

## The Act of Knowing

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Can I know something without knowing that I know it? And if I'm not aware that I know it, what difference does it make if I know it or not?

Freud is often credited with having discovered the subconscious. But the idea that there are things we know even if we don't know that we know them, and feelings we feel even if we don't feel that we feel them -- and that these subconscious realms of knowledge and feeling exert a profound influence upon our lives -- predates the good Viennese doctor by many centuries.

In the Book of Daniel, the great Judaic prince recounts a prophetic vision: "And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, but the people with me did not see it; yet a great terror befell them, and they fled into hiding" (Daniel 10:7). "But if they did not see the vision," ponders the Talmud, "why were they afraid?" "Because," the Talmud responds, "although they themselves did not see, their *mazal* saw."

What is this "mazal" of ours that sees things we don't? The Chassidic masters explain that only a small part -- a mere "ray" and "reflection" -- of the soul enclothes itself within the body to become the consciously sensing and acting self. The soul itself remains "above." Yet a constant flow of vitality and illumination trickles down from the supernal soul to the bodily soul (the Hebrew word *mazal* means "the source of the trickle"), imbuing it with the transcendental qualities of faith, instinct and supra-rational knowledge.

The existence of such subconscious -- or rather, supra-conscious -- knowledge is referred to extensively throughout the Torah. It even has legal repercussions in Torah law. A prominent example is a clause in the laws of divorce: for a writ of divorce (*get*) to be valid, it must be granted willingly. However, if Torah law dictates that a divorce should be granted, the *beth-din* (court of law) has the right to coerce the husband to give the *get*; in the words of the Talmud, "he is beaten until he says, 'I am willing.'" Maimonides explains: "In truth, [every Jew] he wishes to be of Israel, and wishes to observe all of the commandments and to avoid all of the transgressions of the Torah. It is only that his evil inclination has overpowered him. So if he is beaten so that his evil inclination is weakened, and he says: 'I am willing,' he has willingly divorced... he is not considered 'coerced' -- on the contrary, it is his evil character which has forced him, against his true will, in the first place."

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16 July | 6 Av

### Parashat Devarim

Shabbat Begins: 8:56 pm

Shabbat Ends: 10:11 pm

Picture the following scenario: You do something nasty to a friend or a loved one. Later you apologize: "I'm so sorry. I honestly don't know what came over me. You know me -- this isn't like me at all! I just wasn't myself yesterday..." Your friend nods sympathetically, as if what you said makes perfect sense.

What does it mean that "you" were not "yourself"? It means what we all know to be true, because we all know this about ourselves: that there is a real self, and an unreal self. The unreal self may act cruelly, or stupidly, or both; the real self would never do anything to hurt a friend or loved one, or anyone else for that matter.

So why do we often show a distorted, unreal self to the world? There are, of course, many factors that conspire to obscure the core goodness of our souls. But perhaps the main cause of it is that we're all simply conforming to the way we're perceived by others, which is itself a mirror of way that we perceive them. So we end up all walking around seeing distorted, unreal perceptions of each other, and protecting ourselves from all those frightening monsters stalking our world with a monster suit of our own.

Imagine if suddenly everyone else saw you as you really are, as you see yourself. And you looked at everyone else and saw them as they see themselves. Our world would be a very different place, wouldn't it?

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This explains one of the most basic -- but also one of the most amazing -- principles of the Jewish faith. One of the thirteen "foundations" of Judaism is the belief in the coming of Moshiach, and that the Jew "anticipates his coming, every day." To believe that there will come a day when "there will be no hunger or war, no jealousy or rivalry. Good will be plentiful, and all delicacies available as dust. And the entire occupation of the world will be only to know G-d" is quite amazing. Even more amazing is to realistically expect this to happen *every day* -- including today, July 23, 2005, when the world we see out the window seems significantly far from this ideal.

But if we think about it, it's not really that amazing. It boils down to this: If you believe in your own essential goodness, it stands to reason that the guy across the street believes in his own essential goodness, too, doesn't it? And if the thing that's preventing you from being your own true self is the fact that the guy across the street doesn't see the real you, it stands to reason that the same is true of him, doesn't it?

In other words, what's wrong with our world is not a matter of substance, but a matter of perception: the fact that we're not seeing things the way they truly are. Like in a bad dream where everything is wrong even as deep down we know it's just an illusion. No matter how ugly and terrifying a dream is, no matter how distorted its perception of reality, it is never "unrealistic" to expect it to be replaced by a sane, beautiful world. On the contrary: it is the dream that is unreal, and the most realistic thing is to expect its distorted perspective to be replaced, by a single act of waking, with an undistorted vision of the real world.

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This Shabbat is designated on the Jewish calendar as *Shabbat Chazon*, the "Shabbat of Vision." Because it is the Shabbat before the Ninth of Av -- the day on which we mourn the destruction of the two Holy Temples -- we read a special section from the prophets (Isaiah 1:1-27) that describes the causes of the destruction and the ways to rectify them. The reading begins with the words *Chazon Yeshayahu*, "The vision of Isaiah..."; hence the name, *Shabbat Chazon*.

The great Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev revealed a deeper significance to the name "Shabbat of Vision": on this day, said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, each and every one of us is granted a vision of the Third Temple, which will descend from heaven at the time of the Redemption.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe would often quote this teaching of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, and ask: what is the point of being granted this vision of the messianic redemption, if we cannot actually see it?

We *can* see it, the Rebbe would say. The messianic redemption is our own true selves come to light, the reality of creation as it truly is. And to see it requires only one simple action -- an action which we take as a matter of course every day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

To see reality, we only need to open our eyes.

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