



from *Sefer  
Hamaspik  
L'Ovdei Hashem*

# Hitbodedut Meditation

RABBI AVRAHAM,  
SON OF THE RAMBAM

Translated by  
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## HITBODEDUT MEDITATION

Hitbodedut meditation is one of the most outstanding of the exalted traits. It is the path of the greatest of the righteous. Using it, the prophets attained revelation.

There are two aspects to hitbodedut: inner and outer.

The aim of outer hitbodedut is the attainment of inner hitbodedut. And inner hitbodedut is the highest rung on the ladder of revelation. More than that, it is the revelation itself.

Inner hitbodedut is complete faith from the depths of the heart. David prayed for this and said: “God, create a pure heart within me” (Psalms 51:12). And it was attained by Asaf, as he said: “My flesh and my heart have worn away; the Rock of my heart and my portion is God” (ibid. 73:27). It is the purification of the heart and its refinement from anything outside of God. It is His penetrating into [people] and His dwelling in their midst.

This may be attained through the nullification of one’s senses [in whole] or in part; the removal of one’s drive from worldly matters and its application to God; the engagement of one’s mind in Godly matters; and the utilization of one’s imagination to support the intellect, by studying those of God’s creations that clearly inform us about Him, such as the greatness of the sea, its awesomeness and the wonders of the creatures within it; the turning of the globe in the fullness of its glory; the nature of the stars; and the like.

Regarding the purification of one’s heart and thought from everything outside of God, Asaf said, “My flesh and heart have been worn away” (ibid.).

Regarding the removal of one’s drive from everything outside of God, Asaf stated, “Whom else do I have in heaven? I have desired no one but You on earth” (ibid. 25).

Regarding the application of one’s drive completely to God, Isaiah spoke of “a yearning of the spirit for Your name and awareness” (Isaiah 26:8-9). [David said of this], “My spirit, my flesh has yearned for You” (Psalms 63:2).

[David] furthermore said, “My soul clings to You” (ibid. 9).

And regarding placing a limitation upon one’s senses and one’s drive in order to strengthen one’s involvement in one’s mindfulness, Elisha told Gehazi, “If you come upon anyone, do not greet him, nor may you answer any man’s greeting” (Kings II 4:29).

You must understand this completely.

In order to attain an inner hitbodedut that unites [man with his Creator], the prophets and their students used musical instruments to arouse their drive to God and to purify their inner being from anything outside of Him. As the procedure in the Temple (may it soon return) is described, “David and the army officers set aside harps, stringed instruments and cymbals for the service of the sons of the prophets, Asaf, Heiman and Yedutun” (Chronicles I 25:1).

In this way, the prophets and their righteous students tended toward an outer hitbodedut, which leads to inner hitbodedut.

The meaning of outer hitbodedut is that one separates oneself from people and their gatherings, in order to be delivered from the matters that the masses are engaged in, and to arrive at a level of trust that cannot be disturbed—by seeing them, listening to their conversation and dealing with them—that comes from meditation upon the greatness of the Creator, from drawing pleasure from His messengers and the appearance of His creatures, so that one may meditate upon them and consider their closeness [to God] and their majesty.

Regarding this, David said, “How awesome to me are Your friends, how mighty are they all; shall I count them? They are more than the sand” (Psalms 139:17-18). More than that, [David] steeped himself in his meditations until he fell asleep or grew calm and attained oneness [with God]—in the manner that one attains this. When he awoke or arose [from his tranquility], the spell of this oneness did not weaken. As the verse states, “I awoke, and I was still with You” (ibid.).

Outer hitbodedut may be total. For instance, a person may remove himself from city life and seclude himself in a desert or other uninhabited place.

Or it may be partial—such as secluding oneself within one’s house.

It may be constant, or occasional. It may last a long while, or a few days.

But to engage in it constantly throughout one’s entire life is not possible in this world.

Total hitbodedut—which is accomplished by leaving the cities and secluding oneself in deserts, dry flatlands, mountains, and so forth—is mentioned in regard to the prophets and their students, as we shall now show.

