

Sefer haHisbodedus

The forgotten path of self perfection and character development through seclusion and meditation

As seen through the classical Mussar sources

[] are mine for readability { } are for words in the actual text that have brackets
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Hashem

This chapter defines Hisbodedus and differentiates between external and internal – seclusion which leads to meditation. It also gives examples of forms of hisbodedus and cites examples historical figures in Tanach that practiced hisbodedus from the time of the patriarchs through the prophets and their students citing verses especially from psalms to support this claim. It concludes with further examples from the time of the Talmud and cites individuals and their practices and achievements from various Talmudic sources.

“ Hisbodedus (Seclusion and Meditation) is one of the greatest among the lofty character traits. It is the path of the greatest righteous Tzadikim and through this very medium the prophets achieved revelation.

It is divided into two categories: external and internal hisbodedus. The purpose of external hisbodedus [or seclusion of the body] is to reach a level of internal hisbodedus [or meditation and seclusion of the mind] which is the top rung of the ladder of revelation. And more so it itself is revelation.

We shall say that internal hisbodedus is the whole faithfulness from the depths of the heart about which Dovid prayed (Tehilim 51:12) “Elokim create for me a pure heart” and which Asaf achieved (Tehilim 73:27) “My flesh and my heart have expired – the Rock of my heart, my portion Elokim.” This is purification and refinement of the heart from all things but Hashem, and internalization of Him so that He may dwell within it. This level can be reached once the senses are numbed from part or the whole of the soul and the power to feel stimulus is distanced from the concepts and ideas of this world, it should then be re-channeled to focus on Hashem. The intellect should dwell upon G-dly matters. The imagination should be awakened and utilized to serve contemplation and reflection through meditating and

pondering Hashem's creations; wondrous awesome creatures who demonstrate the Creator. For example one could meditate on the vastness of the ocean and the wondrous creatures that live in it. Or one can meditate on the revolutions of the globe; the way the planet earth rotates and spins, or the nature of the stars and other similar examples.

About the concept of purification of the heart and mind (thoughts) from anything but Hashem Asaf said "My heart and flesh have expired." About distancing the stimulus from anything outside of Hashem he said (Tehillim 73:25) "Who is there in the heavens for me, and without You even on the land." On the idea of re-channeling stimulus to focus on Hashem Yishaya said (Isiah 26:8-9) "My soul desires Your name and memory, my flesh pines for You" and also "My soul cleaves after You." In reference to nullifying the senses it is said (Iyov 31:1) "I have made a covenant for my eyes" and similarly (Isiah 33:15) "He shuts his eyes from seeing evil." And Dovid said (Tehilim 119:37) "Move my eyes from seeing naught." In reference to limiting the emotions and external stimuli to allow the contemplative or meditative faculties to overpower them Elisha said to Gichazi "If you meet a man do not bless him, and if a man should bless you do not answer him."

You must understand this {fully}. In order to achieve inner hisbodedus which unites {man with his creator} the prophets and their students utilized musical instruments and melodies in order to awaken the conscious mind to Hashem and to purify the inner self from anything external. Therefore it is said regarding the secret of the holy temple – may it return speedily as of old – (Divrei Hayamim I 25:1) "And Dovid and the army officials separated themselves to the service of the son's of Asaf, and Heyman and Yedusun the prophets with lyres, harps and cymbals."

This is why the prophets and their righteous students were inclined towards external hisbodedus [or seclusion of the body] which in turn brings to internal hisbodedus [or meditation and seclusion of the mind]. The meaning of external hisbodedus is distancing oneself from people and detaching one's feet from their habitat and separation from them. This is all done to save oneself from the things that the general populace is steeped in. To be sure that one will not be disturbed by their sight or their conversations nor bothered by their ideas. Meditation on and pondering of Hashem's greatness and delight in His angel/messengers and various creations, by contemplation and reflection on their closeness {to Hashem} and their exaltedness as Dovid said about them (Tehillim 119:17-18) "Your loved ones are dear to me E-I, their quantity is great, they number more than the sands." He would also sink into deep contemplation until he would slumber or relax and achieve unity

{with Elokim} as he in fact achieved. When he was up and awake {from serenity} the magic of this unity did not fade as it says (ibid.) "I awakened and I am still with You."

External Hisbodedus – [seclusion] can be complete and total, for example detachment from city life and isolation in deserted and uninhabited areas. It can also be partial as in closing oneself inside one's home alone. It can be enduring or temporary, for a long or short duration. However to make it permanent is impossible in this world below. As for seclusion by detachment from city life and isolation in deserts and Aravos Tziya, mountains and similar places this is mentioned and recorded in the lives of the prophets and their students as we shall demonstrate or mention to you. We will now say something that is well known and famous to all even though it is not stated explicitly in any verse; about the way Chanoch lived during his lifetime as it says (Bereshis 5:25) "and Chanoch walked with Elokim." This mostly refers to wanderings and seclusion – Hisbodedus. It is also said about Avraham our forefather peace be upon him, who said to his two servant boys (Bereshis 22:5) "The lad and I will go further, and we will prostrate ourselves and return to you." He who understands can infer that he [Avraham] had the previous custom of closing himself off in seclusion at specific times even from the members his own household. And Yitzhak peace be upon him has had this trait expressed in reference to him as it says (Bereshis 24:63) "And Yitzhak went out to pray in the field." The occupation of the patriarchs our forefathers and their children after them was as a shepherd for their flocks for the very fact this occupation lends itself to hisbodedus seclusion in the grazing pastures and distance from city life. It is quite easy to contemplate Yaakov our forefather's position after suffering fourteen years of grazing cattle which he worked doing for the hands of both Rachel and Leah. As it says (Bereshis 31:41) "I have worked 14 years for both your daughters." {Even so} When Lavan grasped onto him with force and gave him free choice asking him to choose his wages as it says (Bereshis 30:28) "Choose your wage and I will give it to you." He didn't choose gold, silver or anything else except [he still chose] to go back and shepherd a flock. As it says (Bereshis 30:31) "Give me nothing except this one thing do for me, let me return and shepherd and guard your flock." Even though there was great distress and hardship involved in this occupation as he said earlier (ibid 31:40) "I suffered sunstroke by day and frostbite by night and I fought the sleep from my eyes" this all because {shepherding} fit his lifestyle and any other form of work would be either a stumbling block or in direct opposition to his way of life.

The master of the prophets Moshe servant of Hashem was a shepherd to his father in law Yisro's flock. He would go deep into the desert while in the course of shepherding as it says (Shemos 3:1) "He guided the sheep towards the desert and he came to the mountain of Elokim to Horeb." This was not due to a lack of pasture

and good grazing land around Midian, rather [Moshe did this] in order to sink deep into internal hisbodedus and with a desire to achieve a revelation the likes of which no one but him peace be upon him, could comprehend. Do not attempt to contradict my words with the Aramaic translation of "He guided the sheep towards the desert - He guided the sheep towards a place of good pasture, the desert." Since we know the saying of our sages in the Talmud tractate Sanhedrin page 34 "A verse can be explained in a several different ways." And the explanations of our sages indeed differ from his (Onkelos the author of the Aramaic targum) translations in several places as anyone who studies these matters will see. And Hashem said regarding Moshe's complete hisbodedus through which he achieved the desired revelation and received that which he received as it says (Shemos 24:12) "Come up to Me on the mountain." And further (ibid 34:3) "And no man should come up together with you." And since he [Moshe] peace be upon him longed for hisbodedus he distanced the tent of meeting – Ohel Moed away from the encampment, as the verse says (ibid 33:7) "And Moshe took the tent and pitched it outside the encampment, far from the camp." The generation of the desert also lived far away from civilization for forty years, in order to achieve revelation as it says (Dvarim 29:4) "And I guided you for forty years in the desert in order that you should know that I am Hashem your G-d." And He said in the language of His prophets (Yirmiah 2:2) "You followed me into the desert, an unsown land." And Elihu and Eliyahu both secluded themselves in hisbodedus on Mount Carmel many times as the verses demonstrate (Kings I 18, II 2:28, 4:25). Eliyahu in his complete seclusion achieved revelation as it says (Kings I 19:4) "And he went into the desert, and he came to the mountain of Elokim to Horev and behold a voice, What do you seek here Eliyahu?" Even Bilaam used the method of hisbodedus in order to achieve revelation as it says (Bamidbar 23:15) "And I will stand here and he went shefi" as Onkelos translates "He went alone." And similarly (Bamidbar 24:1) "He turned his face to the desert." All the sons of the prophets made use of hisbodedus in far off places, like the tomb of Rachel or Beit El, and Yericho and the Yarden as is clear from the verses to he who contemplates them. (Shmuel I 10:2, Kings II 2:15, 18, 23)

