

SECTION 3: THINKING CHASSIDUS

This section will offer practical guidance on how to think Chassidus. But first, we must explain the significance of thinking Chassidus and what it accomplishes, as well as a number of relevant important concepts you must be aware of before beginning to work on thinking Chassidus. These introductions comprise the first five chapters of this section.

The first chapter will provide some background on the concept of working on yourself to think about Hashem and achieve a Divine perspective on reality (*עבודה פנימית בהמוח והלב*), starting with the Chovos HaLevavos and the Rambam and continuing with how this idea is applied in Tanya and in Chassidus in general. This background should serve as the basis for realizing the fundamental importance of thinking Chassidus as the best method possible of fulfilling the mitzvos of being aware of Hashem and loving and fearing Him. These mitzvos are essential to Yiddishkeit, permeating and giving energy to every aspect of the life of a Yid, and they are of no less importance than other mitzvos such as tefillin and Shabbos.

The second, third, and fourth chapters will explain how you can and should let Chassidus affect you on the deepest and most personal level of your being, which will inspire you with true joy from the fact that you possess a deep, internal connection with Hashem.

The fifth chapter will provide some basic guidelines on how to look at Chassidus as an extremely deep and profound knowledge as well as something very practical that can be applied to your daily life.

It's important to point out that you shouldn't wait until you finish mastering the *pirush hamilos* of the entire davening before beginning to think Chassidus. This is because as much as it is important to know what we are saying, it is of equal importance—or perhaps of even more importance—to know to Whom we are talking. This can only be accomplished by thinking about Hashem as it is explained in Chassidus, which enables us to understand the truth and greatness of Hashem and how we can find Him in our lives, especially when we daven to Him.

CHAPTER 1. TRANSFORMING ONE'S PERSPECTIVE¹

All in the Mind

Before approaching the idea of thinking Chassidus, it is important to realize that studying Chassidus is not just one of many things a chossid does; rather, it is supposed to transform a person's outlook and introduce a G-dly perspective.

In today's world there are many books that are classified as "self-help." Many of these books are based on the understanding that our actions result from the mind and that by improving our outlook our behavior will change.

These books show how to improve life through developing a proper perspective of yourself, building proper relationships, dealing with problems, and so on. This principle—that by changing your perspective you can introduce vast improvements in your life—is something even many non-religious individuals adhere to.

However, for a Yid who sees everything in the context of the Torah's teachings, the process of changing your perspective in the right direction takes place on a completely different level, and it achieves far greater results.²

To help understand how this works, this chapter will outline how this idea was explained in classical Jewish works and how it is explained in Chassidus.

A Torah Mindset

R. Bechaye Ibn Pekuda lived in Saragossa, Spain, during the generation that preceded the Rambam. He wrote a *sefer* called Chovos HaLevavos. In the *sefer*'s introduction he writes that until his time there were many *sefarim* explaining how to fulfill the mitzvos that are performed

¹. This chapter originally appeared as an article in the Perspectives magazine, Nissan 5775. My thanks to R. Shimon Hellinger and his staff (and to R. Eli Leib Rubin) for helping prepare the article, which appears here with slight adaptations.

². In many of the Rebbe's *sichos* he explains that all of the mitzvos in the Torah—even those that make sense logically—should be fulfilled only because Hashem commanded us to do them. This concept requires a person to take a deeper look at many of the things he does. For example, when someone pays his workers on time or gives tzedakah, he doesn't do so (only) because he understands that it's a good thing to do, but because Hashem commanded him to do so. In a similar sense, we must take a deeper look at the concept of focusing our thoughts and changing our perspective. A Yid knows that he is commanded by Hashem to think the right things and realizes that's it much deeper than just self-help. Through focusing his thoughts the way Hashem wants him to, he creates a connection to Hashem within his mind and heart.

with the body, but none that explained how to fulfill the mitzvos that are performed in the mind and heart. These are the “duties of the heart” after which his *sefer* was titled. He argues that these duties are of equal or greater importance than the duties of the body and are deserving of as much explanation. While simple belief in the tradition may be sufficient for children and the ignorant, it does not suffice for intelligent individuals.

Nearly a thousand years later, the *sefer* is still considered a basic *sefer* of *avodas Hashem* in all Jewish circles.

Besides for raising awareness about the importance of the duties of the heart, R. Bechaye Ibn Pekuda also made deep philosophical, ethical, and theological ideas accessible to the common man. Up until that point, only great scholars were able to discern how to carry out these ideas. But his *sefer* was written in the colloquial Arabic and explained in clear terms what it means to serve Hashem with the heart and how to go about accomplishing this. These explanations also addressed fundamental Jewish beliefs such as the oneness of Hashem, *hashgachah pratis*, and trust in Him. The goal of these explanations was not only to give a person more instructions (as in *Halacha*, which tells a person what is permitted and what is forbidden), but also to give a person new perspectives on how to look at Hashem and our relationship with Him.

For example: In many places *Chazal* describe the destructiveness of arrogance and how it is forbidden just like idol worship.³ However, they do not clearly explain *how* one can remove arrogance and attain humility. However, in the Gate of Humility⁴ R. Bechaye lists seven reflections⁵ to consider in order to rid oneself of arrogance. They can be summarized as four themes:

1. **Physical insignificance and inadequacy.** The physical body is created from lowly physical elements. Even if someone is physically comfortable, life is short, passes quickly, and is replete with problems of which he cannot free himself.

2. **Spiritual inadequacy.** However hard one tries, no one is perfect, and every person must acknowledge that he comes very short from fulfilling everything he should in Torah and mitzvos. When the Day of Judgment comes, no excuses will be accepted.

3. **The all-encompassing greatness of Hashem.** Being constantly in the presence of Hashem should inspire tremendous awe. The sages of old were so great that among them were people like R. Yonasan ben Uziel whose words of Torah would consume a bird flying overhead. These sages were on a lower level than the prophets of old (the

3. See, for example, *Sotah* 4b.

4. Gate 6, Chapter 5.

5. The Rebbe would translate *lehisbonein* as “to reflect upon.”

nevi'im). Yet, the *nevi'im* (like Daniel) were terrified in the presence of angels. The angels, in turn, are terrified in the presence of Hashem. Certainly we, who are on an incomparably lower level than all of them, should be even more awestruck by the fact that we are constantly in Hashem's presence.

4. **The stature of the individual in comparison to Hashem.** All of mankind and the entire world is created with Hashem's infinite wisdom. When a person considers himself in comparison to all of mankind, he is extremely small indeed. How much more so is this the case in comparison to the entire Planet Earth, and even more so in comparison to the entire universe. One cannot begin to imagine how small he is in comparison to the Creator of everything, before whom a person is viewed as non-existent.

