

Un-Conscience

by Yishai Fleisher

I was talking to a friend of mine and explaining to him the perils of combat parachuting. Particularly, I was describing the danger that a jumper faces when his ripcord refuses to detach itself from the plane. This scenario plays itself out rarely, but nevertheless paratroopers are trained for such an eventuality. When it does happen, the jumper, still connected to the aircraft, is knocked about mercilessly against the plane's fuselage by the buffeting winds. In order to free him, the plane's crew must cut the ropes binding the jumper to the aircraft at which time he releases his backup parachute. However, the real danger in that situation is that of the jumper losing consciousness. If the soldier is rendered unconscious by the blows to his body, he will not be able to deploy his auxiliary chute and will plummet to his death.

Upon hearing my graphic illustration of these events and imagining himself in the boots of an ill-fated paratrooper, my friend came out with one of the most astonishing statements I have ever heard in my life. He said to me in a frank and straightforward tone: "I'd rather be unconscious than afraid."

What a philosophy. It is estimated that in the twentieth century one hundred and thirty five million people died violent deaths. One hundred and thirty five million!! Are we not aware of this figure? Have not our own people contributed generously to this number? And yet we are not even slightly concerned about the state of our world nor do we sit around discussing possible avenues of betterment and change. Naah, they can go to hell for all we care. We would rather engage ourselves with pretty pictures on television, the beautiful stars, the gifted athletes, the talented pop artists. Oh what a wonderful world we live in, a dream world of economic prosperity and plenty of entertainment. Ours is an opium den of an existence where the eyelids grow heavy from drug-induced images and the safety nurturing our dreams is nothing but a lie. Nothing embodies our mode of living better than "I'd rather be unconscious than afraid."

Our fear is the fear of responsibility. We fear the incredible burden which an opening of our eyes to the world's problems would entail, and therefore choose to remain in a state of unconsciousness to block out these fears and responsibilities. Unlike the hapless jumper rendered unconscious by circumstance, we embrace our catatonic state, we want it, we revel in it. For we know that to look reality straight in the eye is to be ashamed of the unconscionable neglect which we have shown the world. Self-imposed unconsciousness is the only way to explain our complacency in the face of one hundred and thirty five million dead.

And as Jews we should be especially aware of the world's plight for we are charged with being "a light unto the nations." Have you ever thought about what this means? The influence our religion has had on to the world is immense; our

monotheistic ideas have taken root all over the world while paganism and its decadent ideals has been nearly eradicated. That role, however, was mainly a passive one, since it was our unflinching self-confidence in the truth we possessed that served as the inspiration for other faiths, rather than a policy of outreach and proselytization. And yet there has also been an active role which we have played. This planet has been graced with remarkable Jewish men and women who have shaped the fate of man kind. From Moses to Golda Meir, it has been individuals from the family of Israel, who have brought light unto our world. Indeed we have been blessed by our God with extraordinary gifts and talents, and though this sort of boasting may seem egocentric, it comes with a realization that the talents given to us were meant to be used for a Godly purpose and the promotion of our values.

A man is unconscious when he is lacking awareness and the capacity for sensory perception. In other words, he is unaware of the forces which are acting upon him. As a Jewish society, we are similarly unaware of the great force that is acting upon us - the force of history. What more tangible proof does any Jew need in order to understand his place in history than the establishment of Medinat Yisrael. We are indescribably privileged to be living in times of revelation, times which have

come about through the prayers of our people for generations. Those who do not concede the miraculous nature and the revelation of God's hand in the establishment of Israel are either blind men or liars. Our God is beckoning us into his

embrace, with outstretched arms he awaits for us! It is high time the Orthodox world began an intense conversation about going back home instead of the shameful sleepy yawn that we are witness to today.

A parable for our discussion: The word of God came to Yona and commanded him to prophesy against Nineve, but Yona wished to escape the presence of the Lord and boarded a ship to Tarshish. "But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship seemed likely to be wrecked. Then the mariners were afraid and cried every man to his god...But Yona was gone down into the recesses of the ship; and he lay down and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said to him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, perhaps God will think upon us, that we perish not" (Jonah 1:4 - 6).

The ship mentioned in the story is a metaphor for our world which at times "seems likely to be wrecked," and the aforementioned "sleeper" is an apt description for our unconscious selves. But the "shipmaster", that is God, who calls for our awakening to do his bidding. How dare we sleep in light of our mission? How dare we remain unconscious when we have so much to do?

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