In reference to closing oneself off in houses or places of worship and the like, the first to do so as mentioned in the Torah was our forefather Yaakov as it says (Bereshis 25:27) "And Yaakov was Tam – perfect a dweller of tents." From hisbodedus seclusion in tents he went on to hisbodedus in the desert when he traveled and received revelation as it says (Bereshis 28:11-13) "and he reached the place and slept there, and he dreamed and behold a ladder, and Hashem was upon him and He said I am Hashem, and the angel of Hashem said to me etc., I am the G-d of Beit El." And Yehoshuah peace be upon him took on full hisbodedus on the mountains one and many {times}, and in the Ohel Moed – tent of meeting regularly

and almost constantly. His seclusion on the mountain was for the first forty days while {Moshe} the emissary peace be upon him was communing one on one with Hashem and receiving the first tablets while he, Yehoshuah waited for him at the foot of the mountain meditating in seclusion. He then joined the emissary {Moshe} when he left his place {on the mountain} before they reached the camp. The proof for this is the verse (Shemos 17, 19) "and Yehoshuah heard the sound of the people up to no good, and we he neared the encampment ..." We see from here that they met before they entered the camp. As for his hisbodedus at the tent of meeting the Torah speaks of his diligence (ibid 33:11) "and his servant Yeshouah son of Nun, a young man who did not leave the tent." And Shmuel peace be upon him also was accustomed to hisbodedus in the Mishkan sanctuary at Shiloh until he merited revelation as it says (Shmuel I 3:3) "He lay in the sanctuary of Hashem." And regarding the trance-like sleep of his prophecy it says (Shir HaShirim 5:2) "I am asleep, and my heart is awake." Eliyahu also had the custom to seclude himself in the attic and when he was secluded there in meditation his prayers for Achiya the son of the Tzarfatis were answered as it says (Kings I 17:19) "He took him from her grasp and he took him up to the attic where he would sit." And so to Elisha {would meditate} in the attic of the Shunamis, and during his meditation there he revived the Shunamis' son as it says (Kings II 4:33) "And he came and closed the door on them both, and he prayed to Hashem." Aharon and his son's were commanded to hisbodedus in the Mishkan during the seven days of the milluim as it says (Vayikra 8:35) "and sit by the opening of the Ohel Moed day and night" and also (ibid 33) "and from the opening of the tent of meeting you shall not emerge." And the Kohen Gadol – high preist is commanded not to exit the holy temple as it says (Vayikra 21:12) "And he shall not exit the Mikdash, nor shall he desecrate etc." He is also commanded to be alone during the plea for forgiveness on the day of atonement Yom Kippurim as it says (Vayikra 16:17) 'And no man shall be in the Ohel Moed when he comes to atone at the holy until he leaves.'" Similarly we find by Doeg that he stumbled on his path {in life} and did not achieve revelation but instead failed, he used to seclude himself and imitate meditation of {the Kohen gadol} and he was distressed before Hashem (Shmuel I 21:8). The verse has already illustrated clear that he {Doeg} was among those famous there (ibid.) "Head of the shepherds of Shaul". Concerning the desire he had to seclude himself in meditation, and to release himself from the duties of king of Israel so he could reach the level of internal hisbodedus and achieve revelation King David said (Tehilim 27:4) "I have one request to ask of Hashem, may I sit in the house of the Lord all the days of my life and visit His sanctuary." And he said further (Tehilim 65:5) "Happy is he who is chosen to be drawn close and dwell in Your courtyards." And he said further on the subject of his hisbodedus to attain revelation (Tehilim 101:2-3) "I will be enlightened as to the true path, when will You come to me? I will walk with a whole heart in the

depths of my home I would not place before my eyes an evil thing." He opened discussion on this subject upon embarking on the complete path of revelation and said (ibid) "I will be enlightened on the true path when will You come to me?" Later once he understood this {path} and walked in its ways, it being {a form of} external hisbodedus – seclusion, to sit alone in ones home closed off, to which he connected the idea of internal hisbodedus. His saying concerning "I will walk wholeheartedly" connotes internal hisbodedus. Afterwards he expressed his desire for external hisbodedus. Which refers to seclusion sitting at home, by which he distanced himself from seeing evil, and from veering from {the path of} Hashem. It removes all things that can connect to ones spirit from these things, and he said "I will not put before my eyes something evil, distorted and twisted paths I despise, they shall not cleave to me." Afterwards he explained that the purpose of this path is to straighten the heart through internal hisbodedus so that the hollow emptiness of this world in which we are generally steeped will not affect it. Once one is involved in hisbodedus he can then remove the mark that the love of {this} world has on us which is evil – vile sickness. Until it becomes so unrecognizable that it will be as if he has never known it since birth. On which he remarked "A twisted heart will be removed from me." However what he says later in that psalm "Those who slander in secret will I destroy" has no bearing on hisbodedus rather it is discussing what he would do once he would cease his seclusion and return to regular affairs in the kingdom. In order to explain why he would ever leave hisbodedus and occupy himself in worldly affairs for the benefit of the law, he said that even though he has stopeed hisbodedus and returned to worldly affairs this too was done to further the will of Hashem unlike other kings who act punishing, drawing close, distancing and misroim solely for {their own pleasure and for} their kingdom. He is unlike them rather he punishes the wicked who do evil, planters of malvelonce and he distances the arrogant, conceited individuals and lustful ones, he prefers to draw close the good, pure clean individuals he walk on the straight path of virtue; he chooses them to be his advisors and friends, his servants and assistants. Those whose traits are opposite these cannot endure with him. During the morning watch, which usually followed hisbodedus at night, he would set aside time to punish the wicked so that they and their stain would be removed from His holy city. There is not a shadow of a doubt that this is due to his hisbodedus peace be upon him, for he who performs hisbodedus as we have discussed has a chazaka, that he will act as we have explained previously.

The sons of Korach spoke regarding the yearning for the Temple (Tehilim 84:2) "How welcoming is your sanctuary." This yearning can be understood as external {or} internal. Externally it is the yearning for the rebuilding of the temple after its destruction, like those in exile say. This external expression is said "A bird can

also find a home" this is a description of the temple's destruction because of the many sins of Israel like a place where birds come to roost empty and desolate. And as it says "Those who pass in the valley of cries" is a description of the numerous cries of those in exile over the destruction, they are praying {and saying} "Hashem Elokim of multitudes hear my prayer" which is an entreaty to hear the prayers of those in exile. That which he says "Our shield, see O' Hashem!" is a plea for salvation from enemies and a cover to hide from them and the feeling of Moshiach's coming as assured. And he says "from living in the tents of the wicked" refers to {the Jews} living among the gentiles during the exile. And he says "Hashem of multitudes happy are those that trust in You" which refers to those who trust in Hashem who will save them from exile. And {also} the rest of the verses in this psalm can be explained in this same manner and spirit.

The inner meaning [of this psalm is] however, is a desire and yearning for external hisbodedus – seclusion in the holy temple and achieving inner hisbodedus through that. And the saying (Tehilim 84:2) "How welcoming is your sanctuary" is an expression of this [yearning]. And the saying (ibid 3) "My soul craves and expires for the courtyards of Hashem," sheds light on the subject that yearning for external hisbodedus is done to achieve internal hisbodedus which in turn is a medium to the final goal of prophecy or a similar [spiritual] level. Through this the soul, which is connected to the body awakens and can subjugate the body and its limbs to the service of Hashem and His praise. He then compares the dwelling of select individuals from among Israel, the prophets, their students and the hassidim in the holy temple the place of the altar for burnt offerings and the incense altar to the nesting / dwelling of birds and their chicks in their nests as it says (ibid 4) "A bird shall also find a home, and the free bird a nest where their chicks can rest like your altars Hashem." Later he expresses {his feelings} that they are worthy of jealousy, however they merited to achieve revelation and find a shield and shelter behind Hashem. Their revelation came about through the rails of the hear and the Masut of the intellect {during} internal hisbodedus. And it says (ibid 5) "Happy are those that dwell in Your house, they shall praise You selah." Afterwords he describes how their eyes cried tears like an ever flowing spring which feeds a stream that can be compared to a water source. This is as it says (ibid 7) "Those who pass through the valley of tears – cries, a spring will feed it." This is not a description of things as they are rather it is a expressive depiction that draws a picture of the great crying and distress. This crying has two reasons: one is distress on the years of a lifetime that has passed, and will pass without those pleasures {that they subscribe to}, the second reason is the strong emotion felt upon achieving their desired result; like one who is in love cries [from happiness and emotion rather than sadness] when separated from the love of his heart a great many years after being finally re-united.