These ideas are not just facts to be learned and stored away. They are ways of training our brains *how* to think about ourselves and our purpose. In other words, these lessons provide us with life-tools, not just with static information.

A Halachic Obligation

The Rambam took this principle and made it clear that Halacha regards these mitzvos as the foundations of the entire Torah.

The Rambam's *sefer* is comprised of "halachos halachos"—it is entirely dedicated to Halacha. And the Rambam placed the theological fundamentals of Torah at the very beginning of this work. The first volume is *Sefer Hamada*, the Book of Knowledge, so named because it explains the mitzvos that are performed in the mind and heart. The reason these mitzvos come first is because they are a prerequisite for the proper fulfillment of the other mitzvos.

The first section in this volume is *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, the Laws of [the mitzvos which are] the Foundations of the Torah, in which the Rambam explains the first four mitzvos: (1) To know (i.e., to understand⁶) the existence of Hashem. (2) To know (i.e., to understand) the oneness of Hashem. (3) To love Hashem. (4) To fear Hashem. The Rambam begins this section by saying, "The ultimate foundation for the fulfillment of the Torah and mitzvos and of all wisdom

6. In the beginning of *Mitzvas Haamana Elokus* (in *Derech Mitzvosecha*) the Tzemach Tzedek explains that when the Rambam says that the mitzvah is to "know," he doesn't just mean to *believe* that Hashem exists and is the Creator. As the Semag asks, "If one doesn't believe that Hashem exists, how can he accept a commandment to believe?" Rather, it means that after one believes in the existence of Hashem, he should reflect upon His true existence and how it transcends (and permeates) all other types of existence.

Similarly, the way to fulfill the mitzvos of knowing His oneness and of loving and fearing Him are attained through focusing our minds and contemplating on His oneness, greatness, and so on.

is to know and understand that Hashem is the first existence Who is constantly bringing everything else into existence.”

After explaining these and a few other fundamental mitzvos, the Rambam proceeds with *Hilchos Deios*, the Laws of Attitudes. Here he explains how we connect to Hashem by shaping our attitudes according to the way He wants. Hashem wants us to have a generous attitude, a positive attitude, a merciful one, a well-balanced one and so forth. This process of shaping our attitudes is almost entirely fulfilled through focusing our thoughts properly on what is explained in the Torah.

Another example: One of the mitzvos he explains is the mitzvah to love every Yid like one loves himself. This mitzvah is not fulfilled simply by giving tzedakah, and it is not violated only by physically hurting another. It is fulfilled by thinking good about another Yid until you *want* to help them, and it is transgressed by thinking bad about another Yid until opposite feelings are aroused (“*Lo sisna es achicha bilvavecha*,” “Do not hate your brother in your heart”). This is another example of how the Rambam codified the concept of focusing our thoughts properly as part of Halacha.

A Chassidic Mindset

All of this is the way this idea was explained in classic Jewish texts that have existed for close to a thousand years. But Chassidus takes it all a step further.

In Tanya the Alter Rebbe defines our service of Hashem in the context of the struggle between the *nefesh ha'elokis* and the *nefesh habahamis*. In Chapter Twelve he describes the model of service of Hashem that we should strive for as being that of the *beinoni*. The *beinoni* makes sure that his *nefesh ha'elokis* is always in control of how he thinks, speaks, and acts. How does the *beinoni* always have the ability to control his actions? Because Hashem created man with the innate ability for the mind to control the heart. In other words, if you know what the right thing is, you can do it even if you don't feel like it, whether it's in deed, speech, or even thought.

The innovation here is that the Alter Rebbe is not simply giving you tools to train your behavior, but tools to train and transform your inner self, your intellect and your emotions. This is not simply about self-control, but about a methodological process of internal transformation. This principle is encapsulated in the phrase “*moach shalit al haleiv*,” “the mind controls the heart.” This control can be extended in two different ways:⁷

⁷. See *hemshech* Rosh Hashana 5663 and 5665, where the Rebbe Rashab elaborates on three concepts in the development of character. One is in the form of *mutba*, the natural potential for emotions, where one's actions are only a function of *NeHY* (actions without strong feeling). The second is *murgash*, actual felt emotions, where one's actions are a function of *ChaGaS* (natural emotions that are revealed and channeled through the mind). The third form is *muskal*, intellectually developed emotions, where one's actions are a function of *ChaBaD* (profound and penetrating understanding).

1. The more basic level is that the mind controls the way you act upon your emotions. A person's actions flow directly from his emotions. You do what you feel like unless your mind tells you otherwise. This is the most basic idea of self-discipline, to train yourself to act a certain way despite your natural tendencies and desires. This is how a child learns to behave like a *mentsch* and how a Yid learns to behave like a Yid. Here, when we say "the mind controls the heart," we mean that it controls the way your emotions impact your behavior. (In Chassidic lexicon this idea is called *iskafya*—see Tanya Chapter 13.)

This does not mean that the mind is simply controlling your behavior and bypassing the heart. The heart itself must also be affected; you must *want* to do what's right and overcome conflicting feelings because you know that this is the right thing to do. Intellectually knowing what's right won't change your behavior unless you have some kind of emotional desire in your heart to do the right thing.

2. A deeper level of the control of the mind over the heart is that the mind *transforms* the desires of the heart to *truly* want what's right. (In Chassidic lexicon this is termed *is'hapcha*—see the *maamar* Basi Legani 5715.) This process starts at the age of Bar Mitzvah, when a person has enough *daas* to truly internalize ideas and let them affect his heart. Through constantly working on davening and *hisbonenus*, you can actually change how you feel about things and experience ever deeper levels of connection to Hashem.

Chovos HaLevavos can bring a person to a certain level of this transformation, but a true transformation can only happen through Chassidus. This is because Chassidus is the revelation of G-dly knowledge and reveals the inner dimensions of the *neshamah* that have this transformative power. Ideas based on human intellect, by contrast, cannot accomplish the same degree of transformation (see the *hakdamah* of Tanya).

