

Who Are You and Where Are You Going?

by [Petr Chylek](#) (March 2024)



Child with Spotted Dog, by John Byrne, 20th C.

“Know Yourself” is an inscription over the entrance to remnants of the ancient temple of Apollo in Delphi Greece. The meaning of this maxim has been discussed by wise men for thousands of years. On the ground level, it says that you should be aware of your ability to perform the task you decide to do. Know your strengths and weaknesses at your physical and intellectual level. On a higher level, realize that you are not a physical body, not your emotions or intellect. Realize

that you are someone or something that experiences the pains and pleasures of your body, your emotional states, and your intellectual activities. Some call it a soul, others a consciousness, or an inner self. A clear definition of either one of those does not exist. Experts in the medical profession have tried for some time to convince us that consciousness is a property of the brain. They are not so sure anymore.[\[1\]](#) Everything is a mess, a state of confusion, a creative chaos, from which a new understanding will emerge in a near or a faraway future.

Judaism, the oldest of the three major Western religions, is anchored in its foundation of the written Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Many people read the stories of the Torah, perhaps a few times in their lives, without noticing the questions related to the maxim "Know Yourself." The higher level of Torah understanding follows Socrates' method of teaching: not to present a lecture, but to ask questions to force students to find the answers themselves. Torah's questions, related to 'Know yourself' are hidden in a story about Joseph. They are presented in such a way that most people do not notice them.

"Who are you?" (Genesis 32:18)

"Where are you going?" (Genesis 32:18)

"What are you looking for?" (Genesis 37:15)

Finding the answers to these questions is not easy. The answers are also different for people at different levels of self-awareness. Hundreds of religious and self-help books describe how to find out who you are. You can also study hundreds of books of philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, or

new age teachings and spend decades of your life trying to figure out who you are, and what it all means. Thus, there is plenty of advice on how to do it, some are helpful, others not so much. I will not add to the available resources.

Instead of getting involved in intellectual study, reading a few hundred books, and wasting a few decades of your life, you are invited to try the following three practical steps. If you believe that they will work, they will. If you decide *a priori* that they are useless, they will become useless for you. So, here are the three steps:

1. **Get a dog.** If you already have one, get a second one. The best way to accomplish this is to visit the animal shelter.
2. **Forgive everyone** who did something wrong to you. Yesterday, today, and anytime during your presence in this world. Forgive everyone, including your ex-husband or ex-wife, if this is the case, and even your current husband and the current wife.
3. **Never get angry.** This is very important but also very difficult, as you know.

If you have too many things to do, like 613 mitzvot (commandments), or even only Ten Commandments, you may end up accomplishing only a little. But, if for a few years, let us say two or three, you concentrate just on the three steps, your life will be changed. Just try it. Two or three years of life is not so much; look how many years you have already wasted.

Do the scriptures tell you that you have to forgive the trespasses of others even when they do not ask you for forgiveness? No, they do not say that you have to forgive. Forgiveness does not consist of saying "I forgive you."

Forgiveness is a long process of eliminating the feeling of being a victim from your heart.

The Torah provides the following advice:

You shall not hate your brother ... You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself ... (Leviticus 19:17-18)

and in a story about Joseph being sold by his brothers as a servant in Egypt (Genesis 45:4-8)

I am Joseph your brother whom you sold to Egypt ... Be not distressed . It was not you who sent me here, but God ...

You can find an additional story about forgiveness in Zohar. [\[2\]](#)

In Christianity, the teaching about forgiveness is found in Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:14-15):

If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

These are the most clearly spoken words I know of. If we do not forgive others, our efforts in study and in keeping prayers and rituals of whatever religion we are following will

bring only limited results. If we hold a grudge and do not forgive, we are keeping a dark spot on our Soul and limiting our ability to live a free and joyful life. We are putting ourselves in a prison.

Anger and forgiveness are related since anger plays a major role in refusing to forgive. The Cambridge Dictionary defines anger as a strong feeling that makes you want to hurt someone or be unpleasant because of something perceived as unfair or unkind that has happened.[\[3\]](#) *Psychology Today* warns that getting angry can undermine relationships and damage your physical health.[\[4\]](#) The stress hormone that is released with anger destroys memory and clouds your judgment. It also weakens the immune system.

However, modern psychologists view anger as a normal human response to unpleasant situations. Some experts even speak of justified anger. I'm afraid I have to disagree. Anger is a result of self-importance and lack of humility. It should have no place in our lives.

That is all nice, however, why do I need a dog? Does the Torah or the other scriptures recommend adopting a dog?

In the Hebrew language, the dog is called KELEV. The word can be split into K and LEV, with K meaning "like" and LEV meaning the "heart". Just put these two together to get an idea of why you may need a dog.

Some other holy scriptures highlight the virtues of caring for a dog. In a Hindu epic called *Mahabharata*[\[5\]](#) sometimes translated (from Sanskrit) as *The Great Battle*, there is the most righteous man who ever lived on the earth, named Yudhishtira. When his time came to an end, Lord Krishna himself came to accompany him to heaven. Like Enoch in the Torah (Genesis 5:24), Yudhishtira was supposed to go to heaven with his physical body, without dying first. When Lord Krishna and Yudhishtira started walking towards heaven,

Yudhishtira's dog followed them. Krishna asked: "What is this?" pointing to the dog. Yudhishtira explained: "This is my dog." "Dogs cannot come to heaven," says Krishna. Yudhishtira's answer was "If the dog cannot come with me, I don't go anywhere."

After that Lord Krishna changed his mind, and since then all dogs and other creatures are welcome to heaven. Mark Twain commented: "Heaven is by favor; if it were by merit your dog would go in and you would stay out." [6]

Loving your dog, forgiving all who wronged you, and controlling your anger will help you to answer the three above Torah questions as well as the old philosophical saying "Know Yourself". Nobody can tell you the answers to these questions. You have to find the answers yourself; it may take a few years, but it will seem like one day if you keep your goal in mind.

Do you have any experience with how any of the three steps helped you in the past? If yes, please, let others know.

Notes

[1] B. Greyson, *After*, St. Martin's Publishing Group, New York, NY 2021

[2] Greater Than Joseph, in *Zohar*, G. Scholem, Editor, Schocken Books, New York 1947

[3] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/anger>

[4] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basic/anger>

[5] C. Satyamurti, *Mahabharata: A Modern Retelling*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York, NY, 2017. Additional note: One of the basic Hindu scriptures, Bhagavad Gita, is one of the chapters of *Mahabharata*.

[6] [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com)

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Petr Chylek is a theoretical physicist. He was a professor of physics and atmospheric science at several US and Canadian universities. He is an author of over 150 publications in scientific journals. For his scientific contributions, he was elected a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union and a Fellow of the Optical Society of America. He thanks his daughter, Lily A. Chylek, for her comments and suggestions concerning the early version of this article.

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