



לזכות
החיילת בצבאות ה'
ראדא זעלדא רחל שתחי'
לרגל הולדתו ביום י"א תשרי ה'תשע"ז
נדפס ע"י הוראים
הרה"ת ר' מתתיהו וזוגתו נחמה גאלדע
דעוולין



Thought that Counts

Thinking Chassidus before Davening

הרמ"א אומר במפורש שלפני התפילה "יתבונן ברוממות הא-ל", הרי שצריכה להיות התבוננות בגדולת אין סוף. ואין הכוונה במאמר שלם, אלא אפילו שורות ספורות שיחדרו אל האדם, וצריכים הרי לציית לרמ"א, כפי שנוהגים אחרי פסקיו באיסור אכילת בשר בחלב, כך צריכים לציית לו גם בזה!...

The Rema clearly states that before davening, one must contemplate on the greatness of Hashem.

This does not mean that you need to think over an entire *maamar*; a few lines is also enough, provided that they penetrate the person.

We need to follow the Rema's ruling in this regard.

We follow his ruling about the prohibition of eating milk and meat; we need to follow his ruling in this regard as well!

(The Rebbe in yechidus with a bochur, winter 5714)

"In times gone by, in order to awaken a sense of fear of Heaven before davening, to really feel that he was davening to Hashem; Reb Mordechai used to approach the *amud* and look at the words דע לפני מי אתה עומד—know before whom you stand.

"Then he would close his eyes and picture a huge animal, like a giant buffalo, which he chances upon while walking in the street. Of course, he would be gripped with an terrifying fear! No foreign thought would cross his mind at that moment; the only thought would be how to save himself from this buffalo.

"Then he would think to himself: the buffalo is merely one creation of Hashem. He created millions upon millions of buffalos and so many more big scary animals. Just imagine how afraid we should be of the Creator! While standing in His presence and davening, we cannot possess any other thought; we must stand with awe and fear.

"When this concept was well engraved in his mind, Reb Mordechai would go back to his place and start davening..."

This is how the Frierdiker Rebbe describes the thoughts of Reb Mordechai Hatzaddik, one of the *talmidim* of the Baal Shem Tov, in the years before he came to know *Toras haChassidus*.¹

Our Rabbeim teach us that the way to think about Hashem's greatness before davening is by learning Chassidus, and more importantly, by thinking Chassidus.

Chazal say, הרהורי עבירה קשים מעבירה—thoughts of *aveiros* are worse than the transgressions themselves. Chassidus explains the reason for this:

The *neshama* has three garments: *machshavah*, *dibbur* and *maase*. The first one, *machshavah*, is called the לבוש המאוחד—the garment that is attached to the *nefesh*. Thoughts are closer to the *neshamah* than words or actions. Hence the negative effect of bad thoughts on the *neshamah* will be much more profound than *dibbur* or *maase*.

If this is true of negative thoughts, we can certainly apply this rule to thinking good thoughts as well. The effect of thinking words of Chassidus in your mind is far more profound than just reciting words and doing actions. It brings the concepts of Chassidus “closer to home” so-to-speak and allows them to change the person for the better.

That's why it's so important to think Chassidus. After learning a *maamar* well, one should think over the concepts, even for just a few moments. The words will better permeate the student enabling him to really affect change.

When one does this before davening, he can be sure that his davening will be entirely different.

Chassidim used to tell a story of a wagon driver who traveled in the bitter-cold Russian winter with a wagon filled with barrels of vodka. One day while on the road, he felt that he was going to pass out from the cold so he took a sip of vodka from one of his barrels and suddenly, he felt warmer and came back to his senses.

The question on this story is: Why did he actually have to drink from the barrels in order to warm up? Wasn't it enough that he was sitting next to so many gallons of vodka?

The answer is, that as long as the vodka is not consumed, it remains distant and will never have an effect. The moment even one drop is swallowed, the warmth will penetrate the body.

The same could be said of learning Chassidus: you can learn many *maamarim* and *sichos*, but if you don't stop and think about the content, the concepts remain “outside” of you. In order for the words to have an effect, you need to think about them using the לבוש המאוחד—the garment most attached to the soul.²

IN YOUR LIFETIME

You write that your *hisbonenus* is worthless.