He later says "The teacher will also don blessings" Moreh alludes to Hashem. The meaning behind this is from Hashem's charity and goodness those that yearn to connect to Him and approach Him and praise Him with the Divine spirit of inspiration called Ruach haKodesh which is revelation, to which is alluded in this verse (ibid 3) "My heart and my flesh will sing to the living G-d" and (ibid 5) "they will praise You selah" refers to His {Hashem's} acceptance of their praise and worship. The word "don" is a descriptive adjective for his acceptance, like he who wears an article of clothing given to him by the one who loves him and wraps himself in it. He is called "Moreh" their teacher since He advises and directs them giving them the power of speech that they may praise him. Then it says (ibid 8) "May they go from strength to strength." This has in my opinion two possible meanings, but I am unsure whether one of the two is correct, whether both are correct or whether there is another meaning that is unknown to me. The first of the two possible meanings is going from strength to strength hints at the advancement {in levels} of those who walk on the highest paths, for example those who sometimes pass into zealotry, sometimes they direct their intention towards Hashem, sometimes to hisbodedus in their homes and sometimes to the holy temple. Then it says (ibid) "it will appear to Elokim in zion" this teaches that they attained {revelation} in the temple. This is because the whole statement refers to the yearning to achieve revelation. However the second meaning is that going from strength to strength refers to going from the first to second revelation, and the second to third and so on until one reaches the highest revelation possible in this world which is prophecy. The statement "it will be seen by Elokim in zion" {should be interpreted} according to the earlier understanding [of levels rather than specific types or numbers of revelation.] The statement (ibid 9) "Hashem Elokim of multitudes, our shield is seen Elokim" is a prayer that expresses the prophetic yearning to be sheltered {by G-d} and guarded and watched over from stumbling blocks and barriers. Aid and help from the first anointed one such as Dovid, Shlomo and the like or the final anointed one - **the Moshiach** – may he come speedily in our days- whose entire purpose in kingship is the re-building of the holy temple and the external and internal service to which {all of the children of Israel} yearn and desire. This is clear from the statement (ibid 11) "One day in Your courtyards is worth more than a thousand [outside]" this hints at the great joy experienced at hisbodedus within the beis hamikdash – holy temple within which he was deeply involved {from time to time}. The statement (ibid) "I have chosen to dwell in the House of my G-d rather than living in tents of wickedness" we should not translate "tents of the wicked" as "places of wicked people" since this is incorrect to say in the name of our sages and even more so in the name of the prophets. Rather he means to say: it is inappropriate to make a comparison like the temple of is more well liked than the winery since these two places have nothing in common like honey and vinegar are disparate, so that one would not compare them saying honey is sweeter than vinegar

[since they are opposites]. However a sage would say that he prefers Divine wisdom to secular scientific wisdom, because these two things have something in common [like wisdom]. Similarly one could say that the honey derived from bees is sweeter than sugarcane since both have something in common [like sweetness]. Therefore it would make sense to say that the statement of preference regarding hisbodedus in the temple courtyards is not over the place of the wicked rather it refers to the choice between hisbodedus in the temple and other places of worship that have a violation of Torah since they have not given Torah its proper due. As Hashem said through His prophets (Tzefania 3:4) "they violated the Torah." This violence {comes} from those who worship their own beliefs in those places. They {damage} themselves since they mix in these places belief and its opposite. This is similar to the service in their synagogues which are composed of the loftiest of prayers to those that understand them and the reading of the Torah, these together with lowly forms of entertainment and {pursuit} of honor, idle matters and lightheadedness; things which are better not mentioned in this chapter and which were already discussed in previous ones. About such places Hashem said through His prophet (Yishaya 1:13) "On their new months and Sabbaths and holding convocations I shall not endure iniquity with a solemn assembly." An explanation of this is "I choose the holy temple to attain inner hisbodedus – meditation rather than being present at faulty assemblies where both goodness and its opposite are simultaneously present." Regarding the temple and dwelling in the tents of the wicked are equivalent for certain individuals. This is expressed in the words "our shield see" this is like he said that his prayers are to help Hashem through His anointed one for the needs of the temple which {the Jewish people} yearn for and desire because of the great good hidden there. In his statement (ibid 12) "like a sun and shield is Hashem Elokim" he refers to Hashem's presence and existence give forth light as those that merit revelation [or enlightenment] which is compared to light. Therefore it gives delight and spiritual pleasure akin to the feeling [of warmth] provided by sunlight. However the danger of destruction is {also} present to those who are blind, as the Torah relates (Shemos 19:22) "And also the Kohanim who come forth to Hashem must sanctify themselves lest Hashem lash out at them." This is also told in the annals of our forebears (Talmud tractate Chagigah 14) "Ben Azai gazed and was injured." This is similar to the {danger} of sunlight to he who gazes [directly] at it, since inevitably he will lose his eyesight from it since he will not be able to stand its light [intensity] if he dares to stare at the sun itself and not make due with the rays that come here. Or it can be compared to {danger} that he will be tanned and burned by its heat [and get sunburn] if he remains naked and vulnerable without cover or shield from its heat. This is the meaning that Hashem sheds His light on His servants who have merited {revelation} and that He spreads on them his cover, He [Hashem] is at the same time both the sun and the shield from its heat and intense light. As it says

(Malachi 3:20) "And for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness shall shine with healing with its wings." Pay attention to the fact that it says "shine" and afterwards "heal with its wings" it does no damage like the sun to which it is compared. Similarly it was said to Avraham during revelation (Bereshis 15:1) "Fear not Avram, I will shield you." And it was said to Daniel when he prophesied (Daniel 10:19) " "Fear not greatly beloved man, peace unto thee, be strong; strong" and when He spoke to me I was strengthened and I said "Speak my Lord for You have strengthened me". " Similarly it was said to the master of prophets regarding this {Divine} cover (Shemos 33:22) "And I shall place My hands on you until I pass." And then it was said (Tehilim 84:14) "Honor and pleasantries will Hashem give, He will not hold back good for those who walk in a straight path." This teaches us that Hashem distributes {His light} onto those who walk straight on the paths that lead to Him if they walk upright until they achieve {revelation}. He ended the psalm saying (ibid 13) "Hashem of multitudes happy is he who trusts in You." This alludes to he who has removed from his heart anything that is irrelevant to Hashem and he is connected {only} to Him. This verse demonstrates the joy of he who utilizes the trait of security and trust pertaining to the physical matters of this world as was explained in the previous chapter on trust. Happy is he who rejoices solely in Hashem, who casts his pack unto Hashem when it comes to matters of belief he merits {revelation}. This explanation fits with the earlier subject of this psalm, and one verse can be explained in a variety of ways (Sanhedrin 34).

This inner meaning does not contradict the obvious literal {meaning} which we mentioned previously. Because the deep yearning for the holy temple and its rebuilding and the sorrow [expressed] over its destruction which flow from an inner goal and that hidden meaning is that objective. We have explained hisbodedus thoroughly which is the purpose of this chapter through a comprehensive explanation of this psalm since shares a common thread with this chapter.

In order to wrap up this chapter with a brief summary we can say that {the phenomenon called} Hisbodedus in caves is mentioned in the earliest [stories] of our sages. {Rabbi} Shimon Bar Yochai and his son secluded themselves in hisbodedus in a cave for many years. The initial reason for this seclusion was that they were sought after by the officials as is related in the Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 33), however this caused them to reach a level of true hisbodedus through which they {achieved revelation} and they merited a miracle as is related regarding them (ibid) "A miracle happened for them and a carob tree and a spring of water were created." At the conclusion of that story it states explicitly that the act of hisbodedus is what allowed them to achieve a revelation close to prophecy. "Elijah came and stood at the mouth of the cave and said "who will reveal to Bar Yochai that the Caesar has

died and his decree has been rescinded / annulled?"" When they left the cave they were so far from worldly matters to the point that they were astonished at how man could give of himself for planting and plowing as it says (ibid) "They left the cave, they saw people planting and plowing and said "how can you abandon the eternal life for the temporary life?" Their thoughts had such a profound affect that it says (ibid) "everywhere they gazed at with their eyes was burned." They attained this level of achievement once they had left the cave as it says (ibid) "A heavenly voice proclaimed to them: have you come out to destroy the world? Go back to your cave! They returned for a period of twelve months." They only left with Divine permission as it says "A heavenly voice proclaimed to them: go out of your cave! They left and went out." They attained a level of holiness the likes of which is described in (Iyov 22:18) "And you shall decree and say and it shall be fulfilled." "Anywhere Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon would destroy, his father Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would heal. Rabbi Shimon said the world needs only you and me." Go and see how similar is their level of revelation that they merited to that of the prophets and their achievements. From among them arose he who would toil in hisbodedus while plowing the open fields, in addition to the toil for his livelihood like the way the patriarchs acted when they were shepherds and like Shaul before his kingship and Elisha {before his calling as a prophet}, as it says (Shmuel I 11:5, Kings I 19:19) Aba Chilkiyah was a plower {as a hired hand} and Chananyah son of Chizkiyah son of Goron peace be upon him would seclude himself in the attic, and the great leaders of Israel would visit him from time to time to receive his blessing.

The best time for hisbodedus to stand {in prayer} at the end of the night, to awaken at {midnight} as it says (Eicha 2:19) "Awaken and cry/pray at night at the head of the watches." And Dovid said (Tehilim 119:148) "I awoke at the head of the watches to speak about Your words" and he said further (ibid 62) "At midnight I awake to praise You about the statutes of your righteousness." Some who walk this path do not give slumber nor sleep to their eyes as it says (Tehilim 132:4) "If I will give sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids." And Assaf said (Tehilim 77:5) "You have held my eyelids fast I am troubled and cannot speak." The Muslim dervishes have the custom to seclude themselves in dark places and close themselves off until their sense of touch and feeling separates from their souls and they would be unable to distinguish and see even light. This requires a great inner light that the soul must toil in, so that no external intrusion can harm them. Rabbi Avraham the Chasid would say about this, hisbodedus in darkness is what the verse refers to in (Yishaya 50:10) "Who among you who fears Hashem hears the voice of his servant who walked in darkness without light, he will trust in Hashem and depend on his Elokim." One of the greatest blessing which the sages bless each other with is "May Hashem place your portion with he that derives pleasure from seclusion, and his soul is isolated in a

crowd." David said also regarding his close relationship with the Almighty when secluding himself in hisbodedus in the dark cover of night and in desolate deserts and similar places (Tehilim 23:4) "Even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil because You are with me, You rod and staff comfort me."

