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(Summary: In this book, we are traversing our way in stages, beginning from the first stage and all the way until the highest stage; may Hashem merit us to get there. Even from the start, however, we need to bear in mind the ultimate goal of "hisbodedus", long before we arrive at that stage. The order of steps, as we explained in the previous chapter, in summary, is: To reveal the "I"; then to rectify all that is lacking in the "I", by turning the Creator in prayer; and, finally, to reveal the presence of the Creator in one's heart).

1. Revealing The "I" - Only As A Tool To Reach A Greater Goal

Already at the very beginning of our way, when a person begins to reveal his "I", he must remember that he is ascending the rungs of a ladder of growth, of which the final step is: to reveal the presence of the Creator in the heart. If one is not cognizant of this goal, and instead he immediately begins the steps, this is very endangering, because he may become too focused on trying to discover his "I" and he will remain forever in this search.

Compare this to the following. A person has a child. Every parent wants his child to grow and mature past his current age. No one wants his child to remain a one-year for his entire life. So too, with our own selves, there is a beginning point of our *avodah*, which is to reveal our "I", and we should strive to develop our "I" and grow further, so that we can eventually reach the final step in all of this. So when we begin, we must bear in mind that the purpose of life is not to reveal the "I". Rather, the purpose of life is to reveal the presence of the Creator, within man.

How do I reveal the Creator? By means of revealing my own "I". In other words, the "I" is but a tool that the Creator has given me, which enables me to reveal His presence within me. So the revelation of the "I" is nothing but a tool, a means to a greater end.

This can be compared to a person who is looking for a job so that he can support his household, and he succeeds in finding a job, but his workplace is far away from where he lives, so he has to buy a car in order to commute every day. The purpose of buying the car is so that he can get to his workplace every day, so that he can earn livelihood and be able to support his family. But if he forgets the goal, he views the car as a purpose unto itself. He will get up in the morning and drive all day in his car, but he will never get to his workplace.

The lesson from this is clear. When we begin the very first step, which is to reveal the "I", we must understand that the "I" is but a tool for revealing the Creator in one's heart. So although we will be

working to reveal the "I", this is not as a purpose unto itself, but a means to a greater end.

2. Our Task: Revealing Reality

Now that we have defined that the "I" is nothing but a tool to reveal the Creator, now we need to understand: How do we reveal the "I"? What are the actions we must do in order to reveal it?

Let us first address a certain point which many people are mistaken in, when it comes to this beginning part of the *avodah*.

In general terms, the soul consists mainly of two parts, which are also called the "two kings" that reside in man: the *seichel* (mind) and the *lev* (heart). The *seichel*\mind is a cold, logical, rational force, and it stems from the soul's element of water, which is naturally cold. The *lev*\heart is a warm force, for it stems from the soul's element of fire.

When people consider the idea of revealing the heart, they will usually think that this means to reveal the emotions, such as love, hate, fear, etc. There is a generality associated with the heart, that it refers entirely to character traits and emotional reactions. Almost all people tend to think of the "heart" in this regard. Therefore, "revealing" the heart may seem to be an *avodah* to reveal the character traits and emotions. But this is erroneous. Consider the concept of your "I", for example. Is your "I" a collection of emotions, character traits and reactions? No! It is a reality which you can sense.

To illustrate, if a person has just had a baby born to him, he has feelings of love for the child. In addition to the love, he is also aware that there is now the reality of his child which has just entered his life. If a person would imagine that he loves his child that has not been born to him, does this mean that he has a child, since he feels a love for this imaginary child? The child is a reality only if he becomes born. When a child is born, he is a tangible existence which the parent can feel, and this is accompanied with feelings of love for the child. But the reality of the child is not the love; it is the very existence of the child.

Entering into inner *avodah* is in the same vein. It is not defined as feelings of love, joy, etc. Although one needs to "serve Hashem in joy", that is only an aspect of *avodah*, and it is not the definition of *avodah* itself. Without joy, a person cannot genuinely serve Hashem, but the joy itself is not the act of serving Hashem, it is just an aspect of serving Hashem. Joy, love, and other positive spiritual feelings are but tools in our *avodah*, and they are not the defining purpose of our *avodah*.

