

ACSD Training Event, 28 – 30 August, 2015

Hebrew “knowing”: Integrating head and heart in spiritual direction

St Luke’s prayer: *O living Christ, make us conscious now of your healing nearness. Touch our eyes, that we may see you. Open our ears, that we may hear your voice. Enter our hearts, that we may know your love. Overshadow our souls and our bodies with your presence, that we may partake of your strength. your love and your healing life. Amen*

Reflection Exercise:

Think of a choice or action that you took during the last week (big or small), when you knew quite firmly, that it was the right decision. When you knew that you knew that you knew!

You might have come to it over time, but when the moment came, you knew firmly the thing to do. ... *take a moment to recall...*

Now my question to you is this: *How did you know this was right? What told you that this was the thing to do? How did you get to that sense of rightness?* Take some time to ponder that; write down a few thoughts.

Now turn to the person next to you and share some of your ponderings – whatever you feel is appropriate...

Brief Plenary

How do we come to “know” something? Share some thoughts...? Do any of you experience knowing in your body? How?

This could easily become a big philosophical discussion on epistemology –the theories of how we can know anything. And that would be such a heady discussion and would really be precisely the opposite of what I want to explore today.

So instead, I want to take us into Scripture, and particularly into Genesis. We’re going to explore how the Hebrew writers described human “knowing”, because they have a perspective that can help us as sp directors.

> *handout* [just quotes used in this presentation; full notes av by email]

The Genesis story [read tog]

Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

*The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the **knowledge** of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” ...*

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’ ”

The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die!

*“For God **knows** that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, **knowing** good and evil.”*

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they **knew** that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.*

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 (NASB)

However each of us prefers to read this narrative – literally, mythologically, or anywhere on that spectrum – it’s hard to deny it’s a potent story! It has been a foundational story for humans, particularly in providing a narrative framework to understand human brokenness and sin. I notice:

- The subtle half-truths and deceptions of the serpent-tempter;
- The woman’s rationalisations and the man’s silent acquiescence (“instead of a helping and saving partnership, a companionship in error and fall”¹);
- Their eyes opening to “knowing” evil, and an irrevocable loss of innocence; [Blake’s *Songs*... wholly mutually exclusive]
- The immediate result of this knowing: shame at what they are, fear, hiding;
- And I’m aware of what follows - fracturing relationships: human - God, human - self, human – human, human – created world.

Take a pen and underline where you see the word “**know**” (and its cognates) in the story...

That’s *yada*, the Hebrew word for “know”. ***Let’s go through each citing of this word in the text, and find another word that captures the different nuances of yada each time it’s used*** > understand, comprehend, experiencing, realising....

One of the central points of the story is that the “knowing” Eve and Adam fancied having was far more than they anticipated: it became an experience that changed them irrevocably. In disobeying God’s command, they walked into knowledge. They sensually-engaged, they felt, thought, decided, chose and acted... and so they came to “know” evil, from the inside.

That knowing meant eyes opened to things they were previously oblivious to – their own nakedness – and now a new layer of knowing is placed over that nakedness: shame. Previously they were “both naked and not ashamed” (Gen 2:25).

It’s worth us noting that humankind’s introduction to “knowing” is pretty devastating: their gaining of knowledge is seen by the Biblical writers as a fall into sin, from which no recovery is possible. ***Does this mean that knowledge is bad?*** [cf Milton, Blake etc who debate this idea...]

No! God himself “knows”, is the source of all knowledge (see 3:4 above). The tree of knowledge of good and evil is in itself a good tree. What is not good is the process of distrusting and disobeying God going on inside the woman and man - this leads to knowledge of self-will and rejection of God, to knowledge of evil.

¹ J.T.E. Renner, *Genesis* (LPH, 1984), 52.
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What's more: Gen 4:1. *Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain...*

Here in the very next verses following the fall account, a new kind of knowing is described: sexual relations. Adam already knows Eve – “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” he called her when he first saw her. He knows her as part of himself, and yet separate, wonderfully different. He knows her as his true companion in the work God gave them to do. And here now he knows her intimately and physically. This is good knowing, the two humans fulfilling the very gift/ invitation that God gave them to “be fruitful and multiply”. (So knowing can be very good!)

Hebrew “knowing”

What we see in all this is that the Hebrews had a far richer, more complex idea of “knowing” than we often do. For them to know something wasn't just a mental, intellectual process – having some information in one's mind. For a Hebrew, you only truly knew something if it was part of your experience – if your whole being had engaged with it. Indeed, unless a piece of information had produced action – a choice of will, then it probably wasn't ever really 'known' in the first place. **[I read]**

“Knowledge for the Hebrews was not knowledge of abstract principles or of a reality conceived of as beyond phenomenon. Reality was what happens, and knowledge meant apprehension of that. Knowledge of God meant, not thought about an eternal Being or Principle transcending man and the world, but recognition of and obedience to the one who acted purposefully in the world (Deut 11:2ff, Isa 41:20).”²

Or to put it more simply: “In Hebrew, ‘to know’ mostly has the connotation of knowing through experience. ‘Knowledge of God’ does not simply mean knowledge about God, but a knowledge based on being with him and loving him.” (Renner, 61) Knowledge is lived experience. Adam knew his wife Eve...

Hebrew “heart/head” words [*para in handout*]

Likewise, Hebrew understanding in the OT doesn't not have neat distinctions between the mind, heart, soul and spirit, as our Greek-influenced analytical lexicon does. Hebrew uses three main words – *nephesh* (soul), *ruach* (spirit) and *leb* (heart), but the meanings and usages overlap and it's very difficult to differentiate between them. “In particular, the widely-held distinction between mind as seat of thinking and heart as seat of feeling (especially tender feeling) is alien from the meaning these terms carry in the Bible...” **Pause here** – you hear that? Our separation of head and heart as thinking and feeling is not in the Scriptures. Rather, a much more inter-connected, holistic idea of the human being.

