

"LO YADATI"

1. After Father Jacob had his famous dream of angels climbing up and down the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, he woke up in a state of fright -- va-yira. Why did he experience fear after such a sublime vision? Because, as the Torah tells us his very words, akhen yesh ha-shem ba-makom hazeh v'anokhi lo yadati, "indeed, the Lord is in this place -- and I did not know!" Jacob was shocked at his own capacity for lo yadati, for not being aware; for standing in the presence of Almighty G-d, and calmly making his bed unawares of Him; for finding himself in a place of overwhelming holiness, and going to sleep unperturbed by it. Lo yadati, this is the self-accusation of the father of our people.
2. How significant is both Jacob's predicament and reaction for us, his descendants, on this eve of the yom ha-din, the Day of Judgment! The great majority of us are rarely consciously evil. Even after the most searching self-examination on this Judgment Day we will no doubt prove innocent of any calculated evil, of any major malice or obviously bad intention. Our failure, rather, lies in our blindness to the sublime in life, our insensitivity to the holy, our cheerful indifference to the angelic visions that lie within our grasp. Our failure lies in that at every step we can grasp the ladder leading to the gates of heaven, but -- lo yadati, we are not even aware of it, we allow ourselves to be nonchalant about it. Our sin is not that we consciously pursue evil, for we do not. Our sin is that we can so easily achieve goodness, but are blind to the opportunity: lo yadati.
3. Just look at the opportunities for goodness, for grasping the great ladder to heaven, that come within our reach almost every day of the year -- and we fail to climb it because lo yadati, we are impassive and unconcerned. Here is the husband who comes home from work and finds his wife irritated and miserable -- or reverse the situation. One kind word, one gracious compliment, one expression of sympathy can make your spouse happy instead of miserable, cheerful instead of despondent. What an opportunity for bringing just a bit of heaven into an otherwise routine day at home. We are provoked by a phone call we have just received and are about to lose our temper and show our seamy side. What an opportunity for teaching our children by example the virtue of restraint and self-control -- for children observe and learn such things. In our business life we have the opportunity to show our colleagues and customers and competitors that a genuine Jew is basically honest and decent and fair -- what a chance to prove that the ladder of success can be the ladder of Jacob. It is when we forgo these opportunities because lo yadati, because we don't know or don't want to know about them, that we too have reason to fear for our spiritual health.
4. I think that that is what we ought to have in mind when, on this Yom Kippur, we recite, as part of the confession, the phrase al cheit she-chatanu lefanekha be'yodeim u've-lo yodeim, "for the sins we have committed before Thee wittingly and unwittingly." Generally, be-lo yodeim, unwittingly, is taken to mean that we have sinned without realizing that what we are doing is forbidden. I prefer to interpret that be-lo yodeim as referring to the sin of lo yadati, of having the occasion to be constructive and decent, and to pass by the occasion unawares, unknowing, insensitive, indifferent.
5. But while we follow the example of Father Jacob in confessing openly our individual guilt of unawareness and insensitivity, I am convinced that as a people we emerge far cleaner than others from this charge of al cheit be-lo yodeim. I invite you to think

back to what happened only this week at the U.N. when, once again, the Egyptian delegate, in the course of justifying the criminal acts of his government in closing the Suez Canal to Israeli traffic, repeated the old, hackneyed Arab arguments on the Arab refugee question. You read his vitriolic, intemperate words, and the brilliant, clear, and direct retort of the Israeli delegate. I ask you to scratch below the surface and consider this interesting phenomenon, this arresting contrast between Israel and her neighbors. The State of Israel was built by and for a deep, abiding, altruistic concern for our refugee brethren. Jews in America and in Israel gave, in funds and limbs and life, more than any other people ever had, to give a home and self-respect to their brothers from Europe and Asia, from the melahs of Morrocco and the villages of Romania. When history flung the challenge of creative sympathy at us, we did not answer lo yadati, we do not know, we do not care to know. Now compare to this the callous, hardened, brutal and cold-blooded disregard for their own flesh and blood of the Arab states.....Are these poor people near starvation? - lo yadati, as long as they serve as prop ganda against Israel. Are they denied the most elementary rights of a home, an education, a job - - which they could get in other Arab lands with benefit to all concerned? - Lo yadati....