This path is the final of the most exalted paths and it borders on achieving revelation. The external hisbodedus is like a journey, and internal hisbodedus begins as a journey and ends in achieving revelation and completes them all. "

(Final chapter on Hisbodedus)

Hisbodedus means both self seclusion and self isolation in a physical literal sense and in a mental spiritual capacity as well. In the latter it leads to isolation of the mind through meditation leading to levels of receptiveness akin to revelation, Divine intuition (ruach hakodesh) and in times past even prophecy. In the former its purpose is to aid introspection. It seems clear from the sources (see Appendices) that this method is as ancient as the patriarchs and the prophets; it has filtered on through Talmudic times to our own as well. Somehow along the way this very important mussar tool seems to have been overlooked or cast aside by the masses. It has fallen into an obscurity as the domain of those few who searched and found it. However this tool is a powerful key to understand just how much can be accomplished and how close one can come to a deep personal relationship with the Almighty. It is an important tool for repentance, deep introspection and character development.

A practical guide seems to be in order so that one who wishes to take the next step and make use of this powerful mussar tool will have clear guidance. As stated above there seem to be four possible objectives or purposes to using hisbodedus (the third really leading to the fourth. They are:

1. Seclusion from man and society to help character trait development and self perfection.
2. Seclusion for the purpose of humbling oneself to Hashem and repenting before Him, often through personal prayer.
3. Seclusion in order to isolate oneself, block out distraction as a preparation for meditation.
4. Isolating the mind in actual meditation to reach a level of expanded consciousness, merit revelation and a level akin to prophecy.

This being the case we can further categorize the purposes of hisbodedus as simply a mussar tool, a medium used to help oneself achieve a certain spiritual goal. This is an important distinction since many people view seclusion and meditation as foreign to general Jewish practice. This alienation is as we have proven totally unfounded. In fact this historic practice is central to character development as espoused by all major schools of Jewish thought and mussar. Hisbodedus in its classic sense whether it means seclusion, meditation or both is only a means to an end, it is **not** an end unto itself. One does not practice hisbodedus for its own sake, rather one must have a clear goal in mind such as repentance, acquiring the trait of humility and aiding in self perfection or to aid in meditation and connection to Hashem.

We will now explore the various ways to use hisbodedus and their source in various texts:

1. Seclusion from man and society to help character trait development and self perfection.

This is perhaps the most common use of hisbodedus as a mussar tool. It would be categorized as external hisbodedus by Rabbeinu Avraham Maimonides son of the Rambam who wrote "The meaning of external hisbodedus is distancing oneself from people and detaching one's feet from their habitat and separation from them. This is all done to save oneself from the things that the general populace is steeped in. To be sure that one will not be disturbed by their sight or their conversations nor bothered by their ideas." (see Appendix A).

Man and society tend to be a distraction from Hashem and His Torah. They are also viewed as likely to invite frivolity and sin such that a Jew who seeks wholeness in his character development and wishes to refine himself, attaining perfection must really seek temporary periods of isolation from society to seclude himself and work on his character.

Perhaps the earliest source that makes use of isolation and seclusion to this end is the Chovos Halevavos – the Duties of the Heart where Rabbeinu Bachya Ibn Pakuda writes "When you are inclined to allying your soul with the company of others and society at large to socialize and find pleasure in them, reflect then on the value of Bedidus - solitude and seclusion from others, and about all the drawbacks and evils of their friendship. . . The general rule of thumb is that most sins can only be transgressed by two or more people such as illicit relations, and bad business deals, and swearing falsely, and false testimony and all verbal sins can only be

transgressed in public with other people. However seclusion Bedidus and isolation from people is a rescue from all the aforementioned sins it is also the stronger among those practices which bring about good character traits. It has already been said that the pillar of purity of heart is a love of Bedidus – seclusion and a partiality for solitude.” (Gate of Cheshbon haNefesh 3:17)

Here we see advocated an approach to sin that says we should flee from it. This approach has been advocated by the Rambam as well and in our times by the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovez HaRav Elazar Menachem Man Shach z”l of Bnei Brak in his collected letters “Truly wherever a man finds himself in our generation he is obligated to misboded - seclude or isolate himself to a certain degree and as the Rambam wrote regarding this practice in Chapter 6 of Hilchos Deos Halacha #1 all the more so in our times.” (Volume 4 Letter #343)

The Rambam referred to states “The way man was created naturally inclines him after the opinions and actions of his friends and comrades to act in the custom of the society in his country. Therefore one should attach always himself to the righteous and dwell among the wise sages in order to learn from their deeds. He should distance himself from the wicked who tread the path of darkness so that he will not learn from their actions. This is as Shlomo said “He who walks among the sages will grow wise, and the wickedness of fools will cause one to become wicked.” And he said “Happy is the man etc.” So if he one lived in a land that had evil customs and the people there do not walk on the just straight path he should move to a place where there are righteous people who do practice good customs. However if all the countries he knows and has heard of all go in an improper path as in our own times. Or if he cannot reach a land that has just and upright ways because of the roaving bands of brigands and thieves or sickness he should live Badad - alone in isolation as it says “Yeshev Badad Yidom – Sit alone and be silent.” If these people are so evil and sinful that they will not let you live among them unless you mix with them and practice their evil ways go out and dwell in caves and crevices and deserts rather than practicing the way of sin as it says “Who will place me in the desert a lodge for guests?” ”

This practice is also mentioned by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in Mesilas Yesharim – The Path of the Just where he writes that “Separation as practiced in custom is hisbodedus – seclusion and separation from society, in order to free the heart to the service [of Hashem] and to reflect upon it properly.” (Chap. 14 The elements of Separation) and similarly “The most valuable of all [means] is seclusion – hisbodedus . . . Eliyahu and Elisha choose the mountains because of their practice of seclusion and hisbodedus.... this medium to be the most proper means to acquire

perfection and separation in order to prevent themselves from being influenced by the inanity of their fellow man." (Chap. 15 The means to acquire Separation) He also writes "That which helps acquire this trait [of holiness] is hisbodedus and a lot of self-discipline and separation. This is done to get rid of distractions." (Chap. 26 The Trait of Holiness)

Another advocate of hisbodedus as a medium to achieve self-perfection in character development is Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz in Yaaros Devash he teaches that "The earlier pious Chassidim would always choose to sit dwelling in caves in order to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded and to distance themselves from people which habituate and cause one to sin. The prophet himself cried out (Yirmeyah 9:1) Who will place me in the desert? And Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai peace be upon him sat in a cave for several years he chose this place to dwell in order to acquire perfection as is related in tractate Shabbos page 33b. Afterwards he and many of his generation dwelled learning Torah in caves as we find often in the Zohar about sages who always dwelt in caves in order to acquire [the trait of] perfection and to distance themselves from people. " (Part 1 Derush/Sermon 14 for the days of Selichos).

It is highly significant to note that Malbim to Kings I 19:3 notes that Eliyahu used to misboded - meditate most of his days and toil at self perfection to perfect his soul. Being that Eliyahu was a prophet and that most of the commentators including Malbim himself discuss hisbodedus in association with the prophets' attempts to achieve prophetic revelation we can safely surmise that this form of hisbodedus is also the first step to the final version of hisbodedus which is a medium associated with meditation and revelation. In fact as we will discuss later the whole introductory portion of Rabbi Chaim Vital's work Shaarey Kedushah on achieving ruach hakodesh, is devoted to developing one's positive character traits. Since as Rabbi Chaim Vital teaches this is in fact the first step in seeking Divine revelation.

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2. Seclusion for the purpose of humbling oneself to Hashem and repenting before Him, often using personal prayer.

One could in fact argue that this an extension of the first method mentioned above. However while that is true if we are using these four steps as rungs in a ladder, if each version of hisbodedus is practiced on its own the most practical difference between this seclusion and the earlier mentioned is that while the first type of hisbodedus is passive in that it preaches fleeing from society and its sins to achieve character development; this form of seclusion advocates active hisbodedus.

Here we find encouragement for repentance, soul searching and spontaneous prayer. This form of hisbodedus would also be characterized as external with some internal components such as the soul searching that one might perform.

One of the earliest sources advocating this type of seclusion is Rabbeinu Yonah haChasid of Gerondi in his Shaarei Teshuvah where he teaches that "One can achieve levels of humility and shame if he secludes himself in thought – behisboded to think of the greatness of Hashem and how great is the evil of a slandering mouth." (Gate 1: 22) Here we see an internal hisbodedus advocating a non-prophetic outcome. The mental hisbodedus that Rabbeinu Yonah advocates has as a goal achieving levels of humility and shame rather than revelations and prophecy that we shall see is the goal and purpose of other forms of internal hisbodedus. This is another example why we have concluded that hisbodedus can be practiced as a mussar tool for the goals of character refinement, humility and repentance, without ever having a loftier goal in mind.

