then we are better able to deepen our breathing, which comes in through the nose. Before you begin the breathing exercises, it is indeed recommended to first inhale the scent of something holy, such as an *esrog* that was used on Sukkos, or *besamim* that was used for *havdalah*. This opens the nose in the first place, and then we can deepen the sense of smell, and from deepening the sense of smell we can develop a deepened breathing. Through a physical smell which is found on this world, one can tread its path to open the nose, and then enter the depth contained in breathing. It is therefore very recommended to start with inhaling a scent [of something holy] and use it is a way to enter into our breathing.

Q2: ***When a person supposedly "feels something" when he breathes in and out, how does he know if it's a real feeling and not it in his imagination?***

ANSWER: Usually, nothing is ever a total fantasy, nor is anything a totally real feeling. There is always some degree of fantasy in everything we feel, and there is always some truth to what we are feeling in every feeling that comes to us. This is because everything we come across in our feelings is always a mixture of fantasy and feeling, and the only issue is in the percentages: How much of the feeling is real, and how much of the feeling is just being imagined. We always need to sort out what we are feeling and try to discern which parts of the feeling are real, and which parts of it are in the imagination. In order to do this, we need to try to name precisely what we are feeling and refine our perception.

Q3: ***For those who haven't yet begun to recognize their inner world, how can they recognize if they are feeling something real about themselves, or if it is just being imagined?***

ANSWER: If a person begins to feel something deep, that is a sign that he is becoming connected to the real inner world. If a person is not used to it yet, he can get some idea of this at least when he goes through an even that awakens his deepest feelings, such as when he feels pain or when he feels joyous. The very fact that he is beginning to sense deeper things is already an opening to the inner world.

Q4: ***How is the sense of smell the most spiritual of all the senses?***

ANSWER: It is because we can turn something physical into the spiritual. The physical sense of smell can be turned into a spiritual sense. A clear example of this was when they would smell the *korbonos* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, which gave off a "pleasant scent" (*rei'ach nicho'ach*) to Hashem.

When you smell the spirituality in something, smell becomes spiritual. This can be experienced when you smell something before it has been turned into physical uses (and on a deeper level, even if it has already been used for physical uses and it has been returned to its root).

Q5: ***How much time is needed for this breathing exercise? Also, after we have already gotten past the first step and we are at the second step, should we still begin each day from the first step, or can we begin immediately each day from the step?***

ANSWER: At first when you begin to get used to this it should not be more than 3 minutes a day. After that, the amount of time you will need to spend on it depends on how far you have advanced in the *avodah*, and if you are doing it correctly. However, no one should be spending more than 30 minutes a day on it. If you can try this *avodah* in the beginning of the morning, this is even better, as long as your schedule allows it.

Q6: ***After we succeed in the first step, can we go quicker with the second step?***

ANSWER: Yes. But we must make sure that we truly gotten past the first step and not try to move on quickly to the next step. First, we must feel that we have become connected to our breathing.

Q7: ***What should a person think during the first step, as he is beginning to take breaths?***

ANSWER: In the first step, do not think about anything, other than the focus on your breathing.

Q8: ***Should a person try to rid anything from his thoughts that hamper his focus on the breathing?***

ANSWER: Quiet the thoughts. Try to become aware of the breathing, and then after that, try to think more deeply into the breathing.

Q9: ***Should we sit or stand during this time? Should we close our eyes?***

ANSWER: However you are more relaxed.

Q10: ***The Rav mentioned that there are gentile methods of breathing exercises – what exactly is the Rav referring to? Which parts of the non-Jewish breathing exercises are inappropriate for a Jew to use?***

ANSWER: The Torah's approach to the power of using breathing is not so that we should expel negative energy contained in the body and bring in positive energy. A Torah-approved method that that is being somewhat mirrored in the gentile practices of breathing is that a person can bring positive energy into his system. However, this is not being accomplished through the gentile methods. A Torah-approved method would be to imagine a thought about something holy and to imagine that it is entering him, or that it is his enveloping his body, or something similar to this.

The gentile approach of breathing exercises, however, involves imagining a "light" that enters the body and purges it from all evil or negativity found in the body. This approach is heresy.

The purpose of the Torah's approach towards breathing is that breathing enables us to reach *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* found in the depths of the soul. Unlike the gentile methods, which are entirely self-focused, the Torah way of breathing exercises is to come to live with Hashem in our life, through the breathing exercises. However, that is only reached at a much higher stage of the breathing, as we explained. But we must be able to bear it in mind even as we begin to work with our breathing. We must know that the goal of deepening our breathing is because it enables us to live with Hashem in our life.

We can penetrate deeper and deeper into ourselves by imagining a holy thought that is entering us, and we can also think that it is purifying us – these two aspects are acceptable according to the Torah. But the part where they imagine that a light is entering the body and cleansing out all of the negativity – this is against the Torah, and it is basically a form of idol worship.

Q11: ***Does the Rav mean that one may imagine a certain holy thought entering his body as he is doing the breathing exercise?***

ANSWER: It may be done, by imagining that it is found outside of oneself and that one wishes to bring it inside of himself. The way we have described using the power of breathing here in this class is a way of how we can get inside of ourselves, as opposed to using external factors.

However, it is certainly an acceptable method for one to imagine a *possuk* or a certain holy thought about *emunah,* and to imagine that this is entering him and purifying him. But when doing so, the person must be aware that it is the holiness which is entering him, and not that some other outer force or power is entering him and cleansing him. To think that "A power is entering me" is a method that has originated in the gentile nations, and it borderlines on idol worship.