This also explains why there is such a deep distinction between what a Yid can achieve and, *lehavdil*, what a *goy* can achieve (See Tanya Chapter 1). When a Yid uses the intellect of the *nefesh ha'elokis*, he can always control the emotions of the *nefesh habahamis* and not allow them to express themselves in action. This ability is not just because Hashem created every human with the ability for the mind to control the heart. In the case of a *goy*, both his intellect and emotions are created beings and derive from the same spiritual level (*kelipas noga* or *shalosh klipos*

He explains further that on the level of *murgash*, the mind reveals the natural emotions and harnesses them so that a person will exercise self-control and act based on what he knows is right despite his emotions. On the level of *muskal*, the depth of the mind elevates the emotions to the level of intellect, so that a person's feelings will match the way he thinks. This is the idea of *is'hapcha*.

hatemei'os). It's just that the mind is superior and more powerful than the heart and can therefore control it.⁸

In the case of a Yid, however, his *nefesh ha'elokis* reveals Hashem—it's saying the truth, and his *nefesh habahamis* conceals Hashem—it's expressing falsehood, and falsehood compared to truth has no reality, just as darkness is automatically dispelled by light. A Yid has a *nefesh ha'elokis* that is bound up with Hashem to the point that this connection is his entire life. He is willing to give up his life rather than separate himself from Hashem by going against His will. The connection of the *nefesh ha'elokis* to Hashem isn't because he figured out that Hashem is the best thing for his existence; it comes from the *neshamah* "seeing" and being intrinsically bound with the truth of Hashem. This awareness of His truth drives the *neshamah* to reunite with its source even though it will lose its independent existence as a result (see Tanya Chapters 18 and 19). And since this connection is so strong and transcends any logic (even the logical motive of self-preservation), he will do anything to connect himself to Hashem through Torah and mitzvos. Every Yid can focus on this basic concept at any time, enabling him to control his actions, as explained in the fourteenth chapter of Tanya.

There is a general principle that *ain chavush matir es atzmoi*, a prisoner can't free himself, and only someone from without can let him out. Similarly, the limitations of human intellect and emotions can't be completely transcended through human intellect. However smart someone is, he can't transcend being human. Only Hashem, who transcends any and all limitations, can give us a way to grow beyond our human limitations. This is why the wisdom of even the greatest Torah scholars—if their teachings were based on human understanding—doesn't have the power to effect such a transformation. Only the teaching of *pnimiyus hatorah*—especially the teachings of Chassidus—have the ability to bring about that transformation, since they are a revelation of Divine Intellect. Divine Intellect is the source of human intellect and has the ability to change it (just as a programmer can change the computer program from the outside, but the program can't change itself from within). Only through contemplating on the Divine Wisdom of *pnimiyus hatorah* can a person achieve real transformation of the mind and heart and reach a different type of awareness of Hashem.

The Process of Reflection

Accordingly, attaining a greater awareness of Hashem is not only one mitzvah, or many mitzvos, or even many fundamental mitzvos. It is a process through which we are able to serve Hashem at any second of the day. This concept is further brought out in Tanya Chapter 42. The Alter Rebbe explains that if someone will spend time every day to reflect on the fact that Hashem is watching him at every moment, he will be able to control himself at any time by reminding himself

⁸. See Tanya Chapter 51 that the vitality of the soul is revealed within the rest of the body—including the heart—through the brain, and that's why the brain can control the heart.

of this idea for even just a few moments. The ability to focus our thoughts on Hashem is thus not only a foundation behind our service of Hashem, but it is the constant force pulling us through all of the different situations throughout the day.

Even *kabbalos ol*, which means to accept Hashem as our King without understanding, is something that happens primarily in the mind. It means that a person consciously resolves with complete certainty to do whatever Hashem wants, no matter what.

The idea that the mind can control the heart is not an innovation of Chassidus, as we demonstrated above from the Chovos HaLevavos and the Rambam. The innovation of Chassidus is that we can use our mind to understand and connect to G-dly ideas that are essentially higher than human intellect, applying them as the basis of our conduct in our daily lives.

An example of this—a G-dly idea Chassidus explains in a way that the human intellect can understand and channel into action—is the first contemplation presented in Tanya as a way to reveal our hidden love for Hashem (see Chapter 18 and onward at length, and briefly in Chapter 14). To understand Hashem’s oneness as meaning that He is the only existence (*yichuda ilaa*) is something no human being can ever attain alone; it is a revelation of *Elokus*—a Divine perspective. Yet not only can a Yid understand this concept, he can connect to it to such an extent that it can drive him to actual self-sacrifice, to the point that he is willing to give up his life rather than deny Hashem’s oneness. When we understand our connection to Hashem based on that higher level, we can bring that depth into our daily lives.

Although we are incapable of living with *yichuda ilaa* on a day-to-day basis, being aware of the idea can nevertheless impact us.

In *Kuntres Eitz HaChaim* the Rebbe Rashab explains that our primary service of Hashem should be with *yichuda tataa*—an awareness of Hashem as the one who is creating and giving life to the world. However, in order for our *avodas Hashem* to be as it should, it must be permeated with a higher awareness that there is no existence at all other than Him. Without this recognition, our ego is still present and blocks out the true oneness of Hashem. It is only when a Yid knows that in reality there is nothing other than Him that all of his actions can become channels to reveal the true oneness of Hashem, which is the purpose of all of creation (see Tanya Chapter 33).

This type of awareness is something that only Chassidus, a revelation of divine perspective rather than human intellect, can generate.

In addition to having an effect on our daily service of Hashem, this realization can have a deep long-term effect and be the determining factor that will steer us in the right direction. In Tanya Chapter 12 the Alter Rebbe explains that when a Yid evokes a love and fear of Hashem through reflecting on His greatness during davening, it leaves an impression on him that lasts the entire day. In other words, when a person will realize that what he really cares about is Hashem and nothing else, when he will be confronted by a difficult situation during the day, he will have

already attained the right attitude and know instinctively how to deal with it. He won't have to struggle as much to focus on doing what's right, since he is already connected to a higher perspective due to his mindfulness during the morning davening.

Thus, thinking Chassidus and reflecting on the ideas it explains plays a significant role in creating G-dly perspectives and transforming a person's mindset. This will affect his daily life in a real way and change the dynamics of his relationship both with Hashem and with others.

From all of the above it should be clear that thinking Chassidus and creating a G-dly perspective is not a *chassidische minhag*; it's not a custom of sorts reserved only for great chassidim. Every Yid has the merit and responsibility to develop a real and meaningful awareness of Hashem, just as he has the merit and responsibility to put on tefillin and keep Shabbos. Hashem in his great kindness has given us the treasure of Chassidus, enabling each and every one of us to develop an awareness of Hashem in an incredibly deep and enjoyable manner, and every Yid has the ability to make use of this gift by working on his mind and heart.⁹

⁹. The following anecdote demonstrates how applying Chassidus to one's life in a real way is something within the reach of every person.

R. Bentzion Cohen was born to unobservant Israeli parents. At one point he started to become closer to Yiddishkeit, and he arrived at the Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Kfar Chabad, where he learned from R. Shlomo Chaim Kesselman how to think Chassidus and work on himself. He took his advice to heart and applied it, and it transformed him completely. Thinking Chassidus properly thus transformed a non-religious man into a true chossid.