The two most detailed advocates of active hisbodedus in a pure mussar sense are Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Kayduner in his work Kav haYashar and Raaabbi Eliyahu Vidas in Reishis Chochmah and Totzaos Chaim. The Kav haYashar teaches that one must practice hisbodedus daily. He also details examples of what one should do and think once he has secluded himself. Here are a few examples "Therefore a piece of advice given to any man called Yisrael, to subjugate his hard heart, take some free time for himself and hisboded – isolate himself in a hidden place in order that he will feel great humility and humbleness, and so that the awe of the Holy One Blessed be He will seize him. He should ponder and think about the days and years of his life which have already passed and are were like naught, and how each day his time grows shorter and the day of his reckoning is approaching, the day of death which no one can estimate since it comes all of a sudden out of the blue." (Chap. 1) And "This is what man should think about as he engages in hisbodedus daily, since it is an obligation to engage in hisbodedus in order to repair and rectify his sins and iniquities carefully." (Chap. 12) And "Therefore one must engage in meditation in seclusion – lehisboded behisbodedus in the synagogue, he should speak with all his heart before The Knower of all Thoughts Blessed is He, he should weep and cry tears and sigh deeply with all his heart with a contrite broken heart remembering his previous sins and his youthful misdeeds." (Chap. 23)

Here too it is important to note that in Chap.12 the Kav haYashar teaches that "It is a great obligation to perform hisbodedus carefully, maybe from above a spirit of wisdom, insight, understanding and fear / awe of Hashem will alight upon him to guide him on the proper path so that he should not stray from the path of our holy

Torah. If we would receive with our own actions what the earlier sages received we would be able to fulfill our wishes and receive the desires of our heart." This can be taken literally to mean that the ruach - spirit mentioned is akin to revelation or ruach hakodesh. That being the case we have more clear evidence to support Rabbi Chaim Vital's conclusion that the first steps in the quest for revelation are character trait development and refinement.

Rabbi Vidas teaches in Totzaos Chaim #130 "At least once a month he should try and attempt to seclude himself le-hisboded in the synagogue or house of study to cleave unto his maker. He should [use] a little [of that time] in reviewing his deeds, a little in prayer and a little in Torah study. On this day that he designates for seclusion – misboded he should refrain from discussing matters that pertain to business with anyone at all." And in Reishis Chochma Gate of Holiness 6:16 he writes "In order to acquire holiness it is necessary to be in a holy place. . . regarding this there are two aspects: either the place becomes sanctified through Torah study and prayer for example a Beis Midrash – House of Study or a Beis Knesses – synagogue or the place is holy meaning separate and isolated from people.."

The other detailed example of this form of active hisbodedus is Rabbi Elazar Azkari in Sefer Charedim. Here a very important teaching is quoted in the name of the Holy Arizal himself. The Arizal taught that all forms of self-mortification in order to aid on the path of repentance apply only to those not engaged in full time learning. In fact the Arizal advocates hisbodedus as the single most important tool for the ben-Torah to use, so much so that it should be put to use weekly or at least monthly. This is highly significant since we find similar teachings in the poskim of halacha in regards to a ben-Torah skipping extra prayers and where he is also instructed in learning Mussar. (The two approaches are quite complimentary and the parallel is hard to miss. Both indicate that a ben-Torah must have a different approach than the average Jew. Both conclude that Mussar is obligatory. One advocates study of mussar works while the other practicing hisbodedus.) See the Mishna Berurah Orach Chaim 1:4 (MB 12) where he relates "He who is a Baal Torah – master of Torah and has a heart to understand and learn can hold back from saying various extra prayers and supplications printed in the Siddurim. It is better to learn instead. A man is also obligated to establish set times to learn mussar works daily whether a small or large amount. (See also #26 in the Shaar HaTzion where he adds that this is an even greater obligation than learning Mishnah.) "

Here is what Rabbi Azkari says "I found written in the books of the G-dly Kabbalist the Holy Pious Rabbi Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi in a handwritten work called Beis Middos – "Whatever you find written in the works of the rishonim rebuking sin

including self-mortification. . . .were all meant only for those who do not toil in Torah study. However whoever is engaged in Torah study as a profession. . . .has the following method for self improvement; he should not weaken himself nor take away from his studies, rather one day a week he should distance himself from people and seclude himself and yisboded between himself and his Maker. He should unite his thoughts with Him as if he is standing before Him on the Day of Judgment. He should speak to Hashem as would a servant to his Master and a son to his Father. . . . It is found in several books that hisbodedus and separation and dveykus were customs practiced by the pious Chasidim of Israel. When they were secluded alone they would remove the thoughts of this world and tie their thoughts to Master of everything. The aforementioned Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzhak learned that this method is seventy times more beneficial to the soul than learning. According to man's strength and ability he should separate and seclude himself ve'yisboded one day a week, or one day every 15 days, or once a month and no less." (Mitzvas Teshuva Chap. 3)

3. Seclusion in order to isolate oneself, block out distraction as a preparation for meditation.

This is by far the most commonly found reference to hisbodedus. Almost all the commentators to Tanach use the word in this sense (see Appendix). This usage of hisbodedus is external but its sole purpose is to act as a preparatory device for revelation and prophecy. We shall see below that the patriarchs and the prophets from Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov to Moshe, Eliyahu and Daniel they all preferred going to the mountains and other places in order to be alone and isolate themselves from distraction. They would then meditate and practice the final internal level of hisbodedus of the mind in attempts to achieve prophecy.

Here are a few examples in the Torah literature that speak for themselves: Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, the Rambam in his Mishne Torah teaches that "The prophets could not all prophecy whenever they wanted to. Rather they would direct their thoughts and sit in happiness with a good joyful heart and meditate in seclusion – misbodedim." (Mada, Hilchos Yesodei haTorah 7:4) "The mountain is a place of hisbodedus (seclusion & meditation) for prophecy since people do not see distractions there which could distract the mind from concentrating thoughts on Hashem" (Rabbeinu Bachaya Bereshis 46:32) "And Moshe was a shepherd. Moshe took this occupation as was the custom of the early righteous Tzadikim as we find by the righteous Hevel, and the patriarchs, and the tribes. The reason being so that they could distance themselves from civilization which can be a cause of sin and furthermore in order to meditate in prophecy - lehisboded benevuah." (Rabbeinu Bachaya Shemos 3:1) "It was necessary to mention that he was a shepherd since

most of the prophets attained their prophecy through shepherding because prophecy requires hisbodedus - seclusion." (Kli Yakar Shemos 3:1) "After the desert - it should have said to the desert rather the meaning implies that he tried to direct them to a more deserted place. He specifically chose to direct them to the desert since he would be able to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded and to investigate after Divinity or G-dliness – Elokis and similar matters." (Netziv Haemek Davar Shemos 3:1) "This is why Yaakov vowed that Hashem should be his G-d, since yisboded - he engaged all his life in meditation and seclusion to cleave unto Hashem according to his ability, and the sons of the prophets would misbodedim - meditate perhaps they would receive each according to his ability." (Ibn Ezra Shemos 3:19) "Prophecy requires Hisbodedus." (Malbim Kings I 22:10) "Sometimes he would leave him somewhere and go off walking alone in the mountains to meditate in prophecy - lehisboded benevuah." (Radak Kings II 1:7) "Then Daniel left to go home, since he was always at the gate of the king and was busy with his matters there. So he left and went home to meditate alone - lehisboded until the Divine influx would alight on him, and he told his friends this matter so that they should also meditate - she-yisbodedu gam hem. Perhaps the spirit will alight on them according to their preparations." (Malbim Daniel 2:17) "Go out to the valley: in order to meditate - she-yisboded and prepare for prophecy." (Malbim Yechezkel 3:22)

4. Isolating the mind in actual meditation to reach a level of expanded consciousness, merit revelation and a level akin to prophecy.

The final form of hisbodedus is the least practiced. It once served as a form of attaining prophecy and revelation. Today we have no prophets. However there are clear indications that using all the former methods of hisbodedus can lead one to this final step, the pinnacle of the pyramid where one can attain a high level of dveykus and cleave to Hashem.