What, then, is our *avodah*? It is to **reveal reality, as it is**. Do you view yourself as a certain reality? Yes. Do you look at the table in front of you as a reality? Yes. After you know the table exists, you can decide if you love it or not, but first you see it as existing in the first place.

Thus, when we speak here of inner *avodas Hashem*, we will not be using terms such as love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, or any of the other major terms of *avodah* that we may be familiar with. Although love of Hashem and fear of Hashem are both areas that elevate man, they are termed by the Zohar as "two wings" that are inseparable from each other, meaning that they are like "wings" which elevate a person, implying that their role is to uplift, as wings do - but not that they fundamentally define our inner *avodah*.

A common error which people make when entering into *avodah* is that they define our *avodah* as love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, and joy. But these concepts are not the actual definition of our *avodah*. They are rather **tools** that assist us in our *avodah*. What, then, defines our *avodah*? Our *avodah* is to grasp reality as it is: the revelation of our true "I". That is our *avodah*! What are the "tools" that help us get there? They include love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, and any of the other major areas that are

involved in our inner *avodah*.

If we want to enter the inner world, we must know that it is about grasping a certain reality, and it is not about becoming emotionally amazed with feelings of elation. It is not either about improvement of character traits. It involves [mainly] our spiritual **heart**, which has both an external and internal layer to it. The external layer of the heart contains our emotions, such as love, fear, joy, sadness, etc. There is a more inner point in the heart, however, which is entirely an ability to grasp reality as it is.

To illustrate this idea, the *halachah* is that in order for a knife to be fit for kosher slaughter, the knife must not contain any nicks. In order to avoid this problem, the butcher must inspect the knife in various ways, with his fingernail, with his finger, and by passing it over his palm. The Gemara says that this requires “understanding of the heart”. This “understanding of the heart” cannot be done through feeling some kind of emotion. To the contrary - if the butcher is overtaken by emotion, he is apt to err in the inspection of the knife. He needs inner quiet in order to check the knife calmly. The inspection can only be done in the quiet, so that everything is calm - and in this way, he can inspect the reality in front of him.

Usually, if a person is overtaken by emotion, he cannot see reality objectively, and he is apt to see an erroneous perspective. As an example, some people become overly excited as soon as they see a new item that is advertised on the market, and they quickly run to the bank and take out a loan so that they can purchase the item, and the bank will tell them that they can only take out a certain amount of money, but in their excitement, they just say “Yes, yes” without even hearing what the teller is saying to him.

In order to inspect reality, a person cannot be overtaken with emotion. If he is, his perception of reality will be a bit warped. Therefore, when we come to enter into *avodas Hashem*, we need to know that this is an *avodah* to essentially reveal what reality is, and it is not about becoming more emotional. One does not come to inspect something unless he is interested in what is there.

When it comes to entering *avodas Hashem*, a person is obviously interested in seeing what is there, since he wishes to enter it. But he may enter it out of wonder, which means that he is being overtaken by emotion and will thus not succeed; or, he may enter it from a quiet calmness. The spiritual feelings such as love of Hashem and fear of Hashem are but tools that can help a person have a desire to inspect [the inner] reality.

3. Your Personality Is Not Your “I”

So far, we have already explained that if we want to reveal the “I”, we must not define it as some kind of emotional understanding, but as an actual reality.

Now we will clarify an additional common misconception about this. When someone thinks of this concept of “revealing the I”, he may think that this means revealing his personality traits or his individuality. He might seek to define his “I” based on trying to find his unique character and personality traits. Some people have a unique power of deep understanding, others have a unique memory, another kind of person has a unique ability to have a deep love for others, and another person may possess very unique talents. These personality traits may all be true, and indeed, they exist in people. But if we want to define what the “I” is, we must know that the “I” is not the unique personality of the person. It is not the positive qualities, or the negative qualities.

Let’s return to the analogy we mentioned earlier. When a child is born to someone, the child is a reality. Upon this reality, we can get to know the child’s personality, like if he tends to cry a lot or if he tends to be more serene, if he tends to be happier or sadder, etc. But before we analyze his

personality, the child exists as a reality. Thus, the reality of the child does not depend on his personality or character traits. His reality starts before that.