It is well-known to all—although not mentioned explicitly in any verse—that Enoch’s path, in which “Enoch walked with God” (Genesis 5:24),

consisted in the main of travel and hitbodedut.

In a similar fashion, we learn that Abraham said to his two servants, “I and the boy will go there and we shall worship and return to you” (ibid. 22:5). A person of discernment will realize that before this instance, Abraham had already had the custom of secluding himself at regular intervals, even from his own household.

This trait is also mentioned in regard to Isaac: “Isaac went out to speak in the field” (ibid. 24:63).

And in general, why did the Patriarchs and their children work exclusively as shepherds? It is because they used this as an opportunity to engage in hitbodedut in the fields, far from city life.

As a clear proof of this, let us consider the situation of Jacob after he spent a difficult fourteen years grazing sheep in order to marry Rachel and Leah. “I have served you fourteen years for your two daughters” (ibid. 31:4). [Nevertheless,] when Laban took forceful hold of him and gave him a choice in payment—“indicate your payment to me, and I shall give it” (ibid. 30:28)—Jacob chose not silver, gold or any other such thing—but he asked to again graze sheep: “Do not give me anything. If you do this for me, I will return, I will graze your sheep, I will guard them” (ibid. 31).

And this was so, despite the fact that he had suffered in this work: “In the day I was consumed by the heat and frost at night, and my sleep fled from my eyes” (ibid. 31:40). He did all this because [grazing sheep] suited his way of life—whereas any other occupation would have constituted a contradiction to it or a stumbling block.

The master of prophets, Moses, servant of God, used to graze the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law, going deep into the desert: “He led the flock into the desert and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb” (Exodus 3:1). He did so not because of any scarcity of grazing lands in the area of Midian, but because he wished to immerse himself in the trait of inner hitbodedut and because he yearned to attain the revelation whose quality no man but he can understand.

(You might contest this, pointing out that the Aramaic translation renders the Hebrew of “he led the flock into the desert” as “he led the sheep to a place good for grazing in the desert.” But you know the statement of the Sages that “the Torah may be interpreted in various ways” (Sanhedrin 34). And on a number of occasions, the Sages’ explanation differs from that of the Aramaic translation, as is clear to anyone who studies the Sages’ words.)

God instructed Moses regarding total hitbodedut, by means of which Moses gained the revelation he had yearned for, at which point God gave him what He gave him. God told him, “Rise up to Me to the mountain” (Exodus 24:12), and “No man shall rise up with you” (ibid. 34:3). Since Moses desired to be secluded, he moved the Tent of Meeting out of the camp: “Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, a distance from the

camp” (ibid. 33:7).

The generation of the desert lived far from any inhabited place for forty years. This was so that they might attain revelation: “I led you forty years in the desert...so that you might know that I am Hashem your God” (Deuteronomy 29:4). And God said in the language used by his prophet, “You went after Me in the desert, in an unsown land” (Jeremiah 2:2).

Elijah and Elisha engaged in hitbodedut on Mt. Carmel many times, as is clear from the verses (Kings I 18:24; Kings II 2:25 and 4:25).

As a result of his total hitbodedut, Elijah attained revelation: “He went in the desert...and came...to the mountain of God, Chorev...and a voice said to him... ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’”

Balaam also used hitbodedut in order to arrive at revelation: “‘I will be visited’...and he went to the cliff” (Numbers 23:15)—which Unkelos translates as “he went off alone.” Also: “he set his face to the desert” (ibid. 24:1).

All of the prophets engaged in hitbodedut in far-off places such as Rachel’s Tomb, Beit El, Jericho, the banks of the Jordan—as is clear from the verses to whoever studies them (Samuel I 1:10, 42:2, 15:18, 23, and others).

As for the practice of seclusion in houses, places of worship and the like, the first to do so (as recorded in the Torah) was Jacob: “Jacob, a whole-hearted man, dwelt in tents” (Genesis 25:27). From hitbodedut in tents, he went on to hitbodedut in the desert, when, at the beginning of a journey, he attained revelation: “he came upon the place and spent the night there...He dreamed, and behold, a ladder reaching earthward...and behold, Hashem was standing over him, and He said, ‘I am Hashem’” (Genesis 28:11-13).