To cont quote: Hebrew says ‘come into the heart’ where we would say ‘come into the mind’, Jer 19:5, Deut 30:1. ‘Call to heart’ is one way of saying ‘remember’ [what we would consider a mental process]. ‘To set one's heart on’ means to give attention... According to the Hebrew ideas, soul and spirit also think...” (Richardson 144-5)

Whole knowing

Okay, what does all this Hebrew theology have to do with us here today? 😊

I've long been fascinated by this holistic Hebraic understanding of us human beings. We aren't divided into head and heart, into mind and body and spirit. These can be useful technical divisions but if we

² A Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (SCM, 1957), 121.
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stay there, working with divisions, we deny the rich, integrated wholeness of the human psyche. [As spiritual directors we get this, I think; we're invited to see the whole. But it can get lost in analysis... and so it's worth hearing again.]

So I've been playing with this idea: if the Hebrews are right, and 'knowing' is a holistic experience, not just a head thing – then knowing in one part of me means I also know in my other parts. Knowing in my head means that there is also knowing in my heart. Knowing in my mind means that there is also knowing in my spirit or soul, or body... Hence the exercise at the start today: how you "knew".

Some examples that we're probably all familiar with...

- I think of people living with long-term grief, how so often their bodies tell them the anniversary of the loss is approaching. The body knows, as well as the mind/ memory, and emotions, and soul... The knowing is in all parts of the person, because we are whole people!
- Another example straight out of sd: our deep subconscious self knows things and tells us so in our dreams, or in images that come to the surface in our speech or IDT drawing... and our rational mind belatedly recognises the knowing.

So I'm wondering if our language of head/ heart divisions is not so helpful. You know: when we say that a person knows in their head, but it has to travel the 6 inches to their heart! (6"?!?) I suspect that if a person knows something in their head, then it's already also known in the other parts of them too. It might be a different perspective on that knowledge – different kinds of knowing from the various parts of us – but our whole self knows it.

But of course, as spiritual directors we know how we humans can ignore or suppress other parts of ourselves. I'm a 3 on the Enneagram, and I'm a master at suppressing or ignoring my body's voice, especially when it has important but inconvenient knowledge to tell me! ("you're going to get sick if you don't rest!")

Those of us who are Myers-Briggs "Ts" are probably very familiar with our poor ability to hear our F emotions. And those of us who are Fs are also very familiar with our tendency to ignore our thinking voice! We can eclipse the less dominant voices in ourselves, and refuse to listen. But the point is, they are there and they know stuff.

And more deeply, we have blind spots. We can be so out of touch with our shadow selves, or with unfamiliar parts of ourselves, we don't recognise their voice and presence, and so can't hear the knowings they hold.

Part of my own story is that though I'm an F of the M-B framework, I have a strongly developed T/ thinking voice. And that's the dominant voice in my family too. So it was a great shock for me, during my sd formation training, to discover this powerfully-suppressed voice of feeling in me that was trying to get some important knowledge to the surface of my consciousness – knowledge that I knew in my head but was not giving any time or attention to. It took near burn-out, a powerful dream (brought into the light at one of Marg Schrader's dream workshops) and some sensitive, wise spiritual direction to help me to recover the knowledge that I was holding but suppressing.

A different more recent example... A d'tee I've been working with this year, who I'll call Megan, is strongly intuitive and gut-driven, and when I ask her how she arrived at a decision or

action, she just says off-handedly, “oh, I just did it”. At the same time she’ll say that she’s not very clever, doesn’t know much – quite self-disparaging. As we’ve talked and listened together, noticing some of the powerful recurring images she uses, we’ve come to see how there are deeply-held values and thoughts beneath the surface of her awareness. She has a keen mind and strong moral will that undergirds her quick, intuitive action. We’ve come to see that she knows what she believes in, and acts on it. We’ve come to see her strength.

I’m sure you have similar stories as directors, too. Realisations like these are extraordinarily *encouraging* for directees, aren’t they? Directees see that they are not stupid or thick or incapable: there is strength and knowing hidden within themselves. They appreciate more the complex richness of their own psyche, and they become hopeful. I know I did.

So let me pose some different questions for us...

Instead of speaking of head-heart divisions, some better questions might be: how do we hear the different parts of ourselves, the deeper knowings **already in us**? How do we give voice and agency to our eclipsed parts, so that we can respond to life with full knowledge and wisdom?

How might our different ways of knowing be integrated? How can our hearts say “come in” to our heads? Or our heads say “come in” to our hearts?

And the deepest question of all: *where is God in this process of knowing?*

Discussion time

In the rest of our time, let’s share ideas in small groups. **What does this (basic) teaching that we are whole beings mean for our core business as sds: knowing ourselves, helping our directees to know themselves more fully, and how we all know God?**

On the board are a few questions – choose whatever interests your group and have some conversation together.

1. What have you heard/ noticed in this elective that may be helpful for you?
2. What helps a T (thinking-dominant) person to hear their F (feeling) self better? And what helps an F to hear their T self better?
3. How is God present in this process of us learning to hear ourselves more fully? How is God leading us into full knowing – of self, and of him?

On to board at end:

Evelyn Underhill writes that **“Most of our conflicts and difficulties come from trying to deal with the spiritual and practical aspects of our life separately instead of realizing them as parts of one whole.”**

Richard Rohr: **“We don’t think ourselves into a new way of living; we live ourselves into a new way of thinking.”**

“We ask God to give you complete knowledge of His will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honour and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.” Colossians 1:9-10