This goes to show what Chassidus can and should accomplish and how it can affect each and every Yid.

CHAPTER 6. LEARNING AND THINKING CHASSIDUS

In order for Chassidus to have the proper affect on a person and allow his davening to accomplish what it can accomplish, a certain process must be followed, which includes learning Chassidus and three steps in thinking Chassidus.¹⁰

Understanding Chassidus

The first step in thinking Chassidus is to think Chassidus when learning it.

This includes two things. First, you must learn Chassidus slowly and carefully and think through the ideas you encounter until you obtain an initial understanding of the material. Second, after completing a session of learning (for example, when finishing to learn Chassidus in the morning), you should think over what you have just learnt until you grasp it properly.

This concept is true regarding all types of learning. Whenever one studies a subject, whether Gemara, Shulchan Aruch, or any other topic, he should think through the concepts while learning, and he must review the ideas again when he finishes. However, this is especially so when it comes to Chassidus which discusses abstract spiritual concepts that can be difficult to grasp.

Ideally, a person should study with a *chavrusa*. When offering guidance on how to study Chassidus effectively, the Frierdiker Rebbe suggests starting off by choosing *maamarim* that are not so difficult and learning with a *chavrusa* with whom the ideas of the *maamar* can be discussed until they are clear.

When learning with a *chavrusa*, thinking through the ideas when learning can be replaced with a discussion with your *chavrusa*. However, in addition to discussing the *maamar* with a *chavrusa*, you should think over the ideas yourself when finishing a session of learning.¹¹

Chassidim say¹² that learning Chassidus consists of thought, speech, and action. The thought of Chassidus refers to thinking over the ideas you have learnt (if learning with a *chavrusa*—after learning, and if learning alone—at the time of learning as well). The speech of Chassidus refers to discussing the ideas with a *chavrusa*. The action of Chassidus refers to

¹⁰ אג"ק מורה ר' ז' ח"א ע' רמד ואילך (מובא בהיום יומ' כ' תמוז). ח"ג ע' חסג ואילך. ע' תקכה ואילך. ח"ח ע' קצט ואילך. וראה גם ד"ה אשר ברא תורה ז'.

¹¹ נוסף על האגרות דלעיל, ראה ג"כ ח"ב אגרת שנו.

¹². I heard this from R. Nachman Shapiro in the name of elder chassidim.

writing down the ideas in your own words, i.e., to write a summary of the *maamar* for yourself to see if you have grasped the ideas properly.¹³

Writing down the ideas of the *maamar* isn't always possible and depends on the time and situation (for example, it can't be done on Shabbos and Yom Tov). Similarly, discussing the *maamar* with another is usually limited to learning with a *chavrusa*. However, thinking over the *maamar* is a must in all situations. Of course, it's important to review what you have learnt, but that itself is not sufficient. Even if you have reviewed a *maamar* a few times, you still won't grasp it properly unless you think it over.

Additionally, thinking over what you have learnt enables you to gain even from those topics that are learnt once and not reviewed until much later (like the daily Tanya, weekly Torah Or, and so on) or not reviewed at all (for whatever reason). If these ideas are thought over even once (and certainly if they are thought over more than once), a lasting effect can be gained from them as well.

Analyzing and Appreciating

The next step, after learning the *maamar* and thinking it over, is to analyze the *maamar* and appreciate its richness and depth.

The Frierdiker Rebbe explains this concept with a *mashal* from how Gemara is studied.

When a person studies Gemara, he must first learn it and understand it properly. He must also think it over to make sure he understands it, as explained above. After thinking over what he has learnt, he can begin analyzing the *sugya* at greater depth. He can consider the advantages in the logic of each opinion and the novelty of each point in the Gemara. By analyzing the *sugya*, he can enjoy the richness and depth of each point and derive great satisfaction from this knowledge. (Analyzing a *sugya* in such a way requires a sharp mind, and it cannot be done by every person.)

All this similarly applies to thinking Chassidus. The first step is to think over what you have learnt to make sure you understand it properly. The next step is to think it over again, this time focusing on analyzing and comparing the ideas and appreciating their novelty and richness.

When analyzing a *maamar*, there are two ideas that are helpful to keep in mind.

13. When learning a *hemshech* (such as *Samech Vov* or *Ayin Bais*), you should also write a line explaining the connection of the *maamar* to the previous and subsequent *maamarim* in the *hemshech*.

The first idea is to think through the *seder* of the *maamar*. Think over the questions and the answers, and see how the points of the *maamar* flow from one to the next and build up upon each other.

The second idea is to think through the *meshalim* given in the *maamar* and consider the ideas they are trying to express, as explained in the following section.

Using *Meshalim* to Explain Chassidus

The use of *meshalim* plays an important role in explaining Chassidus to yourself. Chassidus discusses ideas that relate to spiritual truths and levels that cannot be grasped with our physical senses. If something can't be seen, touched, or related to, how can it become a reality? This is where *meshalim* come in. By using a *mashal* from a concept to which we can relate, we can come to relate to the spiritual idea as well.

Since *Chabad Chassidus* explains every spiritual idea with a *mashal*, it is important to know which exact *mashal* is used to explain which spiritual idea. For example, Chassidus often brings a *mashal* from the way the *neshamah* infuses and gives life to the body to explain how Hashem infuses and gives life to the world.¹⁴ (In fact, the Mitteler Rebbe explains in *Shaar HaYichud* that there is a *mashal* from a person and his soul for every level of the spiritual worlds.) To explain how Hashem's revelation is completely dependent on and nullified to Him, Chassidus often contrasts the way sunlight exists outside of the sun to the way it exists within the sun.¹⁵ To explain the nature of our relationship with Hashem, Chassidus cites *meshalim* from the relationship between a child and parent,¹⁶ student and teacher,¹⁷ and subject and king.¹⁸

These types of *meshalim* are brought in Chassidus in many different ways, and there are many more *meshalim* cited in Chassidus. Whenever a *mashal* is brought, it is important to consider the following questions:

1. What exactly is the *mashal*?
2. Which spiritual idea is the *mashal* coming to explain?
3. How does the *mashal* make this idea clearer and better understood?

¹⁴. See, for example, the *maamar* "Posach Eliyahu" in *Torah Or, Parshas Vayeira*.

¹⁵. See, for example, *Shaar Hayichud Veha'eminah*, Chapter 3.

¹⁶. See, for example, *Tanya*, Chapter 2 and Chapters 18–25.

¹⁷. See, for example, the *maamar Veyadat Moskva*, 5657.