Joshua engaged in total hitbodedut many times. He regularly secluded himself in the Tent of Meeting. He engaged in hitbodedut at the foot of the mountain during the first forty days that the messenger, [Moses,] was alone with God to receive the first tablets. Then he joined the messenger [Moses] when he left his place [on the mountain] before returning to the camp. As the verse states, “Joshua heard the sound of the people in its outcry...Then Moses approached the camp...” (Exodus 32:17, 19). From here, it is clear that the two men met before they came back to the camp. As regards Joshua’s hitbodedut in the Tent of Meeting, the Torah states that he engaged in this constantly: “his servant Joshua bin Nun the youth did not move out from the tent” (ibid. 33:11).

Samuel also used to engage in hitbodedut in the Tabernacle in Shiloh until he attained revelation, “[as] he lay in the palace of God” (Samuel I 3:3). This type of prophetic sleep is referred to in the words, “I sleep, but my heart is awake” (Song of Songs 5:2).

Elijah would engage regularly in hitbodedut in his attic. It was during his hitbodedut that his prayer regarding Achiya, son of the woman of Tzarfat,

was accepted: “He took him from her bosom and brought him up to the attic where he dwelt.” (Kings I 17:19).

Elisha [engaged in hitbodedut] in the attic of the Shunamit woman. It was during hitbodedut that he brought her son back to life. “He came and closed the door on both of them and prayed to God” (Kings II 4:33).

Aaron and his sons were commanded to engage in hitbodedut in the Tabernacle during the seven days of inauguration. “You shall remain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting day and night...Do not go out from the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (Vayikra 8:35 and 22).

The cohen gadol was commanded not to leave the Temple: “he shall not go forth from the Sanctuary and violate...” (ibid. 21:12). And he was commanded to engage in hitbodedut while asking for forgiveness on Yom Kippur: “no man may be in the Tent of Meeting from the time that he comes to gain atonement in the Sanctuary until he goes out” (ibid. 16:17).

We find a similar practice on the part of Doeg, a man who stumbled in his path [in life]—he did not attain revelation, but lost it. He used to engage in hitbodedut by imitating the way of the [cohen gadol]: “he remained before God” (Samuel I 21:8). And, as the verse makes clear, [Doeg] was famous, “mighty among Shaul’s shepherds” (Samuel I 21:8).

One can yearn to engage in hitbodedut in the Sanctuary in order to perfect inner hitbodedut and arrive at revelation, even if it means giving up the opportunity of being in the King of Israel’s bodyguard. David said, “I have asked one thing of Hashem, that I request: may I dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to gaze upon Hashem’s pleasantness and visit His palace” (Psalms 27:4). He also said, “Fortunate is the person whom You choose and bring close; he shall dwell in Your courtyards” (ibid. 65:5).

On his path to hitbodedut, by means of which he would attain revelation, David said, “I will grow wise upon the way of whole-heartedness. It shall come to me. I will go in the wholeness of my heart, in the midst of my house. I shall not place any vile thing before my eyes” (ibid. 101:2-3).

In this verse, David began by speaking of going upon a straight, righteous, perfect path that leads to revelation. Then he said, “I will grow wise upon the way of perfection when it shall come to me” (ibid.). And then he said that he understood [this path] and went upon it—that is, upon [a type of] outer hitbodedut: sitting alone in one’s house or a secluded place. He connected this to inner hitbodedut. This is indicated by his next phrase, “I will go in the wholeness of my heart,” which indicates inner hitbodedut.

He then said, “In the midst of my house,” [indicating] outer hitbodedut.