If we wish to reveal the actual “I” that is within us, we must know that the external layer of our “I” contains our personality and our character traits, our unique aspects, our unique faults, etc. But the actual revelation of who we are – of our very reality – is independent of our personalities.

Thus, since we are defining *hisbodedus* as an *avodah* to reveal the “I” as it is, this is not an *avodah* about revealing our personality traits, or our emotions. It is an *avodah* to reveal the “I”, as it actually is! The “I” itself is an existential reality, and upon that reality, there are personality traits. But the mistake that people make is that they think, “How will I discover my true self? By identifying my main personality traits. In that way, I will be led to reveal my actual self.” After all, if a person does not identify his unique personality traits, he will act in a way that is not true to who he is.

That is what many people think, but it is clear to me that if a person attempts self-revelation in this way, he will not arrive at his true self. The thinking is that if I recognize my unique personality traits and I learn how to use them, in this way, I will come to recognize my true self. I can’t say that there is no validity to this thinking, but it is not the way of *hisbodedus*.

The way of *hisbodedus* is to reach the “I” not in relation to the unique personality traits of oneself, but to recognize the I as it is. As a result of revealing your “I”, you can also uncover your own unique personality traits. But recognizing the “I” itself, as it is, does not come from recognizing the emotions, or the quieter and calmer abilities of the soul, or one’s unique personality. It is to recognize the “I” itself, as it is.

If the purpose [of *hisbodedus*] was to become full of emotion and wonder, then *hisbodedus* would be based on emotion and wonder; if the purpose was to reveal the unique personality of one’s soul, then we should all hire a psychologist to analyze our personality and then tell us who we are. But the *avodah* of *hisbodedus* is none of the above. It is about revealing the actual I, as it is.

Thus, in summary, *hisbodedus* is not about emotion and it is not about the personality and character traits of one’s soul. It is about the reality of the “I” itself.

4. First Experiences of the “I”

There are those who do recognize their own “I”, whereas others are not aware at all to the reality of the “I” that resides within them.

If a person was not born with a sense of recognition for his “I”, or if he did not receive any formal guidance to reach and reveal it, or if he did not go through a particular experience or tragedy which would have led him to it, generally speaking, he will not come to experience what his true “I” is. The most he can recognize about himself is: What I love, what I hate, what I am good at, what I am not good at, etc. This is a superficial awareness, because these things are but results of the “I”, not the “I” itself. So even if a person thinks he “knows himself” very well through the above information, he is still missing recognition of his actual “I”.

We can give an example to help understand this. Every one of us goes through infancy and childhood, and slowly, we mature. If anyone thinks at all about his past, he will realize that until the age of about 14 or 15 or so (each person is different when it comes to this), he had no self-awareness at all. He simply did things, he liked or disliked certain things, and he wanted certain things, etc. But before a person matures, there is no self-awareness, no recognition that there is an “I”. This is normal with most people, and only a few individuals have self-awareness already at a younger age.

At maturity, a person suddenly begins to realize that he is a soul, and then he begins to think: Who am I, really? Until this realization, a person lives no differently than an animal's orientation. A cat will inspect the food in front of it and it will like or dislike certain foods; a small child will also be picky about what he puts into his mouth. [So the fact that a person knows what he likes and doesn't like is not a sign of maturation or self-awareness]. Eventually, a person becomes aware that there is something inside him, his "I", and he begins to have some minimal experience of it.

This is the beginning of self-awareness, but it is only a spark of it. It is not yet an experience of the "I" as it is. It is just a minimal awareness in a person that there is something more to him than what he does, likes, dislikes, etc. The person becomes aware that there is something inside him. This awareness is usually hidden from the consciousness of most people, unless a person was born with it, or if he uncovered it through formal guidance, or through some experience that triggered his self-discovery. Although it is usually hidden from the consciousness of most people, it is still existent in all people.

5. Revealing the "I"

Thus, the first task here is for a person to reveal the "I" within him, and to know: What is in my "I"? What is my actual "I"?

If we want to know of anything from the physical world, we use any of the five senses: seeing, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. But we cannot see or hear our "I". Nor can we smell it or taste it. But we can feel it (this is a use of the sense of touch).