¹⁸. See, for example, *Tanya*, Chapters 41f; *Shaar Hayichud Veha'eminah*, beginning of Chapter 7.

If multiple *meshalim* are brought, there are additional questions you should consider:

1. What is the difference between the various *meshalim*?
2. What is the advantage of each one over the other?
3. Why are they all needed?

Sometimes you might think of a *mashal* of your own. In such a case, you should try to figure out if this *mashal* is already brought in Chassidus (perhaps in other words). If it isn't, you should consider: Why isn't it brought down? Perhaps there is a flaw in the *mashal*?

It's very important to remember which *mashal* is used for which idea and not to mix them up. Every detail in Chassidus is exact, and you will only be able to truly understand the ideas it discusses if you have these details organized properly in your mind.

Applying the *Maamar*

The final step in thinking Chassidus is to reflect on the lesson that can be taken from the *maamar* and how it can be applied to one's personal life.

The Frierdiker Rebbe continues to use the *mashal* from learning Gemara to explain this step in thinking Chassidus.

After one has understood the *sugya* and has analyzed each point, he can think over the entire *sugya* once again to figure out the halachic conclusion. At this point he has a totally different kind of focus. He has already applied concentration to understand the Gemara, and he has also experienced the enjoyment in appreciating the depth of the ideas, but now he has an even more serious focus because he knows that this will be relevant to actual practice (*halachah lemaaseh*). This isn't just an abstract pursuit of knowledge (even of holy knowledge which is a mitzvah to study); the way he understands the *sugya* will be the deciding factor how to perform a mitzvah or avoid transgressing an *issur*. At this point he is completely focused on working out the *maskana* of the *sugya*.

This applies to Chassidus as well. After understanding the ideas, analyzing them, and enjoying their richness, you must think everything over once again and consider what the *maskana* is. You should explain the *bechain*, the "therefore," to yourself: "How can this idea affect me and my conduct, and how can it change my attitude and perspective?"

In particular there are three ideas in this *bechain*:

1. The conclusion that *Elokus* is the best thing in existence.

2. The conclusion that *Elokus* is the best thing for you personally. In other words, not only is it the best thing in existence in general but it is the best thing for you on a personal level.

(Alternatively, the first two ideas can be expressed as follows:

1. The conclusion that Hashem is everywhere and we all exist within Him.
2. The conclusion that Hashem exists where I am right now and I exist within Him.

In other words, the conclusion must first be that the concept is essentially true, and then you must realize that it is true on a personal level as well.)

3. A reflection on a specific area of conduct that can be improved based on this *maskana*. (This can include the areas of action and speech as well as thought. For example, you can tell yourself, “If I ever find myself in this-and-this situation, I need to approach it the way Chassidus teaches us and not view it the way the *yetzer hara* says is the reality.”)

Dividing the Steps

The Friediker Rebbe explains that the first step in thinking Chassidus should be done when learning (as explained above), the second step should take place before davening, and the third step should take place during davening.

However, this doesn’t mean that you have to go through all three steps each day. As can be easily seen, from when a person learns an idea in Chassidus until it actually affects his actions is a lengthy process. Accordingly, you can think about the idea one day to understand it, think it over again the next day to analyze it, and consider the *maskana* on the third day.

Once you have completed the process of contemplating an idea or *maamar*, you should continue to think over the same idea again and again day after day until it is fully internalized. This can take a few weeks or even a few months, depending on the person and circumstances.

You can also arrange a system for yourself when to think Chassidus on a basic level (for example, every day before davening) and when to think Chassidus at greater length, following the entire process explained above (for example, during the Shabbos davening).

Thinking Chassidus Before Davening

Additionally, the Frierdiker Rebbe explains¹⁹ that there are two ideas in thinking Chassidus before davening:

1. To reflect upon the idea that Hashem is standing over you and watching you. You should realize that speaking to Hashem, the King of Kings, is a serious thing and should not be taken lightly.

(This idea ties in with what the Rebbe says many times that one should think over the content of Tanya Chapter 41 every day before davening, where the Alter Rebbe discusses this same concept, that a person is actually standing in front of Hashem.)

2. To think over the Chassidus you have learnt and let the ideas shine in your mind (by understanding them properly).

The reason why the time before davening is an opportune time to think Chassidus is because it will open your mind and enable it to be receptive to davening. Additionally, the time before davening is a time of *giluy Elokus* when a person is able to grasp and absorb G-dly ideas.²⁰ In one place, the Rebbe Rashab adds that you can think Chassidus before *Yotzer Or* just like before davening.²¹

Novelty and Consistency

Another important idea is that there are two elements in thinking Chassidus when davening: novelty and consistency.

The first element is to think over the new ideas you have studied that day. Thinking over what you have learnt will ensure a proper understanding of the material (as explained above), which is essential for any *avodah*. Additionally, it helps preserve a feeling of novelty, that you always have something new and interesting on which to contemplate.

This idea is consistent with the answer commonly given by the Rebbe when asked what to think about when davening. The Rebbe would often answer that one should think over what he is currently learning.²²

The second element is to have a *maamar* or *inyan* you think about each day over a certain period of time, for example, for a few weeks or months. This *maamar* should be one you have

¹⁹. See note 139.

²⁰. See *Kuntres HaTefillah* Chapter 11.

²¹. See *ibid.*

²². I have heard from several *chassidische Yidden* that this was often the Rebbe's response.

already studied, thought about, and properly reviewed. Then, you can take that *maamar*, think it through again, analyze it, and reflect on the practical lesson that can be taken from it.

A possible method that can be adopted is to think over a new idea before davening and think through the set *maamar* during davening. You can stop at a point during davening relevant to the ideas discussed in the *maamar*, before *Yotzer Or*, or anywhere else. There are no specific rules where to stop and think; each person should find the place in davening that's right for him and think over the *maamar*.

Similarly, there are no rules how long to spend thinking over the same *maamar*. The idea is that the *maamar* should be thought over until it becomes internalized. This certainly can't take less than a week or two, but the exact length depends on the situation, the type of person, the nature of the *maamar*, and so on.

This second element of thinking Chassidus must be done with consistency. The only way for the ideas of a *maamar* to permeate a person's mind and heart is by thinking them over again and again until it becomes his natural way of thinking.

This isn't so exciting, because something real isn't always exciting. A person who owns a car and has a driving license doesn't get excited by driving, because it's part of the reality of life. By contrast, someone who is learning how to drive is excited because it's new for him. The same is true, *lehavdil*, about thinking Chassidus. If the idea is real, it doesn't have to be exciting; it just has to be real. When you first learned about and discovered the idea, it was exciting, but now it's part of your life.²³

In order to retain the feeling of excitement, you can integrate a new explanation into the *maamar* you think about every day or have a new idea to think about. Additionally, you can think over what you learned in Chassidus that day, as explained above.