This is obviously untrue and you should not speak this way. You are thinking about concepts in the Torah of the living G-d, conveyed to us by our holy Rabbeim, whose words live on forever. In the end, their words will most certainly have the desired effect; whether in this *gilgul* or the next (which doesn't necessarily mean in another lifetime; it can also mean after you change yourself in this lifetime).

Therefore, *chas v'shalom*, you should not think lowly of your work, even if you do not yet see the fruit of your labor.

(Igros Kodesh vol. 6 p. 354)

Enliven the Davening

Hisbonenus—contemplating over Chassidus before davening, is different than the routine “thinking over what you learned,” the Frierdiker Rebbe explains in a letter. It is important to think over everything you learn, but before davening the act of *hisbonenus* has an additional element. “It's not just about connecting with the intellectual aspect of the concept at hand. It's about feeling the *chayus* within it.”³

In another letter, the Frierdiker Rebbe articulates this point even more:

“One can understand a deep concept in Chassidus, but it will not have any effect on him (”לא פגע ולא נגע”). Only an ‘*oved*’ who works on himself can reach the truth; by contemplating on it before davening, and with the right concentration during davening...”⁴

What to think?

The Rebbe often quoted the Rema's ruling in Shulchan Aruch that before davening, a person is obligated to contemplate—”להתבונן”—about the greatness of Hashem and the lowliness of man.⁵



The meaning of the word "להתבונן" is to understand and think. In order to adequately fulfill this obligation, one needs to first study these concepts in depth. This can only be achieved by studying Chassidus—*pnimiyus haTorah*.⁶

In addition to thinking over the words of Chassidus studied before davening, the Rebbe also teaches that it's important to stop for a moment and think about the fact that you're about to stand before Hashem Himself. One's davening will automatically be very different with that in mind.

In response to the question of how one can have more *kavanah* during davening, the Rebbe says:

The way to do this is by contemplating before davening, at least for a few moments, about whom you will be davening to. It would be appropriate to study the beginning of *perek mem-aleph* in Tanya by heart until the word המלך (on the second page), and before davening, review it either orally or thinking over the content in your mind.⁷

In a *sicha*, the Friediker Rebbe bemoans the fact that Chassidim aren't davening well. "The problem is, they are lacking the proper preparation for davening," he explains. The bare minimum preparation is to think about these few words: מי הוא המתפלל ולפני מי הוא מתפלל—who is the one davening and before whom he is davening. This thought would bring at least some *chayus* in davening. But instead, people are busy with chit-chat before davening...⁸

BREAK THE SILENCE

I have been wondering for a number of years now:

Everything stated in Shulchan Aruch is to be taken as a ruling and **acted upon**.

...For some reason, there is one clear, undisputed *halacha* that is neglected in certain circles of Yidden, even those who are scrupulous about keeping all the mitzvos:

Before davening, a person is obligated to contemplate upon "the greatness of the Creator and the lowliness of man, and remove all worldly pleasures from the heart..."

...How long will the rabbonim and *roshei yeshiva* remain silent about this *halacha*, one that is neglected even by those who know about it?

(Igros Kodesh vol. 11 p. 230)

Practically Speaking

Very often, when the Rebbe was asked for specific guidance on how to be *misbonen* before davening, he would refer the question to *mashpi'im* and elder Chassidim.

"Seek the counsel of your *mashpia* and elder Chassidim who spent time with elder Chassidim in Tomchei Tmimim Lubavitch. They will teach you..."⁹

But at times, the Rebbe did indeed offer specific guidance in this matter, showing how thinking Chassidus is not a lofty act of past generations *chas v'shalom*, but it is indeed very practical and applicable for everyone.

In a letter about various aspects of *avodas Hashem*, the Rebbe addresses the way to go about *hisbonenus* before davening:

The best way to do it is to think about a concept you have already learned and know well. *Hisbonenus*

means either thinking deeper into the concept, or just reviewing that which you already know [in your mind]. Expound on it in a way that would bring to a practical outcome or an effect on your *middos*.