This explicates his yearning for outer hitbodedut: sitting alone in one’s house, by means of which one removes oneself from seeing the paths of evil and those who turn away [from the paths of] God. One removes all of these things that are liable to cling to one’s spirit. And so David said, “I shall not place any vile thing before my eyes. I hate the doing of those who have turned



aside. It shall not cling to me.” He thus explained that the goal of this path is to straighten out the heart by means of inner hitbodedut, so that the vanities of this world, in which one is so deeply steeped, will not pervert one’s way. He did so in order to remove from himself during hitbodedut the imprint of the love of [this] world, which is evil—a sickly evil!—until it becomes to him like something that he has never known. And so he said, “A twisted heart, turn away from me.”

His next phrase, “or one who slander his neighbor in secret, him will I destroy,” has no connection to the period of hitbodedut. It is, rather, a description of David’s path after returning from hitbodedut to [again] engage in matters of government. To explain why he left hitbodedut, why he turned away from it to return to matters of government in order to uphold justice, he tells that even though he ceased to engage in hitbodedut and returned to matters of government, he intends to fulfill the will of God. He is not like other kings, who distance and punish or bring close and befriend [for their own benefit or] the benefit of their kingdom. But he is not like them. He will punish those who are evil and the violent, he will remove those who are haughty and lustful, and choose instead the company of those who are good and clean in mind, who go upon the straight way. He will choose them to be his advisors and comrades, his students and servants. But those whose characters are the opposite of these traits will not stand before him.

At dawn, which usually follows hitbodedut, since it typically takes place during the night hours, David will dedicate himself to the punishment of the evil, so that they and their influence will be wiped away from God’s holy city.

And there is no doubt that this is indeed is one of the outcomes of David’s hitbodedut—for a person who has engaged in hitbodedut in the above-mentioned manner can be assumed to act in the above-mentioned manner.

The sons of Korach stated, “How lovely is Your dwelling place” (Psalms 84:2). This psalm describes the yearning for the Temple.

This yearning can be understood in its obvious sense and also in an esoteric sense.

The obvious sense is that the psalm describes the desire that the destroyed Temple be rebuilt—this mirrors the experience of anyone living during the exile, and is similar to many statements of others in exile.

“The bird has found its home” (ibid. 4). According to the obvious sense, this refers to the Temple in its destroyed state (due to the many sins of Israel). Like other desolate ruins, the Temple has become a dwelling place for birds.

“Those who passed through the valley of weeping” (ibid. 7) refers to the copious weeping of the exiles over the Temple’s destruction. They pray [and state], “Hashem, God of Hosts, hear my prayer” (ibid. 9). They are asking God to hear the prayers of those in exile.

“Our shield, see, O God” (ibid. 10). This is a request for salvation and

refuge from enemies and for the quick arrival of the Messiah, in accord with God's promise.

"...Rather than dwell in the tents of the wicked" (ibid. 11). This refers to the dwelling of [the people of Israel] amongst the gentiles during the exile.

"Hashem of Hosts, happy is the man who trusts in You" (ibid. 13). This is the statement of a person who trusts that God will deliver us from exile.

And [similarly,] the other verses in this psalm can be interpreted in the same spirit.

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However, there is an esoteric meaning to the verses: the yearning for outer hitbodedut in the Temple, leading to inner hitbodedut.

The phrase, "How lovely is Your dwelling place, Hashem of Hosts" expresses this yearning.

"My spirit has yearned and pined for the courtyards of Hashem" (3). This indicates that the purpose of yearning for outer hitbodedut is to arrive at inner hitbodedut, as a result of which one attains prophecy or a similar state. (In such a state, the spirit that depends upon the body is awakened and subjugates its base—the body and all its limbs—to love and praise of God.)

Next, the psalm compares the dwelling of the spiritual elite of Israel—the prophets, their students and the pious—in the Temple sanctuary, which contains the altars for animal sacrifice and incense, to birds and chicks dwelling in their nest. "Also the bird has found its home and the swallow its nest, in that it has placed its chicks alongside Your altars, Hashem of Hosts, my King and my God" (4).

Next, the Psalm expresses [the idea] that those who have attained revelation, who have found a shield and refuge in God, whose revelation has come to them by means of the paths of the heart and the capabilities of the mind in [the course of] inner hitbodedut, are to be envied: "Happy are those who dwell in Your house, they will further praise You, selah" (5).