There were Chassidim who davened with the same *maamar* for years, and some, for their entire life. The Frierdiker Rebbe mentions²⁴ that chassidim of old would learn a *maamar* ten or

23. A perhaps more fitting *mashal* can be given from a *baal teshuvah* who has become *frum*. At first, everything in Yiddishkeit is new and exciting. After some time has passed, although he may retain his passion for his belief and commitment to Torah and mitzvos, he will lose the excitement he once had because it's not new anymore. Instead, he will feel a deep sense of satisfaction that he has found the right path and is living with the truth he had always wanted.

Similarly, a person who works hard to develop an awareness and feeling for Hashem in davening will have great excitement (התפעלה) at first. Over time, however, this is replaced with a deep feeling of satisfaction from being a Yid who is connected to Hashem (מ'אי צופרידען אוֹ מאַיַּ אַיד ווָאַס פֿאַרְבִּינְדַּט זִיךְ) (מ'אי צופרידען אוֹ מאַיַּ אַיד ווָאַס פֿאַרְבִּינְדַּט זִיךְ).

24. See note 139.

fifteen times, and even then they felt as if they were only on the threshold of the *maamar*. After thinking over the *maamar* twenty to thirty times, they were able to begin appreciating the *Elokus* within the ideas.

The Rebbe Rashab thought over certain *maamarim* of the Rebbe Maharash sixty times. The Rebbe related that he asked the Frierdiker Rebbe about this, and the Frierdiker Rebbe explained that each time someone thinks over a *maamar* he understands it better. It's possible, he continued, that the difference between the sixtieth time and the fifty-ninth time will be as drastic as the difference between the fifty-ninth time and the first time!²⁵

Explaining Chassidus to Yourself as You Would to Another

When thinking over a *maamar*, you should explain it to yourself in the same manner as you would explain it to someone else.

Imagine you are giving a *shiur* in the *maamar*. You go through the *maamar* piece by piece, focusing on each part and explaining it well so that the richness of the *maamar* will be brought out. Now imagine you are *farbrenging* about the *maamar*. You bring out the lesson that can be taken from the *maamar* and explain how it can affect one's perspective and be applied to one's daily conduct.

Back to real life, this is exactly what you should do when thinking over a *maamar*. You must teach it to yourself, *farbreng* about it with yourself, and inspire yourself.

When explaining a *maamar* to another, you would first make sure he understands the basic idea. You can then offer more depth about the idea, and after that you can bring out the lesson. This is also how you should explain the *maamar* to yourself. First you should think through the *maamar* exactly as it is written, similar to the way a *maamar* is reviewed by heart. (The difference is that here you are reviewing the *maamar* in thought.) After going through a *maamar* in this manner a few times, you can think it over and analyze the new ideas that can be gained from the *maamar*. You can then focus on deducing the lesson that can be taken from the *maamar*.²⁶

Another point:

When explaining a *maamar* to someone else, it's sometimes possible to go straight from the basic idea to the lesson that can be derived from it, without adding to what the *maamar* says. Similarly, when explaining a *maamar* to yourself, what's of primary importance is to understand

²⁵. *Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Shemini*, 5710 (*Toras Menachem* 5710, p. 29).

²⁶. See the letter of R. Nisan Nemenov quoted in the introduction to *Chassidus Mivu'eres, Avodas HaTefillah*.

the *maamar* itself (or the *perek Tanya* and so on) and its lesson. The second step of analyzing and examining the *maamar* isn't always necessary, as long as the ideas of the *maamar* are understood properly and the lesson is applied.

As mentioned above, when describing the *mashal* from learning Gemara, the Frierdiker Rebbe explains that to be able to analyze a *sugya* and recognize the novelty of each point requires a sharp mind and cannot be done by every individual. Similarly, examining the depth of the *maamar* to appreciate its richness depends on the person, the *maamar*, and so on.

Making a System That Works

As can be seen from the above, there are different ways how the three steps and two elements discussed in this chapter can be split up. As mentioned before, there are no specific rules that are set in stone; each person should figure out a system that works for him, with the help and guidance of a *mashpia* or *chaver*. The main thing is to go through the three steps of understanding, analyzing (if applicable), and applying the *maamar*, and to have two “tracks” in thinking Chassidus—one consisting of new ideas, and the second, of the same *inyan* being worked on slowly but surely until it permeates and changes you and your perspective.

Similarly, although it's important to figure out the lesson of the *maamar*, this doesn't mean that whenever you think Chassidus you have to think of the lesson. Based on the system you have set up for yourself, there will be times when you will focus on understanding the ideas of the *maamar*, and there will be times when you will focus on the lesson of the *maamar* and its practical application.

Thinking Chassidus isn't meant to be a complicated, detailed process; it should be a natural part of your life. It should become part of your system that you think through what you learn in Chassidus until, over time, it is truly internalized.

This can be compared to a relationship between two people. The first time they meet, they get to know each other very vaguely. The next time they spend time together, they connect to each other a little bit more. Over time, they get to know each other better and better until a genuine feeling of friendship and affection is developed. It's a process that doesn't happen overnight and can only be reached one step at a time.

Similarly, when a person starts learning Chassidus, the concepts may appear abstract and even a bit strange. Slowly but surely, he becomes familiar with the concepts until he begins to appreciate what they really mean and the messages they impart. Then, when he davens, he builds up a connection with the life-changing depth of these teachings until he develops a strong feeling for Hashem.

This process can only happen with a lot of effort, but that's how any good relationship is formed. The main thing is to view having a *pnimiyus'dike* connection to Hashem as an integral

part of your life,²⁷ and you can then figure out for yourself the exact details of how to make the process flow smoothly.

²⁷. See the end of the *maamar* “*Rava Chazya LeRav Hamnuna*” (*Sefer Hamaamorim Kuntreisim*, Vol. 1, pp. 231–232) where the Frierdiker Rebbe uses a number of strong expressions to illustrate how personal this is.

CHAPTER 7. REAL HISBONENUS

Real *hisbonenus* that will bring about a complete change in a person is much more than just reviewing a *maamar* in thought a few times. To truly connect to an idea in *Elokus*, it is necessary to do the following:

1. You should study the subject discussed in the *maamar* thoroughly. If the subject is not fully explained in this particular *maamar*, you should join together information from various *maamarim* until the entire concept is complete in your mind.²⁸ In other words, you should *learn* and *understand* the concept thoroughly.

