


Berur

How Do You Know

If It's God?

Rabbi Howard Avruhm Addison



A person is sitting on a grassy hill, looking out over the ocean at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow across the sky and water. The person is in silhouette, with their hands clasped in prayer or contemplation. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and the water reflects the light of the setting sun.

**Lord, where shall I find You?
Your place is hidden and high.
But where shall I not find You?
Your Presence fills the world!**

**I seek your nearness,
I call to You with all my heart;
when I go forth to meet You,
I find You there to greet me.**

Yehudah HaLevi Spain, 12th Century



Inquiring of God

... and she went to inquire of God, Who said...

Genesis 25:22-3

Through a prophet, perhaps Abraham himself, who didn't die 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 Isaac ("Rashi,")

France, 11th Century

To "inquire of God" means nothing other than to pray... 'I inquired of the Eternal, who answered me ' Psalms 34:5

Moses ben Nachman ("Nachmanides/Ramban")

Spain, 12th century



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

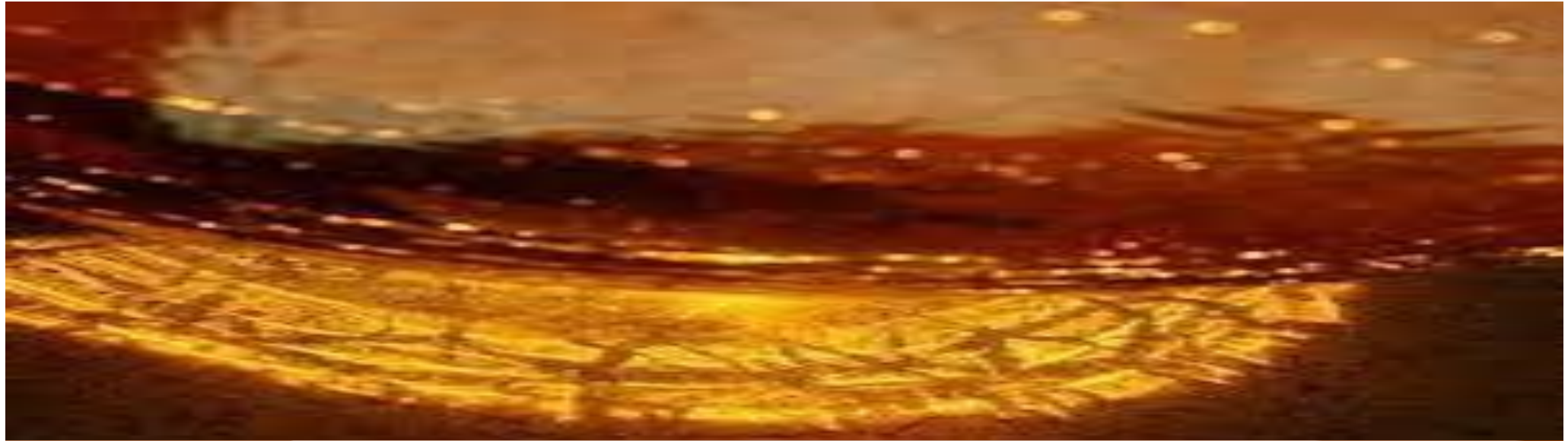
I Corinthians 12: 7-10

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5: 22

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



Berur

... 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.

SHATTERING THE VESSELS

LIBERATING THE SPARKS

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 (*netzotzoṯ*) 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

R' Isaiah Horowitz (Prague, 17th century)

Torah Or (The Light of Torah)
Genesis, Parshat Chaye Sarah



The Eternal, God, formed (vaYYitzer וַיַּצֵּר) the Human from the soil' humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.

Genesis 2:7



DUAL INCLINATIONS



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

THE STAGES OF BERUR

adapted from Moshe H Luzatto (Italy, 18th century) Mesilat Yesharim (Path of the Upright) ch 20

***A. Timimut HaMahshavah* Prayerful 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 Blessed Creator..."

La-asot nahat ruach laBoray baruch Sh'mo Tzavaat HaRibash, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem's Testament #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:

Humans will say, 'How good!' But what YHWH require of you. *To act justly (Asot Mishpat), to love devotedly (Ahavat Hesed) and to walk modestly (Hatzneiya Lekhet) with your God.* (Micah 6:8)

As Schneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad Hasidism noted, tears of trembling and renunciation are, however, the prelude to even greater joy that comes with drawing closer to God.

***C Bitachon* Prayerful Trust In God**

And after all this, one must pray for divine support, "casting one's burden onto God." Then, it will be said: Fortunate are those whose strength is in You... God will not withhold good from those who walk with whole hearts (*b'tamim*) Psalm 84