Afterwards, the Psalm describes how tears pour from their eyes like a wellspring from which a river flows, pouring forth: "those who pass through the valley of tears have made it a wellspring" (7). This is not a realistic description, but a figure of speech that describes this great amount of weeping.

There are two reasons for this weeping. The first is their pain that life has passed and the prospect of it continuing to pass without that pleasure from which [it is alienated]. The second is the powerful feeling they have when they attain their desire. This is like the weeping of a person who had been cut off from the beloved of his heart for many years and then finally re-united with her.

Then the psalm says, "Indeed, the early rain will surround it in blessings."

"Early rain"—moreh, related to the word for teacher—refers to God. The psalm is saying that as a result of God's generosity and goodness to those

who yearn for Him and go out to meet Him until they praise Him with the holy spirit—God accepts their praise and adoration. This “holy spirit” is revelation (as alluded to in the verse, “my heart and my flesh shall sing to the living God” (3) and “they will yet praise You selah” (5)).

“Surround” indicates God’s acceptance—like someone agreeing to wrap himself in his friend’s garment.

“Early rain” indicates that God leads them and gives them the power of speech to praise and exalt Him.

Then the psalm says, “they will go from strength to strength.”

As I understand it, this phrase has two meanings. I do not know if the author only had one of these in mind, or both, or perhaps yet another meaning that I am unfamiliar with.

The first of the two interpretations of “they will go from strength to strength” is that it alludes to the [graduated] ascent of those who go upon exalted paths. For example, they at times pass to zealotry and at times to direct their acts towards God, and at times to engage in hitbodedut in their homes and at times to the Temple.

Then “he will appear to God in Zion.” This teaches that they attain [revelation] in the Temple. This entire phrase indicates the desire for God that comes as a result of attain revelation.

The second meaning of “they will go from strength to strength” is that it alludes to their ascent from the first to the second attainment, and from the second to the third, until they arrive at the highest attainment in this world, which is the level of prophecy.

Then “he will appear to God in Zion.” [This should be understood] in accordance with the explanation above.

After this, “Hashem, God of Hosts...our shield, see, God”—this is a prayer in which the psalmist expresses his prophetic desire to take refuge [in God] and be guarded and shielded from stumbling blocks and obstacles and to receive help from the first anointed ones, such as David, Shlomo and their like, or from the final anointed one—may he come quickly, in our days!—the purpose of whose reign is the building of the Temple and its outer and inner service, for which [all the children of Israel] yearn and desire.

Clearly, the Psalmist’s next statement that “one day in Your courtyards is better than a thousand” alludes to the joy of hitbodedut in the Temple in which he has engaged [from time to time].

“I prefer to gather in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” “The tents of wickedness” should not be understood as referring to places of evil. Such a statement would not be fitting for a wise man, much less for a prophet. That is to say, it is not the way of a distinguished, wise man to mention that he prefers the Temple to the wine [גן] shop, for there is no relationship between these two. By analogy, there is no relationship between vinegar and honey, and no one would exclaim that

honey is sweeter than vinegar. However, a wise man might say that he loves learning divine wisdom more than the natural sciences, since there is a closeness and relationship between these two. By analogy, one can say that bee honey is sweeter than cane sugar, since there is a closeness and relationship between the two.

Therefore, I say that the statement, “I prefer to gather in the house of my God rather than dwell in the tents of wickedness,” does not express a preference for hitbodedut in the Temple over frequenting places of evil. Rather, the intent is a preference for hitbodedut in the Temple over other places of worship, places that are untrue to the Torah because they have not accepted its obligations. God has said (in the words of His prophet), “they have falsified Your Torah” (Zephaniah 3:4). This falsification [comes] from a person who serves his religion in those places (as said), [but yet harms] himself, because in such places he is mixing together religion with its opposite. This is like those exiles whose synagogue service is a mixture of exalted prayers (to the person who understands their meaning) and secondary pleasures [the pursuit of] power, meaningless matters, and light-headedness not fit to speak of here (particularly since they have been spoken of in previous sections). Regarding such places, God said, in the words of Isaiah, “New month and Sabbath, gathering together—I cannot bear sin and congregating” (Isaiah 1:13).