6. This, my friends, was the burden of the speech in the halls of the UN by the arrogant Arab delegate. Would that some one were there to remind that Egyptian that a little before him another Egyptian spoke in the same vein. Three thousand years ago Pharo turned to Moses, another "Israeli", and said lo yadati et ha-elokim, I don't know G-d, I don't care to know Him. He too was lead from ignorance to callousness to cruelty, va-yechezek et lev paro, G-d hardened his heart even as G-d naturally hardens the heart of anyone who chooses the way of lo yadati, who chooses to blind himself to his neighbor's plight. And so Pharo doubled the work-load of his poor slaves! Yet some one should have arisen ~~to~~ in those august chambers of the UN and reminded Mr. Fawzi of what happened to Pharoah - his watery grave. And perhaps if there had been someone in those chambers with an even longer memory and deeper reach into the recesses of the dim past, he might have told the Shukairies and the Nassers that their speeches and attitudes are pirated from the man who first taught the world how to spill blood, from the one who initiated the craft of murder. Remember Cain's initial reaction to G-d when G-d challenged him, "where is thy brother Abel?" The first words he said were lo yadati, I don't know, I couldn't care less! That is what the Arab governments are saying to the conscience of the world about their callous indifference and brutal blindness to the bitter fate of their brother Arabs: lo yadati - we just don't care as long as we can make political hay out of it! Shades of Cain!
7. But if we have reason to feel proud of our national record on this score, we must not imagine that we are therefore free from the obligation from personal self-examination as to whether, as individuals, we have or have not made use of lo yadati. Perhaps the clearest way to self-criticism in this matter is by referring to an interesting passage in the Talmud (B.M. 35a) which refers to a seemingly prosaic case of trusteeship. Hahu gavra d'affkid kipi le'gabai chavrei, a man once entrusted some jewels to a friend, amar lei hav li kipi, and after a while he demanded the return of the gems. Amar lei lo yadati hekhah osvinhu, his friend answered, "I don't know what I did with them." asa lekamei d'ray nachman, when the case was brought before Rabbi Nachman, he decided: kol lo yadati peshiusa hi, zil shelim, every argument of "I do not know" is to be considered a confession of guilt, criminal negligence, therefore go and pay.

My friends, Rabbi Nachman's decision is not only halakhah but also hashkafah, not only Jewish law, but also the Jewish philosophy of life. For each of us is a shomer, a trustee in whose hands G-d has placed his kipi, His most precious and cherished jewels. Our duty in life is to be fully aware of this trusteeship, to be fully cognizant of the kipi. But if we should be negligent, if we should allow ourselves the dubious luxury of

on this day of supp: (10:30 PM), when He
 insensitivity, so that when G-d demands an accounting of us all we can do is say lo yadati, we don't know what in the world we have done with these gems, then the decision of Torah is an unremitting and merciless peshiusa hi, zil shelim, this is considered a criminal act, you must take full responsibility for it, and pay -- in lost years, lost opportunities, lost possibilities.

Just look at the jewels, the kipi, G-d has lent us: life itself. What have we done with ourselves this past year, since last Kol Nidre night? Have we lived life to the fullest, made use of it for the happiness of our neighbors, the betterment of our friends, the enhanced nobility of our own spirits? Lucky is the man or woman who can answer "yes" to that question. For he who is forced to answer lo yadati, I don't know what has happened to this year, it just slipped by -- that person has committed a crime against himself and paid for it by subtracting a whole twelve months from his life.