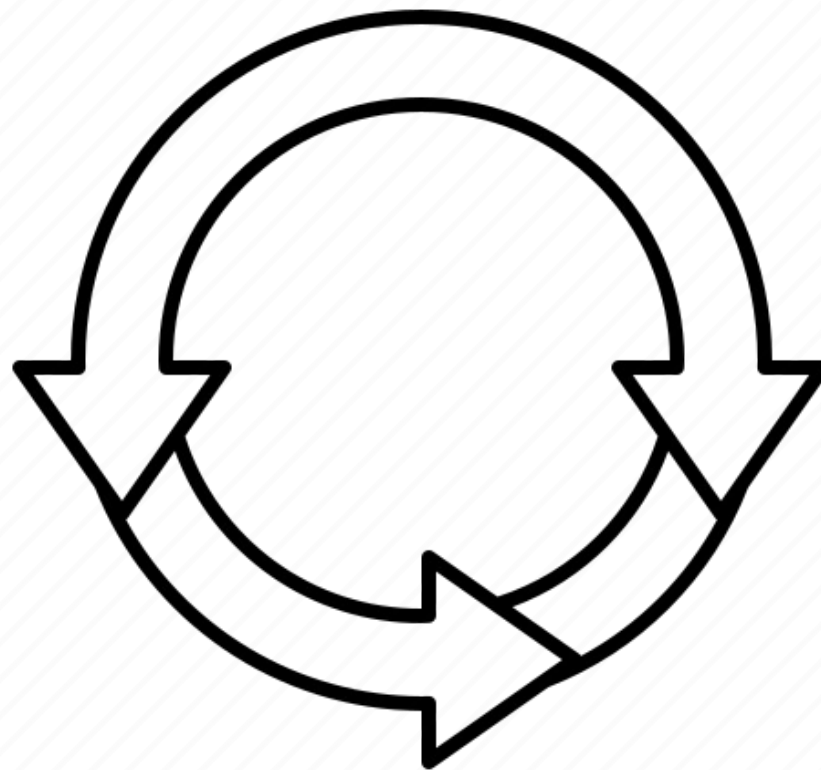
The Baal Shem Tov imaged the Yetzer HaRa as a cat burglar. If you think you've overwhelmed it with zeal or scared it away by stringencies, you always run the risk of it sneaking back where and when you least expect it. Better, he said, to capture it and keep it under observation over time to more fully 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*. Is the joy I'm feeling emanating from my desire to please God or to please myself? R Mordechai Y. Leiner, Poland 19th century *Mei HaShiloach (Living Waters) Parshat VaYigash*

... **strip every** shred of profit, pleasure, or self-satisfaction (*hana-ah*) from the intended act . If that path still seems to be right, then pursue it. *Toldot Yaakov Yosef, VaYikra*, Ukraine, 18th century

***H*azarah: 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...”



Genesis 22

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, "Here I am, my son." 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 יהוה 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. Now I know that you revere 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 יהוה-יהוה there is vision."



Discernment as an Approach to Life

Even though one sees where the judgment (precedent in Jewish Law) leans, still she 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, today they don't want ...to rely on any former response, only that the Blessed God should illuminate the Divine will into us anew

R Mordechai Leiner, Izbica, Poland 19th cent
Mei HaShiloach, (Living Waters), *VaYeshev*

Rabbi (Judah the Prince) said: What is the straight path (*Derekh 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*).

Ethics of the Fathers 2:1

...THE STRAIGHT PATH (Derekh ha-Yashar)

What's true and not true? Is it Either/Or? Both/And? A Problem or a Paradox? Don't be afraid to consult trustworthy others as you assess the inner and outer dimensions of a situation

Is it ethical and aligned with my core values? Ethics sometimes lead into grey areas; they're not always black and white. But if you're being guided to commit a blatant ethics violation, think again.

Does it make sense? While spiritual guidance may often ask things that feel crazy, common sense is still a useful discernment tool.

Will it hurt anyone? Feelings may be hurt when you set boundaries; proper defense is needed when loved ones are threatened. Do double-check, however, if your guidance is potentially dangerous or hurtful to another

Natural, Efficient, Easeful, Peaceful and Graceful? So agrees a consensus of multi-faith spiritual leaders when

BEAUTIFUL (TIFERET) TO ITS ENACTER

Shackles on or Shackles off? *Do you feel like you're in prison, or unfettered? Do you feel the heaviness of the shackles or the lightness of being of freedom?*

Is there Aliveness here? *This is a vitality check. True spiritual guidance rarely tells you to do something that makes you feel dead inside.*

Does it Exhaust me or fill me with Dread? *You may feel weary after saying yes to a calling that seems big and scary. But you will also feel excitement, a positive flow of energy.*

How does this Feel in my Body? *Does your body light up? feel contracted or expansive? Say, "Hell yeah" or "Hell, no?" Ache or feel energized? Check in. Let your body be a compass.*

Will this cultivate stillness? Sometimes what we interpret as excitement is a physiological stress response. Right choices among people, work, and experiences can help relax your nervous system

BEAUTIFUL (TIFERET) TO OTHERS

Is it coercive or controlling? If what you feel guided to do is coercive or controlling of someone else, pause. Love doesn't coerce or control.

Is it Kind? *If you think you're being guided to do something overtly unkind, think again. But don't mistake kindness for people pleasing. Trustworthy spiritual guidance is kind, but can also be tough love*

Am I rushing? Trustworthy spiritual guidance doesn't rush you unless someone's life is at risk. It's not hurried, or frantic. If you're feeling harried or not clear, pray for clarity, confirmation, a sign, a dream, or gut instinct.

Would Love do this? A favorite question because it's so expansive. Sometimes love forgives unforgivable acts. Sometimes love leaves. But nothing is more powerful

Abridged from Dr. Lissa Rankin's
<https://lissarankin.com>

How Can You Tell If You're Being Spiritually Guided? 15 Discernment Tools



DISCERNMENT EXERCISES

LET THERE BE LIGHT

There is another general approach through which light will dwell within a person... The process of creation indicates this approach. *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 FROM HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE

(What Is This to Heaven? To Eternity?)

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 away. *Mountains melt like wax before YHWH, the Lord of the Earth* (Psalm 97)