2. You should organize all the explanations you have studied on the topic into one clear picture in your mind. You should put together all the different ideas and see how they complement each other and provide a better understanding of the topic as a whole. In other words, you should *grasp* the concept properly with all its details.

3. You should think over the entire idea until you understand it well enough to explain to someone else, even if he is on a much lower level than you (for example, to a person on *mivtzoyim*). You should explain the concept to yourself until you are logically convinced that it is true. In other words, you should internalize the concept until it is *true in actuality* and isn't just an abstract idea in the books.

4. You should think over this idea every day until you feel that it has become part of your physical reality. In other words, you should internalize the concept until it is *true in your personal life* and not just true in general.

We will give a practical example from a *hisbonenus* on the topic of *hashgachah pratis*.

1. The first step is to learn the various *sichos* and *maamarim* that explain the concept of *hashgachah pratis* with all of its aspects. By way of example, ideas that would be explored would include the following:

- a. Awareness of *hashgachah pratis* will result in the realization that there is nothing to worry about since everything is preordained by Hashem.
- b. *Hashgachah pratis* is related to the idea that Hashem is constantly creating everything and that each detail has a purpose.

²⁸. Of course, although this is the most ideal way, you can think over a concept of Chassidus even after having learnt only one *maamar*.

Similarly, any other aspect that can be seen as part of this topic should be researched.

2. The second step is to put together the various explanations of this concept and organize them in your mind until you see how they work together.

3. After researching the topic thoroughly, you should think it over one section at a time until you can see the entire picture how Hashem truly has everything planned out to the smallest detail and how each and every detail is important and necessary in fulfilling the purpose of creation.

4. After thinking it over and actually seeing this picture, you should explain to yourself how this is true in your personal life as well, that every detail of your life is planned out by Hashem Himself and is of the utmost importance to Him.

This process is very different from merely thinking over a *maamar*. It is an extremely long process, but it is the “longer shorter way”; ultimately, this is the only way to reach the desired goal. However, to be ready to undertake such a journey, you must first get used to thinking Chassidus in general, because even thinking Chassidus on a basic level can be difficult. You should first grow accustomed to thinking over *maamarim*, *Tanya*, and so on every day for at least a few months, and when it isn’t (as) difficult for you to think Chassidus for five to ten minutes without interruption, you can begin the process of real *hisbonenus* with the help of a *mashpia*.

A *mashpia*²⁹ once advised a student to think over a certain idea in Chassidus at length. The student said that he would rather think over the words of the *maamar* (*osiyos harav*) instead of thinking over the idea itself.

Some time later, the student had *yechidus* with the Rebbe, and he mentioned what his *mashpia* had told him and what he had answered. The Rebbe told him that during the week, when he doesn’t have as much time available to think Chassidus, he can suffice with thinking the words of the *maamar*. On Shabbos, however, he should follow his *mashpia*’s advice and think over the idea itself at length.

We can see from this that there is a definite advantage to thinking over the idea itself as explained above, but since this is a long and involved process, it’s possible that one will only have the time and effort available for this on Shabbos. However, one must keep in mind that this is the only way to achieve a full grasp of and connection to the ideas of Chassidus.

The third volume of this series will explore, with Hashem’s help, a number of topics and ideas that a person can use for this purpose.

²⁹. R. Yitzchok Meir Gurary.

CHAPTER 8. PUTTING EFFORT INTO THINKING CHASSIDUS

It's All About the Details

The Rebbe Rashab explains at length in *Kuntres HaTefillah* and *Kuntres HaAvodah* that the only way *hisbonenus* can affect a person is if it is done in a detailed manner, as opposed to a general overview. This means that you can't suffice with just summarizing the *maamar* and thinking over the summary for thirty seconds or a minute; you must think through the *maamar* with all its details in order to experience what the *maamar* is saying.

(Although there is no exact amount of time for which one must think Chassidus, as a general rule, experience has shown that to do this correctly takes at least five minutes.)

This is different than the concept of thinking the *chassidische pirush hamilos*. For that purpose, it's enough to think over the main idea of the *maamar* that explains that part of davening. However, that isn't meant to replace the idea of thinking Chassidus, which refers specifically to a genuine, detailed contemplation. What it's supposed to be is a *supplement* to thinking Chassidus: in addition to thinking through a *maamar* properly (and thinking the simple *pirush hamilos* of davening), you should try to think about the deeper meaning of the words.

It's true that when thinking through a *maamar*, it's helpful to summarize the ideas after thinking them through in detail, and the summary can then provide even more clarity than was gained by thinking through the details alone. However, thinking over a summary by itself isn't considered a proper contemplation.

The reason for this is because an entity can only be grasped by its edges. When a person wants to grasp a physical object, he must first locate its parameters, and these parameters must be small enough for him to wrap his hand around them. Similarly, in order to grasp an idea, one must find its parameters, its definition and limits, and each idea must be small enough for the mind to process. The details are the "handle" with which one is able to grasp the concept; by grasping each detail one at a time (each detail being small enough to process), you will be able to grasp the entire concept properly. Merely thinking over a summary, by contrast, will not enable you to grasp the idea properly.

(Evidence to this is the fact that when you suffice with a summary, you typically cannot explain the idea using different words. If you would have truly grasped the idea, you would be able to explain it without using the same words as the *maamar*.)

Effort Brings Success

Thinking through an idea with all its details is much harder than thinking over a short summary of the concept, but this is the way you will be able to connect to it. In Tanya (Chapter

42) the Alter Rebbe explains that to achieve *daas* in *Elokus*, you can't suffice with studying *sefarim* and listening to the explanations of *tamidei chachamim*; you must work hard to connect your mind to the idea until it is as real to you as a physical object. This requires a lot of effort, because you have to think through the ideas clearly, explain them to yourself, and bring out the lessons that can be applied from them. But *Chazal* have promised us, “*yagata u’matzasa taamin*,” “If you have worked hard and succeeded, you can be believed.”

Contemplating an idea from Chassidus is something you must toil at. Don't view spending a long time thinking over a *maamar* as something burdensome. You shouldn't satisfy yourself with thinking Chassidus for a couple of minutes and then say, “I was *yoitzei* my obligation to think Chassidus.” You should think through the *maamar* and *farbreng* with yourself until you feel that it means something to you and that you have really connected to the idea.

On some days, when you're in a rush, you can think Chassidus for five minutes and that will be enough, but your general attitude must be that this is something into which you invest time and effort. Everyone knows that in order to become a *baki* in Torah, a person must put effort into learning. Can you imagine transforming your natural tendencies and elevating yourself without effort? Doing that surely requires even more effort! Explain to yourself that this is a worthwhile investment and that every ounce of effort devoted to this end will be well spent.