Obviously, we cannot physically touch our "I". We are referring to a power of touch in our soul, to feel a certain perspective, and through it, we may feel the "I".

The task of recognizing our "I" is therefore a use of our soul's sense of touch. We will not be using our body's physical sense of touch for this - we will be using our soul's sense of touch, which can be used to feel a reality.

Let us now define the deep understanding of what the actual "I" is. (There are also deeper definitions that exist, but here we are explaining the one that is of relevance to us right now.) Revealing the "I", as it is, is to reveal an existing *havayah* (reality) - it is to feel its reality as it is.

When we use our physical sense of touch, we are touching something outside of us, and just as we can touch something outside of us, so can we feel something inside of us. We do not mean performing heart surgery, which enables the physical hands to reach the heart. Rather, we are referring here to sensing an actual reality within us. That is how we can define recognition of the "I". There is nothing else to do to recognize the I, because it is entirely a sensing of an existent I. There is no picture of it, and there is no smell or sound to it. It can only be "touched" - it can be felt.

Let us now summarize the first step in *hisbodedus*. As mentioned before, we still have not yet touched upon any actual guidance in doing *hisbodedus*, as of this point. We are simply learning about how to approach it, and to clarify our understanding about it.

The very first step is to know exactly what we are searching for here. After we know that, we can then explain the steps in between and the goal of it all. **The goal is to find the Creator within us.** *In the path to get there, one needs to find his actual "I"*. The actual "I" of a person is not emotions or reactions, or any of one's unique personality traits and characteristics. The "I" is a reality that is independent of those factors, and it can be tangibly felt.

6. The Two General Ways To Reveal The "I"

Now that we have defined the first step of *hisbodedus* as being a revelation of the actual “I”, and we have clarified that the “I” is not emotions or personality traits or characteristics, but an existing reality unto itself, we will now try to explain, with the help of Hashem, the more practical steps which can bring a person to experience this reality of the actual “I” within him.

Man is comprised of a soul and a body; the body conceals the soul, and man’s task is to remove the “barrier” that is his body, and to reveal the soul. Certainly, **the basic condition needed in order to reveal the soul is for the body to be sanctified through the observance of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah**, which are parallel to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of the body (adding up for a total of 613). This means that a person must keep all of the mitzvos that are applicable to him\her. This is the basis of **purifying the body**.

Upon this basis, there are two general and fundamental paths which can bring a person to his *neshamah* (Divine soul of a Jew):

- 1) Through **weakening the body’s physical hold** on a person; also known as “breaking” the body.
- 2) Through **shining the light of the soul, from within the body**. Meaning, although the body is a barrier that covers and conceals the soul, there are “cracks” and “windows” within the body, so to speak, which the soul to shine through and thereby be revealed within the body. These “cracks” and “windows” within the body are, according to the *Arizal*^[1], essentially referring to the the body’s senses of sight, hearing, smell, and speech. These senses are the general “cracks” through which the soul may come out its hiding and be revealed.

7. The First Method: “Breaking” The Body’s Hold

The first method - weakening or breaking the body [the hold of physicality] - can be generally explained as follows.

With men, “breaking of the body” is accomplished through exertion in studying the holy Torah. It is written, “The words of Torah do not last except in one who kills himself over it.”^[2] Clearly, this means that one must “kill” his body [his hold of physicality upon him] for this, and the intention is not to kill his soul, *chas v’shalom*. One needs to make himself “like an ox to a burden, and like a donkey to a load” - a person must exert his physical body for the study of holy Torah, and through expending physical energy for the Torah, he weakens the body^[3] and “breaks” it, and in turn, the soul is then revealed.

This is the more recognizable and familiar path, known throughout the generations. Since the times of the Sages who composed the Mishnah and the Talmud, there have always been those who toiled with all of their physical energy as they exerted themselves in Torah study. When they had used up every last bit of their physical energy, their body was “broken”, meaning that they broke the hold of physicality upon them.

It can be compared to breaking a sealed barrel in order to release the wine inside it. The holy *neshamah*, so to speak, is like the wine inside a sealed barrel, and the body is like an earthen barrel which contains the wine. When a person exerts his body greatly in order to understand the Torah, he “breaks” the body and the soul is thereby revealed. That is one way of how to reach the soul.

