

I. **Berur: How do you know if it's God?** Rabbi H A. Addison

II. **Lord, Where Shall I Find You?** Yehudah HaLevi Spain, 12th century

Lord, where shall I find You? Your place is hidden and high.

But where shall I not find You? The whole world is filled with Your glory!

I seek your nearness, I call to You with all my heart;

and, when I move to meet You, I find You there to greet me.

III. **Discernment: Charism of the Holy Spirit?**

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. I Corinthians 2: 12-13

Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another, miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another discerning between spirits

I Corinthians 12: 7-10

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world John 4:1

IV. **Inquiring of God**

And she(Rebecca) went to inquire of God (Genesis 25: 2-3)

Through a prophet, perhaps Abraham himself, who lived until her children were 15

Abraham ibn Ezra Spain, 12th Century

To the Beit Midrash, the [mythical] Academy of Shem [Noah's son]

Solomon ben Yitzhak (Rashi) France, 11th Century

To "inquire of God" means nothing other than to pray *'I turned to the Eternal, who answered me Psalms 34:5 Moses ben Nahman (Nachmanides) Spain, 12th Century*

V. **Berur** -- The etymology of **Berur** stems from the process of smelting metal. **Bor**, meaning potash or lye, was used to help purge the dross so that only the pure, strong metal element would remain. **Bar** or **barah** in biblical Hebrew connotes that which is pure, lucent, or clear.

VI. **The Eternal, God, formed** (vaYYitzer וַיִּצֶר) *the Human from the soil's humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being. Genesis 2:7*

The verb used there to describe God's fashioning of Adam is the same term used in Hebrew for character inclination (*Yetser*). Because the first letter of that term is doubled (vaYYetser), the sages of Israel claim that each human being has two character inclinations.

When Adam sinned the light was hidden, the shells were actualized, revealed and dispersed... The ascending level of our perception should be to discern (l'barair) the inward sparks (netzotzot) from the external shells (kelipot), to consume and be nourished by the inner, and to discard the shells. But in the future, that which is as dark as night will shine as brightly as day. *Isaiah Horowitz Torah Or, (The Light of Torah), on Genesis, Parshat Chaye Sarah*

VII. THE STAGES OF BERUR

- A. **Timimut HaMahshavah Purity of Intention** “...that one's heart might be upright.”
Let Thy will be my will, that my will be Thy will -- aseh ritzono ritzoncha ...sheya-aseh ritzoncha kirtzono
Pirke Avot, The Ethics of the Fathers 2:4
I act from no intention other than to please the Creator, Blessed be the Name.
La-asot nahat ruach laBoray baruch Sh'mo
Tzavaat HaRibash, The Testament of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, ch 46

- **B. Iyun Analysis**
- “... analyze one's actions that they be brought into conformity with the purpose (of pleasing God)”
- If the goal of discernment is to choose that which is “pleasing to God,” the prophet Micah offered three behavioral criteria to help us judge what this might mean:
- It has been told to you O' Humanity what is good and what YHVH requires of you. To **act justly (Asot Mishpat)**, to **love devotedly (Ahavat Hesed)** and to **walk modestly (Hatznaya Lechet)** with your God. (Micah 6:8)
- **C Bitachon Trust In God**
... Deuteronomy 10:12-13 lists those traits which God “commands you today for your **good**,” including Awe (Reverence, Fear), Walking in God's Ways, Love and Wholeheartedness. Conversely, feelings of self-inflation, sadness, anger, hostility, boredom, antipathy, hesitance, uncertainty and disconnection might well be signs of what the Psalmist referred to as *To-ay Levav*, Errant Heart, “they who do not know my ways.”(Psalm 95)
- As Schneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad Hasidism noted, these tears of trembling and renunciation, however, may be the prelude to even greater joy that comes with drawing closer to God.

VIII. D Hazarah The Return Loop

“an act should not be judged by the first impression that it makes on the mind.” ..cast one's lading with God...”

