

What is So Novel About the Idea of Hisbodedus?

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Question:

What is so novel about the idea of Hisbodedus? Don't we as believing Jews all believe in the importance and power of prayer? Don't we all sometimes speak to G-d in personal prayer, in English or our native language, for example, by Shema Koleinu or before the end of Shemona Esreh?

Answer:

Of course, belief in and practice of prayer is one of the fundamentals of Judaism, and it's discussed at length and in depth throughout all of the major works of traditional Jewish thought. And of course, many of us do take the time to compose our own personal prayers, whenever the need may arise.

However, Hisbodedus is something else entirely.

First of all, Hisbodedus is not just a short prayer which we offer in time of need. Besides the fact that Hisbodedus must be in our native language, Rebbe Nachman taught us that we must schedule ourselves to speak to G-d 1) every day, 2) for at least an hour 3) in a secluded place.

This has nothing to do with any specific need which I may have now. It means that no matter what, we must always find time every day to speak to Hashem. Not just for a couple of minutes to get some things off our chest, but to have an hour-long conversation with Him. Of course, if for whatever reason you cannot do it for an hour, then however much you can is certainly fine.

This prayer must inherently be in a secluded place, so it cannot be as an addition to the regular order of davening, and

not just because of the difficulty in adding an extra hour to Shemona Esreh. Again, if one doesn't have a secluded place to go to, Rebbe Nachman offers different ideas as how to conceal yourself as you do Hisbodedus. For example, in shul, you can cover yourself in a Tallis, or sit in front of a sefer and give the impression that you are learning.

Hisbodedus is a vast subject which even more than study, requires much actual practice to properly appreciate its depth and beauty.

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