The most clear example is surprisingly found in the Shulchan Aruch where the author is teaching us the Halacha – Jewish Law as to what direction and meaning our prayers are supposed to take on "This is what the Chassidim and men of great deeds would do, they would misbodedim meditate in seclusion and concentrate in their prayers until they divested themselves of their physical form, strengthening their mental faculty or the power of their mind until they reached a level close to prophecy." (Orach Chaim 98:1)

Another very clear example of hisbodedus meditation is from Rabbi Moshe Cordevero known as the Ramak in his work Pardes Rimonim. "The prophets peace be upon them would achieve [revelation] through the letters with great secluded

meditation – behisbodedus gadol, and a refined pure soul.” (Gate 21 Chap. 1) “Some of the earlier sages explained that by transforming and combing the 72 letter name and other [Divine] names through much great secluded meditation – behisbodedus gadol, a righteous Tzadik can merit a minor revelation of a heavenly voice called bas kol meaning that Hashem’s spirit can speak through him with His words on his tongue.” (Gate 30 Chap. 3)

But perhaps the clearest example of hisbodedus as both a mussar tool in its external sense and as process for revelation and attaining the level of Divine intuition known as Ruach haKodesh in its internal sense is a remarkable sefer called Shaarei Kedushah. Its author Rabbi Chaim Vital was the foremost student of the holy Arizal. While Shaarei Keduash is meant as a path for attaining Ruach haKodesh as the author states, it is mostly devoted to mussar in a classic character refinement sense. However in the final culminating chapters we find the purpose of the sefer to once again come into view when Rabbi Chaim Vital once again introduces the final goal of hisbodedus by outlining the following procedure “Once he is ready and prepared to receive Ruach Hakodesh – the holy spirit **after he has acquired and ingrained all the positive character traits** (emphasis my own). He should enter his house alone after having immersed himself [in a mikvah] in sanctity, in a place where he will not be disturbed by people’s voices or the chirping of birds. If it can be after midnight this is better. He should shut his eyes and divest his thoughts of all worldly matters as if his soul has departed as if he is dead and unfeeling. Afterwards he must concentrate strengthening himself to think about the higher worlds and to connect the root of his soul binding it there to the higher lights. He should imagine as if his soul has left [his body] and has risen up above, he should depict and draw the higher worlds as if he is standing there. If he has done a yichud – unification he should think about it to draw light and the influx of blessings known as shefa to all the worlds. He should intend to receive his portion as well. VeYisboded beMachshava – He should meditate, secluding his thoughts as if the spirit has rested upon him for some time. If he feels nothing he must not yet be ready or prepared. Therefore he must strengthen his resolve to serve Hashem in holiness and continue to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded as we described until he merits that the spirit rests upon him.” (The Eighth Gate - to describe he who comes to sanctify himself in our times in a very brief manner)

In Conclusion we hope that we have demonstrated some of the benefits of hisbodedus as a tool for character development and to aid in acquiring humility and on the path of repentance. Similarly one who wishes to engage in hisbodedus to these ends alone is encouraged to do so on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. We have shown that hisbodedus is advocated as the single most important tool for

attaining holiness and for the ben-Torah on his path of coming close to Hashem. As well as those who wish to aspire to connect with Hashem and rise to the prophecy-like levels of Divine intuition advocated by Rabbi Chaim Vital as practiced through the generations by our patriarchs, the prophets and their students is encourage to take the first step. May we merit the rebuilding of our temple, the coming of Meshiach and the revival and return of prophecy speedily in our own days. Amen.

Appendix A: Sources

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakuda – Chovos HaLevavos – Duties of the Heart

“The seventeenth type of self analysis is reflection regarding when you are inclined to allying your soul with the company of others and society at large to socialize and find pleasure in them, reflect then on the value of Bedidus - solitude and seclusion from others, and about all the drawbacks and evils of their friendship .

.....

The general rule of thumb is that most sins can only be transgressed by two or more people. Sins such as illicit relations, and bad business deals, and swearing falsely, and false testimony and all verbal sins can only be transgressed in public with other people. However seclusion Bedidus and isolation from people is a rescue from all the aforementioned sins it is also the stronger among those practices which bring about good character traits. It has already been said that the pillar of purity of heart is a love of Bedidus – seclusion and a partiality for solitude. Therefore guard yourself my brother, lest your evil inclination lead you astray into the illusion that society and mixing among people is attractive and to cause you to desire them at times when you are engaged in isolation and bedidus – seclusion. Then guard yourself further lest the imaginations of your heart misguide you into believing that the company of wise men who know G-d and His Torah and mixing with great men is the reversal of the concept of bedidus – seclusion and a departure from isolation. Rather this is the greatest most complete form of true bedidus – seclusion and isolation. (*since from them you will learn not to befriend the wicked and you will gain many other benefits* – commentary of Tov haLevanon or that *the essence of the benefits that can be acquired from bedidus you shall acquire in a greater and stronger measure in their company* – commentary of Pas Lechem)."

(Gate of Cheshbon haNefesh 3:17)

“What kind of asceticism should the follower of the Torah engage in? The sages differed and disagreed in its definition . . .

One said that asceticism is the departure from creature love and a preference for Bedidus – seclusion or isolation. (*To depart from the love of people and their friendship and to love hisbodedus* – commentary of Tov haLevanon)
(Gate of Asceticism Chap.2)

“He will flee in thought, soul and body to Hashem. He will delight in remembering Him while in Bedidus – seclusion and banish all other thoughts but those of Hashem’s greatness.” (When he is misboded – secluded from other people and there are is nothing distracting his thoughts then he will delight since he can properly think of Hashem – commentary of Pas Lechem) (When he is Badad – isolated and separated from being part of people and he has given up on their pleasures he will rejoice in having reached this level. – commentary of Tov HaLevanon)
(Gate of Trust Chap.7)

Rabbeinu Yonah haChasid of Gerondi – Shaarei Teshuvah

“One can achieve levels of humility and shame if he secludes himself in thought – behisboded to think of the greatness of Hashem and how great is the evil of a slandering mouth. When one constantly bears in mind that Hashem is watching his deeds and actions and [Hashem] analyzes his innards and sees his thoughts.”
(Gate 1: 22)

“It is proper for every man who fears heaven to establish set times by day and night lehisboded – to seclude himself in his rooms and to search and investigate his ways. ”
(Gate 2:14)

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato – Mesilas Yescharim – Path of the Just

“Separation as practiced in custom is hisbodedus – seclusion and separation from society, in order to free the heart to the service [of Hashem] and to reflect upon it properly.”
(Chap. 14 The elements of Separation)

“The most valuable of all [means] is seclusion – hisbodedus, because just as he removes from his eyes the subjects of this world, he also removes the desire for them from his heart. King Dovid has already praised hisbodedus when he said

(Tehilim 55, 7-8) "Who would give me the wings of a dove so that I could fly and dwell far off and lie in the desert forever/selah." And we find the prophets Eliyahu and Elisha choosing their place in the mountains because of their practice of seclusion and hisbodedus. And our wise sages the earlier ones of blessed memory walked in their footsteps, because they found this medium to be the most proper means to acquire perfection and separation in order to prevent themselves from being influenced by the inanity of their fellow man."
(Chap. 15 The means to acquire Separation)

"That which helps acquire this trait [of holiness] is hisbodedus and a lot of self-discipline and separation. This is done to get rid of distractions then his soul can grow in strength and he can cleave bonding with the Creator."
(Chap. 26 The Trait of Holiness)

**Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher – author of the Tur: quoted by Rabbi Yosef Karo
author of the Shulchan Aruch**

" He who prays must direct or have intention in his heart to the meaning of the words that his lips are saying, he should think that the Divine Presence of the Shechina is opposite him and he should divest himself of all distracting thoughts until his thoughts and intentions are pure and refined towards prayer. He should think that if he were standing before a flesh and blood king he would organize and prepare his speech and concentrate on them well so that he not stumble heaven forbid. How much more so before the king of all kings the Holy One Blessed be He who investigates all thoughts.

This is what the Chassidim and men of great deeds would do, they would misbodedim meditate in seclusion and concentrate in their prayers until they divested themselves of their physical form, strengthening their mental faculty or the power of their mind until they reached a level close to prophecy."
(Orach Chaim 98:1)

Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, Rambam – Mishne Torah – Yad haChazakah

"All the prophets could not prophecy whenever they wanted to. Rather they would direct their thoughts and sit in happiness with a good joyful heart and meditate in seclusion – misbodedim."
(Mada, Hilchos Yesodei haTorah 7:4)

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Koydunover – Kav haYashar

"Therefore a piece of advice given to any man called Yisrael, to subjugate his hard heart, take some free time for himself and hisboded – isolate himself in a hidden place in order that he will feel great humility and humbleness, and so that the awe of the Holy One Blessed be He will seize him. He should ponder and think about the days and years of his life which have already passed and are were like naught, and how each day his time grows shorter and the day of his reckoning is approaching, the day of death which no one can estimate since it comes all of a sudden out of the blue. The emissaries of the heavenly court then hurry to bring him to judgment to give a reckoning on each word, action, and thought and nothing will be excused."

(Chap. 1)

"This is what man should think about as he engages in hisbodedus daily, since it is an obligation to engage in hisbodedus in order to repair and rectify his sins and iniquities carefully {see Chap 1 [cited above]} It is a great obligation to perform hisbodedus carefully, maybe from above a spirit of wisdom, insight, understanding and fear / awe of Hashem will alight upon him to guide him on the proper path so that he should not stray from the path of our holy Torah. If we would receive with our own actions what the earlier sages received we would be able to fulfill our wishes and receive the desires of our heart."

(Chap. 12)

"Therefore one must engage in meditation in seclusion – lehisboded behisbodedus in the synagogue, he should speak with all his heart before The Knower of all Thoughts Blessed is He, he should weep and cry tears and sigh deeply with all his heart with a contrite broken heart remembering his previous sins and his youthful misdeeds. Every man knows his own heart's bitterness at the sins and mistakes of his youth. Everything is written and inscribed in well guarded [memory]. If he repents returning fully then his sins will be erased. Then his blemishes and stains will be bleached, cleaned and purified. And instead of judgment and punishment he will instead receive reprieve through salvation and rescue as he will see eye to eye when he will stand before Hashem's throne of glory when he is called to give account and reckoning when Hashem calls him for judgment suddenly."