I have had to speak about length about this topic, because I am aware that many people are unfortunately using these improper methods in their breathing exercises.

Q12: ***Is the avodah of focusing on our breathing a separate matter from the power of "levad" (alone) which the Rav has spoken about in sefer Da Es Atzmecha, "Getting To Know Your Self")? Does it get in the way of "levad" or it is a part of "levad"?***

ANSWER: It is within the *avodah* of "*levad*". There is a general *avodah* of acquiring the power of *levad*, but what do you once you're in the space of *levad*? Part of the *avodah* of being in the "*levad*" is to focus on your breaths.

Q13: ***In the first step, when we just focus on our simple act of breathing, should we think that Hashem is providing us with our breathing and enabling me to breathe? Or should I just focus on the mere fact that I am breathing, without thinking of Hashem is in the picture?***

ANSWER: In the very first step, the point is to become simply aware of your breathing, because the first step is to simply become aware of ourselves, way before we connect our self to Hashem. This is because in order to connect ourselves to Hashem, we need to first become aware of ourselves in the first place, and awareness of our breathing is one of the ways to accomplish this.

Q14: ***Is this avodah of breathing the same avodah as "hisbodedus" (meditation) and of talking to Hashem when we are alone? Is it an alternative to hisbodedus, or is it something we need to practice besides for hisbodedus?***

ANSWER: It is a separate *avodah* than *hisbodedus*, not a replacement to *hisbodedus*. It needs to be practiced outside of *hisbodedus*.

Q15: ***Should a person try the avodah of breathing before doing hisbodedus, or after hisbodedus?***

ANSWER: It doesn't make a difference if you do it before *hisbodedus* or after *hisbodedus*. Just like a person has to eat and sleep, so is there an *avodah* of breathing that is besides for the *avodah* of *hisbodedus*.

Q16: ***What does it mean to reach a 'more inner place' in oneself? Does it mean that you feel calmer? Does it mean that you feel more connected to yourself?***

ANSWER: Just like when you wade through a pool you feel yourself getting deeper and deeper into it, so do you experience yourself going deeper and deeper the more you try to enter your *pnimiyus*. The more you feel yourself, the more you can discern where you are. When a person becomes connected to *pnimiyus*, it is an experience, and you can feel it, and then there is no room for this question.

24 | Appendix 3: Sources

Paths of Meditation in the Inner Silence Series [#2996]
[from the Q &A archive]

Question:

In the Rav's series on hisbodedus (meditation), "Inner Silence", the Rav explains that the series is explaining one out of many possible paths in hisbodedus, and that this is the path which some of the Rishonim (Torah sages ranging from 10th-15th centuries) traversed. The Rav further explained that this is a series about hisbodedus which is partially based on the Rambam's approach, and partially from the approach of Rav Avraham Abulafia. Can the Rav please explain a bit more about each of these approaches?

Answer:

The way of the **"Maimoni**" [Rabbi Dovid HaMaimoni, a grandson of the Rambam] is to attain *hisbodedus* (meditation) by disconnecting from action, emotion, turning the senses inward, connecting to G-d via the intellect, and silencing the actions, emotions and intellect via being in the dark. Through all of this, a person can reach the most desired state of *hisbodedus*, which is called "Encounter" [*pegiah*, to "encounter" G-d, as it were] – first by attaining a revelation of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) and later by attaining a revelation of G-dliness.

The way of **Rav Abulafia** is to reveal the *neshamah* (Divine soul) by way of the breath. This is based on the verse, *"And He breathed into his nostrils, a breath of life."* The verse is saying that the main revelation of the soul is via the nostrils. For this reason, when one connects himself inwardly to the power of breath, in the proper way, he becomes connected with his soul. According to this approach, one reaches the body through the soul. This [connection] does not happen through the intellectual faculties of the soul, but through the soul's connection to the body. As the verse teaches: *"And He breathed into his nostrils*" – which implies the soul's connection to the body.

An additional part contained in **Rav Abulafia**'s approach is for one to reveal the "active intellect", meaning that one reveals the intellect from its potential state into an active state. The intellect divides into three parts: (1) *Seichel pashut,* the "divested intellect" [the part of the intellect that is removed from physicality, hence it contains a simplistic view]. (2) *Seichel murkav*, "the complex intellect" [the analytical part of the intellect]. (3) The "intermediate" level between the divested and complex intellect.

An example of the "intermediate" level is when one views a combination of Hebrew letters which do not translate into anything understandable, such as looking at the *tagim* [the crown-like symbols which protrude from some of the Hebrew letters in a sefer Torah]. This is a bridging level between the "divested [non-analytical] intellect" and the "complex intellect", and it corresponds to the concept that wisdom comes from "nothingness" (*ayin*), which is based on the verse *"And wisdom, from where does it come?"* [implying that the true source of analytical thinking ("complex intellect") is really drawn from the higher, non-analytical part of the intellect, the "divested intellect"]. This is how one can combine the "complex intellect" with the "divested [non-analytical] intellect", together: by revealing "divested" [non- analytical] intellect" in the complex [analytical] intellect.

Through this [contemplating the *tagim* of the Hebrew letters], one reveals the intellect from its potential state to its active state. Through this, one can arrive at "simple, non-analytical reflection". This is not referring to actual "simplicity" itself, but to simple, non-analytical **reflection**.

The "*Inner Silence*" series which explains *hisbodedus* is partially based on this concept of **simple, non-analytical reflection,** albeit the fact that the series does not elaborate on how to reflect on the various combinations of Hebrew letters and words.