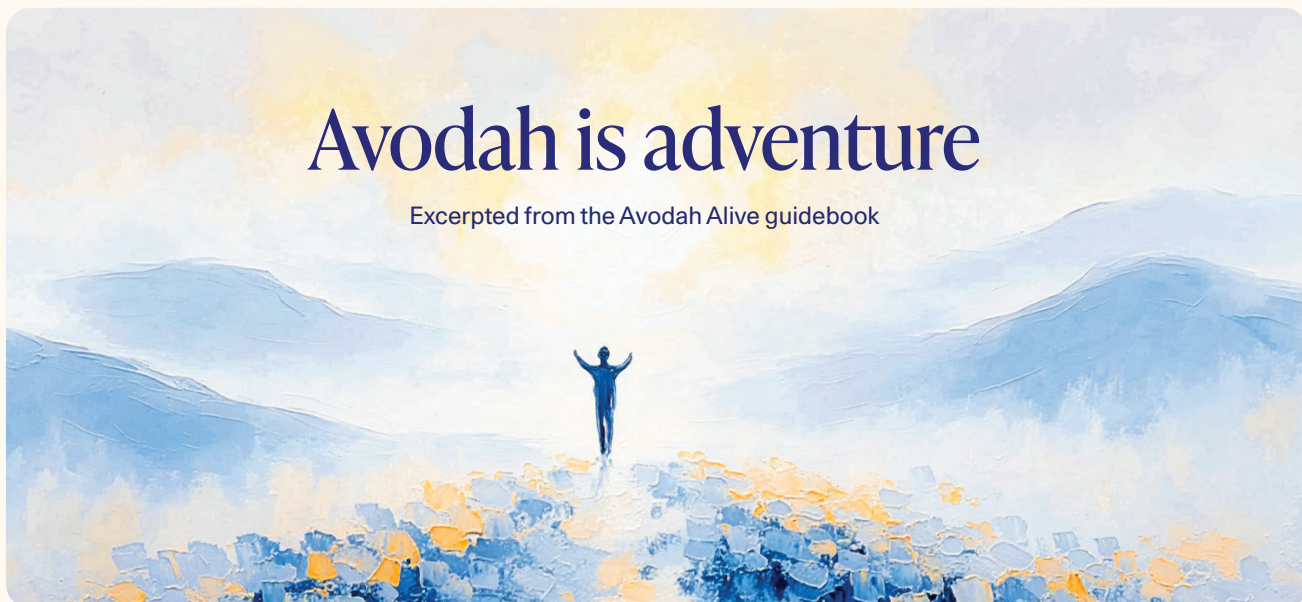


Avodah is adventure

Excerpted from the Avodah Alive guidebook



There's a part of us that yearns to live more centered around Hashem and spiritual growth.

And then there's a part of us that finds intense focus on avodas Hashem a bit... tedious.

We like to invest our time and headspace in pursuits we enjoy. Our work, perhaps. Our relationships. Our hobbies.

To most of us, avodas Hashem is on life's to-do list, not exactly in its fun-and-games bucket.

How can we get our pleasure-oriented selves to happily focus on it anyway?

By realizing that, when we learn how to think the right way, avodas Hashem becomes a great adventure.

In Hilchos Talmud Torah (1:13), the Rambam introduces us to the middah or trait of "hislamdus." The reflexive form of the Hebrew word for learning, hislamdus essentially means "self-teaching."

This middah serves as a core feature of a life of avodah. It keeps our minds busy exploring the insights we constantly notice in both our external lives and our inner worlds.

"Who is a wise man? One who learns from everyone." (Avos 4:1) Famous as this mishna is, has it ever led you to wonder about the parallel it draws? Can't a person be wise simply because he knows a lot, even if he doesn't learn from absolutely everyone?

Well, say Chazal, wisdom isn't just something you have. Wisdom is a mindset. A chacham, a wise person, is someone who constantly learns from the people and things around him.

Someone who's in a constant state of hislamdus.

The word "explorer" usually brings up images of intrepid men cutting through tropical jungles, discovering new wonders of the world. But a person who's truly living a life of avodas Hashem is also an explorer.

That's because he views everything in life – his surroundings, things that happen to him, his own actions and reactions – through the eyes of hislamdus. To him, they're all new vistas brimming with intriguing pockets of insight, ripe for exploration.

How do we activate our hislamdus? What insights should we be looking out for?

Anything that can inspire, enhance, or open up a new path in avodas Hashem.

Chazal (Eiruvim 100b) remark that even if we hadn't received the Torah, we could have picked up many of its lessons from the world around us. We could have learned modesty from the cat. The evil of stealing from the ant. Faithfulness from the dove.

And there's truly no hislamdus playground as intricate and enlightening as our own inner world.

Our actions. Our choices. Our triggers. Our strengths and weaknesses.

That guy rubs me the wrong way. Hm, I wonder why. What can this teach me about myself?

I'm having trouble staying focused now. How come? What's going on inside me that's holding me back?

I really wasn't feeling Yom Tov this year. Why not? What needs to be different?

To a man with a hammer, the old adage says, everything is a nail. What we focus on in life determines what we'll notice in the world around us. A photographer notices lighting and framing details wherever they look. A real estate developer sees potential projects in any empty or poorly used land.

And someone living a life of proactive avodas Hashem? They notice pathways to a stronger relationship with Hashem.

“Ein tzur k’Elokeinu” – “There is no Rock like our G-d,” the Navi tells us (Shmuel 1: 2:2). Chazal expand the word “tzur” into “tzayar,” unveiling a new meaning: “There is no Artist like our G-d.” Hashem fashioned a world filled with an endless variety of creations – all to teach us something else about Him, about connecting with Him.

Those living focused on avodas Hashem, living in a state of hislamdus, live endlessly interesting lives. Because there’s always more to explore. More to learn. New paths to follow – which lead to yet newer ones.

Hashem doesn’t just encourage us to focus on avodah for the sake of our spiritual wellbeing. He wants us to live the most satisfying lives we can in this world too.

Hislamdus is one of the gifts He’s given us to make that possible.