The Baal Shem Tov imaged the Yetzer HaRa as a cat burglar. If you think you've overwhelmed it with zeal or scared it away by stringencies you always run the risk of it sneaking back where and when you least expect it. Better, he said, to capture it and keep it under observation over time to more fully recognize its potential impact

A decision might initially evoke within us the joyous, enthusiastic feelings of *Bitachon*. The Isbitzer warned that these moments born of *Gadlut*, spiritual expansiveness and exuberance, warrant *Berur*. (*Mei HaShiloach, Living Waters, Parshat VaYigash*) Is the joy I'm feeling emanating from my desire to please God or to please myself? Strip it of every shred of profit, pleasure or self-satisfaction (*hana-ah*). If that path still seems to be right, then pursue it. (*Toldot Yaakov Yosef, VaYikra*)

IX. Discernment as an Approach to Life

Rabbi (Judah the Prince) said: What is the straight path (*derech ha-yashar*) that one should discern (*she-yabor bo*): that which is beautiful (*tiferet*) to the one who enacts it and is recognized as beautiful (lit. brings one beauty) from (other) human beings (*ha-adam*).

Even though he sees where the judgment (applicable precedent in Jewish Law) leans, still he looks to the Blessed God to see the depth of the truth of the matter. ...not to act in a way that is simply habitual. Even though yesterday he acted in such a way, yet today he doesn't want to rely on his former response, only that the Blessed God should illuminate God's will into him anew *Mei HaShiloach*, The Living Waters, *Parshat VaYeshev*

X. **Some time** afterward, God put Abraham to the test, saying to him, "Abraham." He answered, "Here I am." "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. **On the third** day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you." Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. **Then Isaac** said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son, I am here." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "It is God who will see to the sheep for this burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together. They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. **Then a messenger** of YHWH called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me." When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. And Abraham named that site *Adonai-yireh*, whence the present saying, "On the mount of YHWH there is vision." **Gen 22**

XI. **Discernment Practices**

A. Particularly when faced with untoward sexual involvement distance yourself from the situation by ten degrees of separation.

B. During moments of exaltation if not actual self-inflation the following four steps might be undertaken to assess the purity of one's motives:

- Similar to Buddhist prescription, remember that life and its desires are ephemeral. Question whether it's worthwhile to engage in what might well be personally defiling and provide but fleeting enjoyment
- Study Torah. Its teachings might offer salvation from untoward craving or insight into legitimate ways to fulfill one's desires.
- As a hedge against arrogance and the illusion of human self-sufficiency, recite the Shema. This is a reminder that all is interconnected and in the hands of the One true God. The Isbitzer cites a statement in the Talmud indicating that at the end of time God will invite the righteous into a circle dance. Some contemporary Jewish spiritual directors have suggested that when faced with an insuperable urge one should envision that urge surrounded either by the words of the Shema or by a circle of current and former

righteous people whose wisdom and examples would be invited to help illumine this difficult situation.

- If all these fails, then envision the actual day of your death, an occasion where lust, and desire have no place. Looking back over your life consider if you'd like to be remembered as having committed the act you're considering *Mei HaShiloach, Parshat Vayigash*

XII Discernment Exercises

- **Inviting Divine Light to Penetrate the Darkness** There is another general approach through which light will dwell within a person... This approach is indicated by the process of creation. *The earth was unformed and void; darkness was on the face of the deep. God said, "Let there be light" and there was light.* Each person is a miniature world: each person contains a Godly soul and potent spiritual energies as well as forces of darkness and confusion.... In the absence of spiritual light a person becomes increasingly self-centered...; s\he simply cannot move beyond the self ... When, however, s\he instills one's being with spiritual light—*You shine forth the sun, they disappear* (Psalm 104)—all the dark places of the soul become illuminated.
- **Seeing through the Perspective of Heaven** *You have seen that I spoke to you from the heavens.* (Exodus 12)... The meaning of the verse is that *I speak to you* "communicating a state of elevated consciousness." When one looks at the world with this (heavenly) consciousness one sees the insignificance of so much that people put their efforts into...negative traits fall way. *Mountains melt like wax before YHVH, the Lord of the earth* (Psalm 97).