(Chap. 23)

Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz – Yaaros Devash

“The earlier pious Chassidim would always choose to sit dwelling in caves and bat holes in order to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded and to distance themselves from people which habituate one and cause one to sin. The prophet himself cried out (Yirmeyah 9:1) Who will place me in the desert? And Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai peace be upon him sat in a cave for several years [and one may ask] couldn't he find somewhere else to hide from Caesar's decree [against Torah study]? It is well elaborated in the Talmud that the highest angels constantly surrounded him as is well known. Rather he chose this place to dwell in order to acquire perfection therefore once he went out he acquired a high level until he surpassed even the level of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair as is related in tractate Shabbos page 33b. Afterwards he and many of his generation dwelled learning Torah in caves as we find often in the Zohar regarding other sages at the time of Rashbi and other tales related in the Zohar told about sages who always dwelt in caves and crevices in order to acquire [the trait of] perfection and to distance themselves from people. ”
(Part 1 Derush/Sermon 14 for the days of Selichos)

Rabbi Moshe Cordevero – Ramak – Pardes Rimonim

“The prophets peace be upon them would achieve [revelation] through the letters with great secluded meditation – behisbodedus gadol, and a refined pure soul.”
(Gate 21 Chap. 1)

“Some of the earlier sages explained that by transforming and combing the 72 letter name and other [Divine] names through much great secluded meditation – behisbodedus gadol, a righteous Tzadik can merit a minor revelation of a heavenly voice called bas kol meaning that Hashem's spirit can speak through him with His words on his tongue.”
(Gate 30 Chap. 3)

Rabbi Eliyahu Vidas – Reishis Chochma

“The general basis for acquiring the trait of love [of Hashem] is the love of hisbodedus. Since man naturally loves the company of others it is impossible for him to be bound [to Hashem]. And Rabbi Yitzhak of Acco peace be upon him writes “hamisboded – meaning he who practices hisbodedus, who wishes to acquire the level of hisbodedus in order to allow peace to rest upon him during his lifetime must

connect to the following three things and distance himself from their opposites; and then peace will rest upon him during his lifetime and all the more so afterwards. These are they: He must rejoice in his portion, he should love his bodedus, he should flee from honor and glory meaning that he should humble his heart. Their opposites include: that he is unsatisfied with what he has, and he will never be satisfied with any amount as the verse in Koheles says 5:9 "He who loves money/silver will never be satiated by money/silver," his soul is distressed when he is alone and he desires men's company and conversation and he would rather discuss and listen to idle talk, and he who chases after honor and glory. May the Merciful One merit us to attach ourselves to the three aforementioned and to those who possess these traits, and distance us from their three opposites and their respective possessors." (Gate of Love Chap. 3:30)

"Whosoever wishes to gladden his soul yisboded – should seclude himself to meditate for some part of the day on the greatness of the letters Y"H"V"H (the four letter name of Hashem) As we explain in the gate of holiness Chap 6:9. A source for this is the saying of Dovid in Tehilim (16:8-9) "I have placed Hashem before me at all times. Therefore my heart has rejoiced and my honor gladdened" my honor refers to the soul which emanates from the name Y"H"V"H as it says in Devarim 14:1 "You are children to Hashem your G-d" therefore if one thinks or meditates on the name Y"H"V"H the soul shines and gleams with a great light; and it is happy." (Gate of Love Chap. 10:28)

"Since we have explained the holiness of the Shabbos generally it is proper that its holiness should influence every day, each person according to his own ability, whether a small or large portion of the day or sometimes the entire day. He should cease work and yisboded – seclude himself to study Torah and turn his thoughts from worldly matters since it is improper for one to be involved the entire day in work." (Gate of Holiness) Chap. 3:10

"It is found in a hand-written work called: The actions of the Hassidim that one pious chassid which was misboded me-hamisbodedim – one who practiced seclusion and meditation from those ascetics that separate themselves from this world was always strongly connected and bound to Hashem. Once this pious chassid came to town and since they didn't recognize him they gave him a simple job as beadle of the synagogue. Whenever he would add oil to the candles it would overflow, spilling out. He couldn't concentrate properly due to his intense connection to Hashem. The wise sage of the community recognized this and said it would be proper for him to be the community sage and I should be his servant. About such

things the verse says Mishlei 5:19 With love they err greatly, because of great love for Torah and the dveykus and connection to it they err in matters of this world." (Gate of Holiness 3:13) *(Compare with "They called the prophets crazy since they engaged their minds so much in hisbodedus on Hashem that they would err in other matters." (Ralbag Kings II 19:11))*

"In order to acquire holiness it is necessary to be in a holy place. As we find in the Torah portion of Achrei Mos – VaYikra 16:24 "A holy place." Regarding this there are two aspects: either the place becomes sanctified through Torah study and prayer for example a Beis Midrash – House of Study or a Beis Knesses – a synagogue or the place if holy meaning separate and isolated from people. An isolated place – makom badad is a place that prepares one for dveykus and attachment to Hashem. This is why the earlier sages would seclude themselves away from civilization, they are called the group of hamisbodedim – the seclusionists or meditators. As is cited by the chasid – pious author of Chovos haLevavos – Duties of the Heart, Gate of Asceticism Chap 3. "One of the conditions of asceticism is the love of solitude – bedidus because this illustrates in his soul that he has no connection to the people in this world at all, and that he does not wish to be bound to anyone but Hashem to who he will be essentially connected if he so merits." " (Gate of Holiness Chap. 6:16)

"As the pious author of Chovos Halevavos – Duties of the Heart has written there are three groups of ascetics. (Gate of Asceticism Chap. 3) The second group are those that seclude themselves at home – Misbodedim BeBaysam, which is the path closest to the [truth of] Torah." (Gate of Holiness Chap. 6:18)

"We see that there are two aspects of holiness to a place (*as mentioned above in 6:16 they are that one sanctifies the place actively through learning or prayer or to go to a place that is devoid of people in search of solitude*) if both aspects can be found in the same place such as practicing isolation or seclusion – hisbodedus in a house of study or in the synagogue itself how good is his lot, for he shall surely acquire the trait of extra holiness in his soul. . . .he should take an example from the kohen gadol – high priest who was commanded in Vayikra 21:12 "he should not exit the temple," similarly he who wishes to sanctify himself should do so in the synagogue or in the house of study. *(Compare this with Rabbeinu Avraham son of the Rambam in his final chapter on hisbodedus quoted above – "Aharon and his son's were commanded to hisbodedus in the Mishkan and the Kohen Gadol – high priest is commanded not to exit the holy temple as it says (Vayikra 21:12) "And he shall not exit the Mikdash, nor shall he desecrate etc.")*

. . . Either way hisbodedus is practiced well when done with a friend, as our sages taught in Brachos 63b/Taanis 7a/Makos 10a based on Yirmiyah 50:36 that a Torah scholar who learns and studies alone brings upon himself the sword." *(This concept is also found in Yaaros Dvash of Rabbi Yonason Aybshitz Part II Drush #3 "Tochachos Mussar veHesped" where he similarly warns Torah scholars against the false pride and vanity of those studying Torah alone without guidance and with no one present to rebuke them nor show them their faults.)*
(Gate of Holiness Chap. 6:19)

"Whoever merits contemplating matters such as these: how his soul is hewn from a true place, and how his actions must be performed honestly . . . if he diverts his thoughts from worldly matters and comes close to Hashem alone and his intelligence grows stronger to connect to the higher light ; he should think constantly about this desire. A person can merit attaining this if he meditates in his room in seclusion – misboded. Therefore a pious chassid will often seclude himself - le-hisboded and separate himself; he will only connect with people for a very great purpose or need."
(Gate of Holiness Chap. 12:64)

"The 32nd [custom that should be practiced by a penitent Baal Teshuvah is] At least once a month he should try and attempt to seclude himself le-hisboded in the synagogue or house of study to cleave unto his maker. He should [use] a little [of that time] in reviewing his deeds, a little in prayer and a little in Torah study. On this day that he designates for seclusion – misboded he should refrain from discussing matters that pertain to business with anyone at all. On that day he should fulfill the commandment Devarim 30:20 "And bond with Him," and the commandment Vayikra 19:4 "Do not turn to false gods" as the Talmud tractate Shabbos explains 149a do not remove Hashem from your thoughts. This is what Dovid peace be upon him commanded his son Shlomo Divrei Hayamim I 28:9 "And you my son Shlomo, know the G-d of your forefathers and serve him with a full heart...if you seek Him, He shall be found, and if you leave Him, He will neglect you forever." If it is possible for him to meditate in seclusion she-yisboded once a week that is very good. . . . and every day that he engages in seclusion – misboded in the synagogue or in the house of study he should wear a Tallis – prayer shawl and Tefillin – phylacteries because through these he draws holiness unto himself, if he can keep his body clean."
(Totzaos Chaim #130)

Rabbeinu Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi – The Arizal – Shaar Ruach haKodesh

“You should meditate – lehisboded daily for half an hour on the [concept of the] love of Hashem especially on the first of the week {Sunday}. Then on the second {Monday} [meditate on] fear/awe [of Hashem], on the third day {Tuesday} [meditate on] Torah with love and fear/awe. Or similarly on the first day {Sunday} the intentions of the heart, on the second day {Monday} on speech, on the third day {Tuesday} on actions.”
(Page 77a)

Rabbi Elazar Azkari – Sefer Charedim

“I found written in the books of the G-dly Kabbalist the Holy Pious Rabbi Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi in a handwritten work called Beis Middos – “Whatever you find written in the works of the rishonim rebuking sin including self-mortification and difficult suffering like snow and thorns & thistles, week long fasts these were all meant only for those who do not toil in Torah study. However whoever is engaged in Torah study as a profession and knows knowledge and has awe / fear of Hashem has the following method for self improvement; he should not weaken himself nor take away from his studies, rather one day a week he should distance himself from people and seclude himself and yisboded between himself and his Maker. He should unite his thoughts with Him as if he is standing before Him on the Day of Judgment. He should speak to Hashem as would a servant to his Master and a son to his Father. . . .

