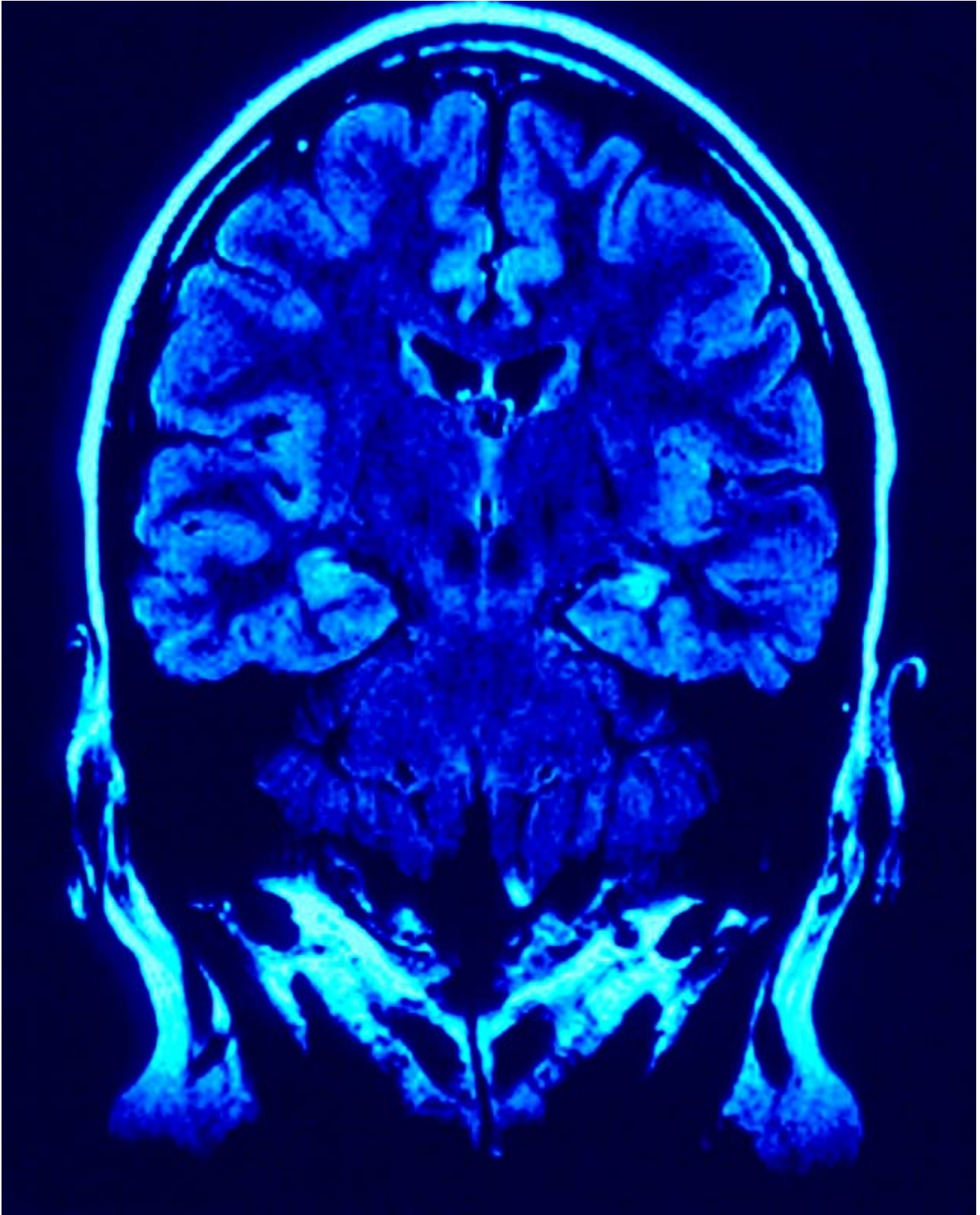


# In The Know

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January 29, 2015



Knowledge, wisdom, education ... these are the cornerstones of a typical Jewish upbringing. Almost as soon as a Jewish baby is

born, his or her parents have already established a college fund. This reminds me of a joke: A Jewish mother is walking down the street with her two little boys. A passerby sees the children and remarks, "What adorable children you have. How old are they?" The proud mother replies, "The doctor is seven and the lawyer is five."

But is knowledge truly everything? And should measuring our lives based on "what we know" be the guiding principle for our children and ourselves?

To answer this question, we turn to our *parashah*. Over the past few weeks, the Torah has recounted numerous incredible miracles. First we read about the Ten Plagues devastating mighty Egypt and bringing about the release of the Jewish People. Now free, the Jews must travel through the Sinai desert on their way to the Holy Land. God leads them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The battered Egyptians decide to give it one more shot and pursue the Jews into the sea. The sea supernaturally splits and the Jews cross on dry land. The Egyptians, in hot pursuit, meet the sea-wall as it comes crashing down on them.

The Talmud testifies to the awesome level of the Jewish People at this time: "What a maidservant at the sea saw, Yechezkel ben Buzi [the prophet Ezekiel] did not see in all his days" (*Mekhilta*, Rashi 15:2). Let's ponder the depth of this statement. Ezekiel was a very great prophet; his most famous vision was that of God's "Chariot" (Ezekiel 1). This vision was so great that our Rabbis warned, "The Act of Creation can be taught to just one student at a time, but the Chariot cannot be taught at all. It must be studied alone, and then only if the student is wise and understands on his own" (*Chagigah* 11b). Despite Ezekiel's lofty vision, he did not reach the exalted level of the simple maidservant at the sea!

After all these miracles, and considering the incredibly elevated level of the Jewish People, the Torah states, "And

Israel saw the great hand which the Lord had used upon the Egyptians ... and they *believed* in God and Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31). At this point, wouldn't just "believing" be preposterous? Moreover, the verse seems to imply that their knowledge led to their faith. Doesn't belief apply only to something that you can't experience for yourself?

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the essence of knowledge is to know that you know nothing at all. Yes, the Jews had seen the "hand of God"—but the more they saw, the more they appreciated God's greatness and acknowledged the limitations of personal knowledge. Knowledge and education are important as a means, not an end. The purpose of expanding our knowledge is to strengthen our faith in God. After all is said and done, all roads lead to faith and the existence of the ever-present Creator. Therefore the greatest thing we can do is to fortify ourselves with simple faith in God and his true Tzaddikim.

Living with faith means living a God-centered life. It means living with the awareness that everything we experience is being orchestrated by God Himself. And it means perceiving that we must always have faith, because no matter how much we know about God, we realize our insignificance vis-à-vis His greatness and rulership.

Rebbe Nachman said, "The world considers faith a minor thing. But I consider it an extremely great thing" (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #33).

*Based on Otzar HaYirah, Emunah 82*