This is a path that certainly requires guidance, but not as much guidance as the second path does [which is the path we are explaining in this book]. The general guidance for this first path [breaking the body through exertion in Torah study] is that one needs to have a balance between guarding his physical well-being, so that his mind will still be able to function properly. If a person weakens his body too much, his mind cannot work, and he loses anything that is to be gained from this, because

then he won't be able to learn Torah. So the body can only be weakened to the extent that one can maintain a clearly-thinking mind.

Anyone familiar with this matter knows that there are many who err when they take this path. There are people who exert their bodies very much, using all their physical energy in order to learn Torah, but along with this, they weaken their minds as well. They do not reveal their souls through it. The reason for this is because the mind is the tool to get to the soul. The soul resides in the mind, so if the mind is weakened, the soul suffers as well. He is like a person who overworks himself when trying to build a structure, who will simply break his body in the process. The soul cannot be revealed in this manner, because it will have no place for this revelation to occur.

In this *sefer*, we will not be using this path, although it is a complete discussion for itself.[\[4\]](#) Instead, we will focus on the second path [shining the light of the soul onto the body].

8. The Second Method: Shining The Soul Onto The Body

The second path [in order to reveal the soul] is to **shine the light of the soul**, within the body - to let the soul's light penetrate into the body. We will explain what prevents this revelation, and how a person can reveal the light of the soul from within the physical body.

Let's use the examples of hearing, sight, and the other physical senses. How do our eyes see, and how do our ears hear? They cannot see on their own. They can only work because there is a soul animating the physical body and allowing them to function. However, since the soul is clothed by the physical body, we will usually see only through our physical senses, and not through the soul. We will see something physical, and we will hear something physical, but we will not see or hear the spiritual. But the guiding force behind our sense of sight, the actual lens which we are using whenever we see something, is really the soul. The same is true for our other physical senses. The soul is moving our senses and allowing them to work. It is just concealed within the body, and that is why our senses are usually be accessed solely on a physical level.

In the coming chapters, we will explain several practical ways of how a person can see using his "spiritual" sense of sight [to see from the soul]. However, first, we must emphasize two very essential points. As we stressed in the beginning of this chapter, the basis is the observance of the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah. This includes guarding our eyes and ears from seeing\hearing anything that is improper for us to see or hear.

If a person, *chas v'shalom*, is careless when it comes to avoiding spiritual damage to his senses of sight and hearing, his physical body will be too callous to the spiritual, and it will prevent the revelation of the soul. Only after a person is making effort to protect his eyes and ears from improper things, can he begin to shine the light of the soul, onto his physical senses, of seeing and hearing, etc.

Secondly, as we have mentioned before and which we are not repeating and emphasizing, the ultimate end goal is not to simply acquire more spiritual senses, to learn how to see and hear from the soul, etc. Rather, accessing the spiritual uses of our senses is but a tool that we need in order to reveal the soul, which is ultimately a means to reach the general goal of this all: revelation of the presence of the Creator.

So when we will be learning here of how we can go about revealing the soul, the purpose is not to be able to see from the soul, to hear from the soul, etc. Rather, this is all a means to open the "cracks" within the body, which will in turn allow the soul to come forth and be revealed. When the soul comes out from its hiding, we are then able to reach the core of our very existence, but the goal is not to be able to have "spiritual sight" and "spiritual hearing", or anything of the like.

The Baal Shem Tov warned that many erred in this regard, by seeking high levels of understanding, or to see spiritual sights, or to hear messages from Heaven. The curiosity and urge to attain high levels of understanding can actually be the biggest factor that prevents a person from the truth. Truth is not about seeing spiritual sights or hearing spiritual messages. The purpose is to reach the soul, and from there, to reach the very core of our very *havayah* (existence) – which is the Creator of the world.

9. Differences Between Physical Senses and Spiritual Senses

There is a fundamental difference between our physical senses, with our spiritual senses.

Our physical senses have certain limitations. The eyes can see up to a certain distance, and the ears can hear sounds from far away but not further than that. But the spiritual senses of sight and hearing are not limited. It is as the Gemara says regarding Adam HaRishon, that he was able to see from one of the world to the other. His sight was not limited with the constraints that we recognize. Our spiritual senses do not contain the limitations that we are familiar with.