It is found in several books that hisbodedus and separation and dveykus were customs practiced by the pious Chasidim of Israel. When they were secluded alone they would remove the thoughts of this world and tie their thoughts to Master of everything. The aforementioned Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzhak learned that this method is seventy times more beneficial to the soul than learning. According to man’s strength and ability he should separate and seclude himself ve’yisboded one day a week, or one day every 15 days, or once a month and no less. The Rambam wrote regarding the verse about Yaakov “Get up and go to Beis E-I and shev there.” What does the word Shev – (usually translated as settle) connote? It means a settled mind like in the verse “With serenity and tranquility will you be saved.” To prepare the mind to have – peace and tranquility called Yishuv haDaas in hebrew [lit. a settled mind] with Hashem. This is the meaning of the Mishna which we have learned (Tractate

Brachos) The early Hasidim would wait one hour before praying in order that they should direct their hearts to Hashem. This has been explained by commentators to mean that they would empty or turn away their hearts from the matters of this world and bind their minds to the Master of the world Hashem with awe / fear and love. There are therefore nine hours that they were idle from learning and spent on the practice of hisbodedus and dveykus. Yet we compare the light of the Divine presence of the Shechina that was above their heads as if it spread about them, with them situated in it as I found in an old pamphlet containing early commentaries." (Mitzvas Teshuva Chap. 3)

Rabbi Chaim Vital – Shaarei Kedushah – Gates of Holiness

"Once he is ready and prepared to receive Ruach Hakodesh – the holy spirit after he has acquired and ingrained all the positive character traits. He should enter his house alone after having immersed himself in sanctity. In a place where he will not be disturbed by people's voices or the chirping of birds. If it can be after midnight this is better. He should shut his eyes and divest his thoughts of all worldly matters as if his soul has departed as if he is dead and unfeeling. Afterwards he must concentrate strengthening himself to think about the higher worlds and to connect the root of his soul binding it there to the higher lights. He should imagine as if his soul has left [his body] and has risen up above, he should depict and draw the higher worlds as if he is standing there. If he has done a unification he should think about it to draw light and the influx of blessings known as shefa to all the worlds. He should intend to receive his portion as well. VeYisboded beMachshava – He should meditate, secluding his thoughts as if the spirit has rested upon him for some time. If he feels nothing he must not yet be ready or prepared. Therefore he must strengthen his resolve to serve Hashem in holiness and continue to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded as we described until he merits that the spirit rests upon him." (The Eighth Gate - to describe he who comes to sanctify himself in our times in a very brief manner)

Rabbi Yosef David Azulai – The Chida – Avodas HaKodesh

"The root of everything is hisbodedus for it is a great and lofty medium to merit holiness. I will give you a hint from earlier great sages the verse says Bad Kodesh Yilbash, wear a holy garment. Bad can allude to the root of the word for hisbodedus. Meaning if he engages in the practice hisbodeds he will be clothed in holiness. Similarly the acrostic formed by the first letters of the Hebrew verse know

Him in all your ways – Bekol Drachecha De'ehu spell Badad meaning isolated or secluded. This is because when one engages in isolation yisboded then he will cleave unto Hashem even in his physical needs."
(Tziporen Shamir 51)

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin – Ruach Chaim on Pirkei Avos

"In a place where there is no one behaving like a (decent) person, try to act like a person – Meaning to say that sometimes it is also beneficial to seclude yourself – lehisboded and there [in seclusion] you must also behave like a person, even though no one sees you since Hashem's eyes are constantly roaming."
(Commentary to Chap. 2 Mishnah 5)

The Vilna Gaon & Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin – Sheiltos Horaaos veHanhagos

"Our teacher (Rav Chaim) said that it is not good or proper to seek out mitzvos to perform. He also said in the name of the GR"A (the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna) that it is better to walk around one's house in seclusion & meditation - hisbodedus grasping ones hands together, rather than wandering in the marketplace in search of a mitzvah."

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin – Sheiltos Horaaos veHanhagos

"Our teacher (Rav Chaim) taught that one should distance himself from the company of men."

Rabbi Eliyahu Desler – Michtav meEliyahu

"If a person secludes himself in meditation – kshe-misboded and concentrates solely on himself then he can really recognize his true level or stature, to see a true candid picture."
(Volume 3 - Part 3 Hagigim veMichtavim – Shvivei Nogah)

"A person can find himself in three ways – 1. in self- seclusion or isolation – behisbodeduso 2. When he gives instead of takes and 3. When he yearns to be rather than to receive and to acquire."
(Volume 4 Nitzozei Nogah)

Classical Commentators on Tanach discuss the practice of Hisbodedus in attaining prophecy and meditation

The heart of man is the vessel for thoughts, which come from the mind. You can see that he that wishes lehisboded - to meditate and draw down the influx of thought bends his head down and thinks in order to draw down the influx of thoughts from the mind which is the source of thought [down] to the heart.
(Rabbeinu Bachaya Bereshis 6:2)

The mountain is a place of hisbodedus (seclusion & meditation) for prophecy since people do not see distractions there which could distract the mind from concentrating thoughts on Hashem
(Rabbeinu Bachaya Bereshis 46:32)

And Moshe was a shepherd. Moshe took this occupation, as was the custom of the early righteous Tzadikim as we find by the righteous Hevel, and the patriarchs, and the tribes. The reason being so that they could distance themselves from civilization which can be a cause of sin and furthermore in order to meditate in prophecy - lehisboded benevuah.
(Rabbeinu Bachaya Shemos 3:1)

He [Moshe] went alone lehisboded – to seclude himself in meditation and prayer.
(Sforno Shemos 3:1)

It was necessary to mention that he was a shepherd since most of the prophets attained their prophecy through shepherding because prophecy requires hisbodedus - seclusion.
(Kli Yakar Shemos 3:1)

After the desert - it should have said to the desert rather the meaning implies that he tried to direct them to a more deserted place. He specifically chose to direct them to the desert since he would be able to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded and to investigate after Divinity or G-dliness – Elokis and similar matters.
(Netziv Haemek Davar Shemos 3:1)

This is why Yaakov vowed that Hashem should be his G-d, since yisboded - he engaged all his life in meditation and seclusion to cleave unto Hashem according to his ability, and the sons of the prophets would misbodedim - meditate perhaps they would receive each according to his ability.
(Ibn Ezra Shemos 3:19)

Vayelech Shefi – Alone in order to meditate in seclusion – lehisboded to achieve a type or form of prophecy using the name of Hashem which he [Bilaam] mentioned. (Toras Moshe of R' Moshe Alshich Bamidbar 23:3)

Some people's souls have the power of prophecy to know the future. No one knows from where this comes, however that person yisboded - engages in seclusion or meditation and a spirit comes upon him that says so shall be the future about this thing.

(Ramban Devarim 13:2)

Eliyahu used to misboded - meditate most of his days and toil at self perfection to perfect his soul.

(Malbim Kings I 19:3)

Prophecy requires Hisbodedus.

(Malbim Kings I 22:10)

Sometimes he would leave him somewhere and go off walking alone in the mountains to meditate in prophecy - lehisboded benevuah.

(Radak Kings II 1:7)

They called the prophets crazy since when they would misboded - meditate in prophecy they appeared crazy or mad since they were turned away from worldly matters.

(Metzudas David Kings II 19:11)

They called the prophets crazy since they engaged their minds so much with hisbodedus on Hashem that they would err in other matters.

(Ralbag Kings II 19:11)

Then Daniel left to go home, since he was always at the gate of the king and was busy with his matters there. So he left and went home to meditate alone - lehisboded until the Divine influx would alight on him, and he told his friends this matter so that they should also meditate - she-yisbodedu gam hem. Perhaps the spirit will alight on them according to their preparations.

(Malbim Daniel 2:17)

Go out to the valley: in order to meditate – she'yisboded and prepare for prophecy

(Malbim Yechezkel 3:22)

If you were to ask why do I misboded - meditate in seclusion in the fields as the prophets did.

(Metzudas David Zechariah 13:5)