The exact method will vary for different people: some may feel that the *hisbonenus* works better while thinking over the exact words of the *maamar*; others will prefer to think over the general idea instead.

How can you maintain your train of thought to think about one concept for a while?

You need to train yourself and do it slowly but surely. First, try to keep it up for a shorter while, and with time add more and keep it going for longer. A good idea would be to have the *sefer* or *siddur* open to the page you're thinking about.¹⁰

In *yechidus* with a *bochur* during the winter of 5714 (quoted in part at the beginning of this article), the Rebbe describes quite vividly how to think Chassidus before davening and even offers a few examples from concepts in Tanya:

"Thinking Chassidus before davening is not the same as reviewing Tanya in the street, which is done to purify the air. Chassidus before davening is supposed to penetrate the person. You can find concepts to think about in Tanya: the concept of לית אחר פנוי מיניה—there is no place devoid of Hashem's presence [*perek* 21]; the concept of עובד אלקים לאשר—pushing oneself the extra mile to serve Hashem properly [*perek* 15]; כל אדם יכול להיות בינוני בכל—every person has the ability to be a *beinoni* at all times [*perek* 14].

"You can even contemplate on the first *perek* of Tanya, which seems to be a 'dry' *perek*. It talks about the five levels of צדיק וטוב לו, צדיק ורע לו, etc. Think about how Hashem gave us these five levels, and through our *avodah* we can reach a higher level, even in one instant!"¹¹

To another *bochur* the Rebbe advised that he should think Chassidus before davening twice a week; one time in one concept of Chassidus and the other in a different concept.¹²

Reb Shmuel Charoler

Reb Yoel Kahn relates a story he heard from Reb Moshe Gourarie of Tel-Aviv:

There was a Yid by the name of Reb Shmuel Charoler. He was a big *lamdan* and *maskil* in Chassidus, an "*oved*" who worked on himself

immensely, and a wholeheartedly-devoted Chossid of the Rebbe Rashab. He happened to be a relative of the Gourarie family.

Reb Moshe Gourarie had a brother, Reb Hirshel, who made his living from a small factory in the city of Kremenchug.

Once, Reb Shmuel Charoler came to visit Reb Hirshel in Kremenchug and stepped into the factory. The workday was drawing to a close and Reb Hirshel was finishing up his final tasks for the day, so he told Reb Shmuel to wait a few minutes and they'll walk home together.

Some ten minutes later Reb Hirshel was ready to go home and he looked around to find Reb Shmuel, but he was gone. Reb Hirshel went home, thinking that Reb Shmuel may have gone on his own, but Reb Shmuel was not there either. After a few hours of searching for his lost relative, Reb Hirshel decided to go back once more to his factory. Sure enough, after looking around in all the rooms, he found Reb Shmuel tucked away in a corner, head in his hands, leaning on the wall, lost in deep thought.

"Reb Shmuel! Reb Shmuel!" cried Reb Hirshel, "Are you ready to go home?" Reb Shmuel finally turned around, "awoke" from his contemplation, and went home with Reb Hirshel.

When they reached the house, Reb Shmuel began donning his *gartel*, and in a low voice, he whispered, "*V'hu rachum...*" breaking out in a silent cry.

It was time to daven *maariv* after some preparation, thinking Chassidus.¹³ **T**

1. Igros Kodesh Admur HaRaYYaTz vol. 3 p. 189
2. See B'Darkei HaChassidim by Reb Yoel Kahn pp. 180-182
3. Igros Kodesh Admur HaRaYYaTz vol. 3 p. 526
4. Ibid. vol. 14 p. 400
5. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 98:1
6. Yechidus with Toldos-Aharon Rebbe, Toras Menachem vol. 30 p. 319
7. Igros Kodesh vol. 17 p. 111
8. Sefer Hasichos 5691 p. 151
9. Igros Kodesh vol. 12 p. 204. See also vol. 11 p. 378; vol. 8 p. 1 et. al.
10. Igros Kodesh vol. 20 p. 52
11. Sefer HaYechidus (Glitzenshtein) p. 237
12. Heichal Menachem vol. 1 p. 238
13. B'Darkei HaChassidim p. 358