The Psalmist means to say, “I prefer being completely alone in the Temple in order to attain inner hitbodedut over gathering in flawed meetings where good and evil are mixed.” Compared to the Temple, the alternative is, in the eyes of the spiritual elite, like “gathering in the tents of evil.”

The psalmist expresses this in the words “[one day in Your courtyards] is better....” This explains the previous phrase of his prayer: “our shield, see, God...” It is as though he is explaining that the reason he is praying for God’s help through His anointed one is that it should aid the Temple, which [the children of Israel] desire and yearn for, because of the great amount of goodness it contains.

When he says that “Hashem God is a sun and a shield” (12), he is alluding to the idea that God’s being bestows an influence of light upon those who have attained revelation (revelation is like light: “in Your light, we will see light” (36:10)). Indeed, [His being] contains complete spiritual pleasure, such as [the light one senses] in the shining sun. However, it [also] contains the danger of destruction, just as one can be struck by blindness. As the Torah states, “The cohanim who come close to Hashem must prepare themselves lest Hashem assail them” (Exodus 19:22). And, as we are told in the chronicle of our forebears, “Ben Azai peeked and was damaged” (Chagigah 14). This is like [the danger that] sunlight poses for a person who gazes at it. Ultimately, he must turn eyes aside from it, for he cannot stand in its light if he dares look at it, instead of satisfying himself with the rays of the sun that reach him.

There is also [the danger] that he will be burned in [the sun's] heat if he will sit beneath it naked and bare, without a covering and shield against its heat.

But it is said that [after] Hashem causes His light to rain upon His servants who have attained [revelation], He spreads His protection over them. He is the sun, [but also] the savior and the shield from its heat and great light: “There will shine for you, who fear My Name, the sun of charity with healing in its rays” (Malachi 3:20). First, “there will shine,” but then there will be “healing in its rays.” There is no harm in it—unlike the sun to which it was compared.

Similarly, Avraham was told at the time of his revelation, “Do not fear, Avram, I shall shield you” (Genesis 15:10). And Daniel was told when he prophesied, “Do not fear, favored man. Peace to you, be strong, be strong.’ And I took strength when he spoke to me, and I said, ‘May my master speak, for you have strengthened me’” (Daniel 1:19). Similarly, [Moses,] the master of the prophets, was told regarding this [divine] protection, “I will place My hand upon you until I pass” (Exodus 33:22).

The psalm continues: “Hashem shall give grace and honor. He will not withhold goodness from those who proceed in a wholehearted manner” (84:12). This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, spreads [His light] upon those who walk in a straight way upon paths that lead to Him, if they will continue walking straight until they reach [revelation].

And the psalmist concludes: “Hashem of Hosts, happy is the man who trusts in You” (13). This alludes to a person who has emptied his heart of everything outside of God, and is connected [only] to Him. This verse demonstrates the happiness of whoever adapts the trait of trust in matters of this world (as we explained earlier in the chapter on trust), and the happiness of whoever strips himself of everything outside of God and casts his burden in religious matters upon God. Such a person attains [revelation].

This esoteric interpretation is in line with the previous text of the Psalms. (The Biblical text can be interpreted in various ways—Sanhedrin 36.) It does not contradict the revealed interpretation that we initially presented. The longing for the Temple to be rebuilt, and the pain over its destruction, flow from its inner purposes. The esoteric interpretation presented above indeed [describes] this purpose. We have spoken at length regarding hitbodedut (the topic of this chapter) in terms of an encompassing explanation of this psalm, since it is in line with the topic of this chapter.

To conclude the topic of this chapter: in the chronicles of the early Sages, we are taught about hitbodedut in caves (Shabbat 33b).

