



Mesillas Yesharim - Why Hisbodedus is Out of Style Today

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(This section has been adapted from Bilvavi on Mesillas Yesharim, Vol. III, p. 621-626)

The Concept of Hisbodedus - And Why It Is Not Popular Today...

The *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chapter 15) writes: ***“And more precious than everything is hisbodedus (Jewish meditation), for just as it removes worldly matters from one’s eyes, so does it remove the desire for this world from one’s heart.”***

The matter of *hisbodedus* is more precious than anything else!

What exactly is it about? *Hisbodedus* is that a person identifies with a concept of having a bond that is eternal.

The connection that a person has to this world eventually becomes severed. A person gets married and has children, and he has a bond with them, but most people take leave of the world at a different time than their spouse and children; so there will come a point in time where the bond with one’s family is severed. We are not always together with or family. Who will a person always be with? Hashem is the only one whom we are always together with.

Hisbodedus, besides for being a means to help remove a person from his pull towards this world, also contains a deeper aspect: it is about forming a connection with the eternal.

A person must connect to the Creator, who is eternal, and to Torah, which is eternal; as well as to the souls of the Jewish people who are eternal, for it is written, *“The eternity of Yisrael does not lie.”* But if a person connects to others simply in the social sense, he is not connecting to their souls, but simply to their bodies, which are only a garment of the soul. This kind of [superficial] connection is only a temporary connection with others; and it causes a person to lose his connection to the eternal.

The depth of the concept of *hisbodedus* is that it is to have a constant connection [with the eternal]. The truth is that doing *hisbodedus* for an hour is something that contradicts the whole concept of *hisbodedus*, because *hisbodedus* is to have a constant connection, and it cannot be accomplished through having a bit of time set aside for it. It is constructive of course, but it is not yet the inner and complete *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus is about maintaining a permanent and constant connection with the eternal. It should not ever be interrupted. We live in a world which distracts us from having this inner connection, and therefore we must separate ourselves from this world.

The purpose of *hisbodedus* is thus for a person to wish to leave his connection to this world, which is only a temporary connection – and to choose to enter into a constant kind of connection.

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If *hisbodedus* by essence to be constant, when should a person detach from *hisbodedus* [besides for anything that obligates him according to *Halacha*]?

The general answer to this is that it depends on what it will cause the person. If leaving *hisbodedus* will not cause the person to lose his constant connection, then he can temporarily stop *hisbodedus*. But if he will lose his constant connection when he leaves *hisbodedus*, then leaving *hisbodedus* is detrimental for him.

Hisbodedus is the tool which can help a person reach his constant connection with the eternal. If a person leaves *hisbodedus* and goes to a noisy place, or if he leaves *hisbodedus* for too long, then this interruption will make the person lose his constant connection. Such a person should not leave his place of *hisbodedus*.

Hisbodedus is all about acquiring a deep power in the soul to always have a constant connection. It is that even when a person has to stop his *hisbodedus* temporarily and go out into the world, he still maintains his deep connection, and even if gets interrupted, he knows how to immediately return to his connection. The further a person advances in his *hisbodedus*, the less danger he is in when he has to go out into the world.

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The *Mesillas Yesharim* continues: ***“Dovid HaMelech has already mentioned the praise of hisbodedus, for it is written (Tehillim 55: 7), “Then I said, O that I had a wing like a dove; I would fly off and find rest. Behold, I would wander afar; I would dwell in the wilderness, selah.” The prophets Eliyahu and Elisha would find designated places in the mountains for hisbodedus, and the Sages and pious ones of old followed in their footsteps. They had found the best tool to acquire the complete abstinence from this world, so that the vanity of their society could not influence them.”***

Here the Ramchal states that the most precious way to serve Hashem – the way which was traversed by Dovid, Eliyahu, Elisha, and the Sages who came after them – was to designate a place in the mountains and be in *hisbodedus*.

It is therefore very perplexing: how can it be that we almost never see anyone doing *hisbodedus*? Even when someone practices *hisbodedus*, people think he is strange....

The Ramchal states here that *hisbodedus* was the way of the previous generations, all the way down from the earliest prophets to the Sages. They left civilization and found a place in the mountains for *hisbodedus*.

It is upon us to understand: How could it be that *hisbodedus* has become forgotten and lost? To where has it gone? We will try to go a little deeply into this matter.

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One’s personal avodah (as we mentioned before, in the name of the Baal Shem Tov) consists of the three stages of *hachnaah* (subjugation), *havdalah* (separation) and *hamtakah* (sweetening). In the initial stage of one’s avodah, a person has to overcome the pull toward materialism; this is *hachnaah*,

subjugating the desire to this world. The second stage is *havdalah*, separation – to disassociate oneself from materialism and instead connect to his soul. The final stage is *hamtakah*, sweetening – otherwise known as *kedushah*, holiness – which is for a person to return to this world and all its materialism with a pure outlook, since has achieved sanctity and has an attachment with Hashem.

These three concepts not only apply to our soul, but they apply to time as well. Thus, there are also these three stages of *hachnaah*, *havdalah*, and *hamtakah* when it comes to time as well.

The world will last for 6000 years (Sanhedrin 97a). We are currently at the end of the 6000 year period, and we are close to the end of days, which will essentially be an end to our period of avodah. The end of avodah is *hamtakah*, and therefore – we are found in a period of *hamtakah*, as opposed to *havdalah*. We are in a time of *hamtakah*, but in our souls, we are still at *havdalah*. What results from this is that we feel a contradiction between the stage that our **soul** is at with the stage that **time** is at.

To give an example of this concept, Chazal say that a Torah scholar resembles Shabbos; an ignoramus resembles the weekday. This is only true in terms of the soul, but in terms of time, a Torah scholar contains in himself the weekday as well, and an ignoramus can have Shabbos.

In terms of our soul, we have to go in order of the three stages of *hachnaah*, *havdalah*, and *hamtakah*. The middle stage, Havdalah, is essentially the concept of *perishus* (abstaining from this world), and this expresses itself in the act of *hisbodedus* – being in solitude and away from civilization.

But in terms of time, we are close to *hamtakah*, in which we will achieve the universal connection with all people. (And actually, due to this, there is great abundance of physical nourishment available in today's times; its source is holy, being poured down from Above, but unfortunately, all of this sustenance in being used for unholy purposes...)

This creates a contradiction to our souls. Most of us in our souls are at the lower stages, *hachnaah* and *havdalah*; but from the perspective of time, we are at *hamtakah*, since we are at the end of days.

Thus, the avodah of *hisbodedus* has become somewhat weakened.

These words are extremely subtle and deep points about our soul. There are people who go to faraway places from civilization to engage in *hisbodedus*, but it does almost nothing for them; it simply pulls them away from learning Torah and keeping the *mitzvos*. But if someone truly wants to go in the way of our ancestors – who learned Torah every second and kept all the *mitzvos*, without a shadow of a doubt, yet also made sure to designate times of *hisbodedus* in the mountains – then this is the proper way to go in.

Our first step in avodah is *hachnaah*. The second stage in our avodah is *havdalah*, which is to designate a place in the mountains for *hisbodedus*. And after this comes the third stage, *hamtakah*.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/mesillas-yesharim-why-hisbodedus-out-style-today>