Some Practical Tips

When a person starts to think Chassidus, he may find it difficult to concentrate and can suddenly discover that he is “spacing out” and thinking about other things when he is supposed to be thinking about the *maamar*. If this happens to you, don't be deterred. It's only natural to be easily distracted if you are not used to concentrating for a long time on a single idea. After a few months of thinking Chassidus, it will start getting easier to concentrate, and eventually you will be able to think through an entire *maamar* from beginning to end without spacing out in the middle. So if you find yourself spacing out when thinking Chassidus, don't worry about it too much; just return to what you were thinking about as if nothing happened, and after working on this for a while you will overcome this problem.

As mentioned before, there are no exact rules as to where in davening you should stop and think Chassidus. You should find the place that works best for you, whether before *Hodu*, before *Ashrei*, or anywhere else.

When you reach the spot where you will be thinking Chassidus, you should stop saying the words of davening and think instead. You shouldn't think Chassidus while saying the words; at that time you should be thinking the *pirush hamilos*, not Chassidus.

If the chazzan reaches kaddish or the like when you're in the middle of thinking, just stop where you are, answer, and then go back to the idea you were thinking about. Just as there are stopping points when reading a book (for example, the end of a paragraph), there are “stopping

points” in the idea you are thinking about, so you can stop and answer and then go back to the most recent “stopping point.”

The main thing is to make thinking Chassidus into a habit. Just like you must learn Chassidus every day and say the words of davening every day and after a while it becomes routine, you should think Chassidus every day until it becomes a daily routine. Make sure that not a day goes by without thinking about Hashem.

Davening on Shabbos

There is a big difference between the weekday and Shabbos davening. The Alter Rebbe mentions in *Tanya*³⁰ that on Shabbos even working people can and must daven properly, meaning that they must think and become inspired by Chassidus. Similarly, *bochurim* in yeshiva and *yungeleit* in *kollel* have a greater opportunity to daven on Shabbos than they have during the week, because during the week they are limited to the *sedarim* of the yeshiva or *kollel*, but on Shabbos they can daven without looking at the clock. Furthermore, Shabbos is a special time, an *eis ratzon*, when it is much easier to daven and attain a real understanding of and feeling for Chassidus. One can accomplish a lot more on Shabbos than we think is usually possible.

Accordingly, on Shabbos you should make sure to learn (or finish off or review) an entire *maamar* and think it over completely. You should make this be your priority, that on Shabbos you will think Chassidus no matter how long it will take, and you will try to truly understand and connect to what you have learnt and gain inspiration from it. This will give you the inspiration and motivation to learn Chassidus and daven throughout the week.³¹ The only thing that’s needed is to realize how important it is until it becomes your priority.

³⁰ אגרת הקדש ס"א.

³¹. See *Torah Or, Parshas Noach, Maamar Mayim Rabim*, where the Alter Rebbe explains that all of a person’s davening during the week is an extension of his davening on Shabbos.

CHAPTER 9. ENJOYING CHASSIDUS

As important it is to put effort into davening, it is of at least equal importance not to look at davening as an obligation but as something *enjoyable*. The only reason we must sometimes force ourselves to daven is because, as is true with anything in life, if we really want something to happen, we must sometimes force ourselves to make it happen. Our emotions are designed in such a way that we don't always feel like doing what's best for us; as a result, we must sometimes force ourselves to do things even though we don't feel like doing them. In reality, however, davening is something extremely enjoyable.

In *Kuntres Umaayon*³² the Rebbe Rashab describes various levels of pleasure. He explains that for a person, the highest level of pleasure lies in intellect. In intellect itself, the ultimate pleasure can be found in the G-dly intellect of Torah, and in Torah itself, in *pnimiyus hatorah*. By learning *pnimiyus hatorah* you can come to recognize and feel *ruchniyus*. Your *neshamah* leaves behind a state of being coarse and concerned with physicality, and instead connects with a state of becoming refined and spiritual.

In *Kuntres HaAvodah*³³ the Rebbe Rashab explains that if a person thinks Chassidus as if it were a chore, it is unlikely that he will develop true feelings (of love and fear of Hashem). Thinking Chassidus will only bring about such feelings if you are excited about Chassidus and enjoy thinking about and connecting to it.

A businessman doesn't need to force himself to think about his business and figure out how to improve it; it comes to him naturally because this is where his excitement lies. Similarly, it should be natural for someone who appreciates a little of the infinite depth of Chassidus to be excited to think about and live with these incredibly beautiful realities.

How can a person arouse an enjoyment in thinking Chassidus?

One piece of advice is to realize the uniqueness of the subject matter you are thinking about. As the Rebbe Rashab explains there,³⁴ before one thinks Chassidus he should recognize that he isn't thinking about an ordinary idea that can be conceived by the human mind; he is contemplating on an idea of *Elokus*, which is infinitely higher than anything that exists in this material world. You are trying to connect your mind and elevate yourself to a reality that is entirely beyond your present state.

³². בתחילה.

³³. ע' מב.

³⁴. קונטרס העבודה שם.

Another way you can heighten your enjoyment is through *nigunim*. The Alter Rebbe explains that *neginah* can help a person break free from his limitations and draws forth from the essence of one's *neshamah*.³⁵ The Friediker Rebbe explains that *nigunim* open up a passageway between *chaya yechida* and *nara"n*, the essence of the *neshamah* and the *neshamah* as it is enclothed within the body. *Osiyos hanegina*, he explains—the letters of song—are *osiyos atzmiyim*, letters that express the essence; or as the Alter Rebbe puts it, song is the language of the soul.

This means that a *nigun* can help you understand and feel the truth of the *neshamah* and of *Elokus*, and it can enable you to “get outside of your box” and think in a more spiritual and profound way. The Friediker Rebbe expressed this idea when he said in the name of the Rebbe Maharash that if a person is afflicted with *timtum hamoach* (i.e., he is unable to understand Chassidus properly), thinking Chassidus deeply may not suffice. Sometimes, it is only with the help of a *nigun* that his mind will be able to open up to Chassidus.³⁶

This is why chassidim sing during davening, sometimes before davening, sometimes in the middle of davening, and sometimes after davening. In addition, in Lubavitch there is a *seder nigunim*, a *seder* dedicated to simply singing *nigunim*, as this itself can help a person attain proper feelings during davening. Even if you just teach yourself new *nigunim* or listen to them before going to sleep or at some other time, they will eventually infiltrate your mind and you will be able to find the right *nigun* to express yourself during davening.

³⁵. ראה ד"ה יבל הוא ה' (בתו"א פ' בראשית) ע' ז, ג.

³⁶. סה"ש תש"ג ע' 113-115.