Another difference between our physical and spiritual senses is in their very structure. The structure of the physical senses is designed to be somewhat noisy, meaning, that they require movement. For example, in order for a person to see something, he must move his eye, and in order to hear something, there must be sound waves. These physical movements, albeit minimal, are still louder than the spiritual. The spiritual senses, the senses of the *neshamah*, are more silent.

In summary, the physical senses are noisier than the spiritual senses, whereas the spiritual senses are quiet and calm; in addition, the physical senses are also limited, whereas the spiritual senses are not.

10. The Three Dimensions: Worlds, Souls, and G-dliness

Before we explain these spiritual senses, we will first explain the body and framework of this *sefer*.

One of the well-known principles of the holy Baal Shem Tov (also explained by the Arizal, in different terminology, as well as in other holy *sefarim* in many other terms; here we will use the language of the Baal Shem Tov regarding this matter) is that there is a general division of three dimensions, which are:

- 1. Olamos** (Worlds)
- 2. Neshamos** (Souls)
- 3. Elokus** (G-dliness)

The first [and lowest] level is “*Olamos*” (Worlds), which refers to the “vessels” (or tools, or containers) that we need in order to get to our greater spiritual goals. The intermediate level, “*Neshamos*” (Souls) refers to the spiritual “illuminations” [which can settle upon our “vessels” and thereby be contained in them.] The highest level, “*Elokus*” (G-dliness) refers to the *EinSof*, the Infinite.

In relation to using our spiritual senses for *hisbodedus*, our spiritual senses will need to pass through these three levels, as follows:

- 1. Olamos\Worlds** – These are the “tools” which we need in order to get to our greater spiritual goals. In the physical world, tools help us get to our goals. In the inner, spiritual dimension, there are also spiritual tools which we use; such as the “heavenly realms”.

2. Neshamos\Souls - The *neshamah* (soul) is spiritual light. Light is always a form of the spiritual. There are varying degrees, however, of how powerful the light of a *neshamah* can be; there are varying levels of this light, ranging from the level of lower-rooted souls and all the way until the level of “new souls” of the future.

3. Elokus\G-dliness - Above the level of “Neshamos\Souls” is “Elokus”, G-dliness. This refers to the *EinSof* (the Infinite) of the Creator.

Overview of the Coming Chapters

We will be working throughout [*hisbodedus*] using our spiritual senses, in all of these three levels. For example, in order to fully access our spiritual sense of sight, it will need to pass through the stages of “*Olamos*”, then “*Neshamos*”, and, finally, to reach “*Elokus*”.

It is also necessary for us to understand that the senses are not disparate from each other; rather, they are a unit. Our four senses [sight, hearing, taste, and speech] are therefore not disconnected from each other; they work in tandem. So it is upon us to let our senses traverse all of the stages of *Olamos*, *Neshamos*, and *Elokus*.

At first, we will explain how to use the senses with regards to the material world, which we refer to as “*Yeish*” (the material existence). We will see the “positive” [direct] use of each of the senses, and then we will see how to use the senses in the “negative” [the abstract and non-material], which we refer to as “*Ayin*” (nothingness). In that stage, we will essentially be silencing each of the senses [negating its simpler and more tangible use]. After that, we will learn how to rise to the stage after “*Ayin*”, which is to touch upon the light of the Infinite.

Through each of the senses that are found in us, we will need to rise from the level of “*Olamos*” to “*Neshamos*”, and from “*Neshamos*” to “*Elokus*”. As we explained, the task of a person is, first:

- 1)** To reveal the *neshamah* (Divine soul of a Jew);
- 2)** After that, to reveal the soul’s bond with her Creator;
- 3)** And, after this, to reveal “the Infinite”.

[1] “*Ari Zal*” – acronym for Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, of blessed memory (famed 15th century kabbalist and foremost sage on the Torah’s hidden mystical wisdom)

[2] *Talmud Bavli: Shabbos 83b*

[3] *Sanhedrin 26b*

[4] Editor’s Note: The Rav has explained this elsewhere in the derasha entitled “*The Weekly Shmuess_014_Vayechi_Illness and Purifying The Body In Shovavim*”

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