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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. In general, people think they know what *hisbodedus* is.

One of the Sages said, "I have seen *b'nei aliyah* (those who ascend), but they are few." 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, Pharaoh. 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](#) [1], 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*. [1]

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 listeners 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 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.

Clarify To Yourself If This Method Is For You

Therefore, if any of the listeners to this series have any questions, please send them in, [\[2\]](#) 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.

These classes are indeed not for everyone; a person has to know if the approach here is indeed for him to take. This class was just a general overview of our goal here; with Hashem's help, we will continue with the next class.

Questions And 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?*

ANSWER: True hisbodedus is when you feel a very strong desire to connect to where you are trying to connect to and 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?*

ANSWER: 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?*

ANSWER: 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?*

ANSWER: 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?*

ANSWER: Either you can speak to a professional who can help you get by these bothersome thoughts and feelings you're having. Or, 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*")?

ANSWER: 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?

ANSWER: 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.

[1] See the e-book of the author's collection of droshos entitled "[Search for Serenity](#) [2]" (published in Hebrew as "*Da Es Menuchasecha*").

[2] All question should be sent to: info@bilvavi.net [3]

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-hisbodedus-preparation-006-essence-hisbodedus>

Links

[1] <http://www.feldheim.com/hamaspik-l-ovdei-hashem-hebrew-only.html>

[2] <http://www.bilvavi.net/files/Search.for.Serenity.pdf>

[3] <mailto:info@bilvavi.net>