MISSING
 G-d has given each of us an unusual jewel: the human brain. Some of us have higher IQs, some not as high. But all of us are capable of a great deal of creative thinking. What an incomparable miracle that human mind is! Some scientists have calculated that the number of cells in the human brain equals the number of stars in the whole universe! We who are so curious about the other side of the moon and the outer reaches of stellar space -- have we been aware of the equally exciting miracle in our inner space, the vast complexity of our own brains? How many of us this year, who have complained about the younger generation's inattention to religious studies, have taken the trouble to cultivate our own minds with the wisdom of Torah? Who of us has sufficiently polished that jewel within the cranium and developed and advanced his knowledge? We live in a community in which major museums, planetariums, are within walking distance; in this building exciting courses for adults are given every week of the year; sheurim of the most arresting kind are given in this neighborhood or at the most a short ride away. What have we done with these precious opportunities? Lo yadati is an unacceptable answer.

Time - missing 1:15 PM
 G-d gives us children. How unutterably precious are these gems! If we pay close attention to their growth and development, good. But if we are blind to any phase of their lives, if, for instance, we remain oblivious -- as so often happens -- to their proper religious development, then that lo yadati must evoke from G-d on this holy day the charge peshiusa hi, criminal neglect, zil shelim, and how bitterly parents must pay for such neglect! What a tragedy if instead of a dor deah, a generation of knowledge, our inaction and obliviousness produces a lost generation!

Perhaps some of us are privileged to have in our homes a parent or both parents. Tonight we are to judge ourselves in the light of the fifth commandment, Honor father and mother. Have we treated them like precious gems, which they are, as golden links to the great past, as the opportunity to repay them for the love they lavished on us? Or do we sometimes act indifferent towards them, lo yadati, shrugging them off and blind to their need for consideration and love and respect. If it is the latter, peshiusa hi, it is a sin, and zil shelim, every son or daughter pays for that sin for whether we like it or not the one thing our children best learn from us is how treat their parents later in life!

8. Not lo yadati, I do not know or care to know, but yadoa yadati, I know and want to know and want to be concerned, should be our slogan. Leifi ha-deah ha-ahavah, Maimonides taught us -- love and knowledge go hand in hand. I do know, in our sense, means not intellectual knowledge alone, but spiritual knowledge, love, warmth, affection.
9. Let me therefore bring to your attention the final case of lo yadati -- your synagogue. Here in your vicinity you have an incomparable kipi, the opportunity to find your spiritual home. We of the Jewish Center are here to serve you. We have never failed our community: services -- guidance -- personal counselling -- junior congreg. -- Hebrew High School -- etc. etc.

On this night we are faced with the challenging question: ~~heilich est~~ what have you done with and for these gems? A Synagogue and a school cannot exist and be supported by only a handful of people. If this center of Orthodoxy is to remain functioning and on its high level, it must have your support. You must not be forced to shrug your shoulders and say: lo yadati, I don't know or care to know about my "shul". A refusal to assist in the welfare of the synagogue is peshiusa, a decided wrong which is considered as such by Almighty G-d on this yom ha-din.

We appeal to you therefore for your warm and devoted support. Do not neglect us. Do not remain oblivious to this religious jewel in your midst.

A man once went to a jewelry store to buy a jewel. He noticed one, highly priced, that did not sparkle at all. When he inquired from the proprietor, he was told to hold the gem in his hand for several moments. When he opened his hand, he found a gem of sparkling beauty. "This," the jeweler told him, "is an opal. It will shine and sparkle only when you put it in your hand and it is heated by your warmth."

We of the Center now ask you to hold us in your hands, as it were; to give us of your warmth and friendship and loyalty; to open your hearts and your hands to us, in a manner that will be an everlasting credit to all of us Jews. May your response be the very opposite of lo yadati, and may the Lord respond with the blessings of a year of happiness, blessing, and peace.

Even as Father Jacob, after his arrangement
at his performance of the Kol Nidre, proceeded
dedicate that place as (House of God, which
ultimately became the Temple.