[Rabbi] Shimon bar Yochai and his son engaged in hitbodedut in a cave for many years. The initial cause was that [the government] wanted to kill them, as the Talmud tells. As a result, however, they attained a complete and long-lasting hitbodedut that caused them to attain [revelation]. At last a

miracle appropriate to the [greatness of the] situation was performed for them: “A miracle occurred, and a carob tree and a wellspring were created for them.” And in closing, the [Talmud] states clearly that at the end of their hitbodedut they came to an attainment that is close to prophecy: “Elijah came and stood at the entrance of the cave. He said, ‘Who will reveal to Bar Yochai that the king has died and his decree has been nullified?’”

When they emerged, they were so far removed from this-worldly concerns that they were astonished that people could dedicate themselves to plowing and planting. “They emerged and came upon people who were plowing and planting. They said, ‘How long will you set aside eternal life and engage in temporal life?’” And their thought was so powerful that “every place that they looked at was burned.”

It was after they emerged from the cave that they came to this attainment. “A voice came forth from heaven and told them, ‘Did you emerge to destroy the world? Return to your cave.’ And so they returned for twelve months.” And they did not emerge again until they had divine permission. “A voice from heaven emerged and told them, ‘Come forth from your cave,’ and so they did.”

They were in a holy state in which “You will decree and it will come about for you” (Job 22:28). “Whatever Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon destroyed, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai restored. He said to him, ‘You and I are enough for the world.’”

Come and see how similar their way and revelation are to the ways of the prophets and their attainments. From among them rose [even] those who engaged in plowing in an open field for the purpose of hitbodedut—in addition to doing so in order to support themselves. There are, for instance, the Patriarchs, who grazed sheep; Shaul before he became king; Elisha (before he prophesied) who used to plow (Samuel I 11:5 and Kings I 19:19, etc). Abba Chilkiyah used to plow [as a day worker]. Chananiah ben Chizkiyah ben Gabon engaged in hitbodedut in the attic, and the great leaders of Israel used to visit him from time to time to receive his blessing.

The best time for hitbodedut is to rise [in prayer] at the end of the night and arouse oneself at midnight [of the night]. “Rise, sing at night at the beginning of the watch” (Eichah 2:19). And David said “My eyes have preceded the morning watch to speak in Your words” (Psalms 119:148). And he furthermore said, “At midnight I will rise to praise You for our righteous judgements” (62). It is possible that one who goes on this way will not sleep at all. This lone meditation is similar to (ibid. 132:4) “I shall not give sleep to my eyes, to my eyelids a nap.” And Asaf said (ibid. 77:5) “You have grasped my eyelids; I have been stirred up and cannot speak.”

The Moslem dervishes have the custom of engaging in hitbodedut in dark places. They enclose themselves there until the sense of feeling melts away from the portions of the spirit, and they cannot even distinguish light [a form

of sensory deprivation like an isolation tank?]. And this brings about a strong inner light in which the spirit may engage so that the outer darkness will not cause it pain.

Rabbi Avraham Hachasid of blessed memory used to say that this—hitbodedut in dark places— is spoken of in the verse (Isaiah 50:10) “Who among you is fearful of Hashem and heeds the voice of His servant who has gone in the dark places, where he has no light. It is he who shall trust in the name of Hashem and lean upon his God.” (In the beginning of this book, we have explained this verse in line with their explanation.)

One of the blessings with which the greatest wise men bless each other is “May Hashem place your portion with those who take pleasure in solitude, as their souls are isolated amidst the crowd.” And David said regarding his closeness to God when he engaged in hitbodedut in the darkness of night and in the dry deserts and the like (Psalms 23:4): “Even when I walk in the valley of the deathly shadow, I will not fear evil, for You are with me, Your staff and Your stick, they will comfort me.”

This path is the last of the exalted paths. It borders the [attainment of] revelation. Outer hitbodedut is like a journey. Inner hitbodedut begins as a journey. But its end is the arrival. It completes everything.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rabbi Avraham, son of the Rambam (1186-1237), succeeded his father as head of the Jewish community of Fostat, Egypt. He wrote his book, *Sefer Hamaspik*, as an encyclopedic compendium of the ways of intense devotion. Unfortunately, only a fragment of this work survives.

## ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

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