

1. YHWH's children's rebellion has made us dumber than mammals of less potential. The ass knows enough to go to its master's feeder for food, and the ox responds to its master's call, "But Israel does not know, My people does not consider"[vs.3, Kissane]. This thinksheet is about that last word, fr. Heb. **יָדַע**, "to discern."
2. The Anglican Prayerbook petition for "a right judgment in all things" points to the human need to discern the size, urgency, and potential of facts, values, issues, persons, prospects. It's on the nose of "action/reflection," the attention/construction/revision loop that distinguishes our species when healthy--as detailed, on the medical side, by psychiatrist Earnest L. Hartmann in his brilliant THE FUNCTIONS OF SLEEP (Yale/73). The pathology of any of the three stages is instructive for biblical "serving."
3. The sense of serving a divine, cosmic, historic purpose is not unusual in humanity; but the singing and sustaining of it is. In my opinion, the supreme instances of this rarity are the Scroll of Isaiah and the life of Jesus, whose favorite book was Isaiah.
4. Ironically, the way of this Isaiah-Jesus [names meaning "saving"] "serving" fulfils an obedience Adam-Eve and Abraham were called to, Adam-Eve violated out of desire to "discern" (good from evil), and Abraham forewent ("not knowing whither he was going"). To use brain language, "discerning" is given, biblically, not out of the left hemisphere with its rational-cognitive-separative powers, but out of the midbrain, to those who know Whom to love and follow, whose right hemisphere is accordingly fired to images of devotion, praise, peace, joy, hope....whose left hemisphere then becomes "servant" of this passionate vision. Whoever begins with analysis, on the other hand, is the servant of death, the technopsyche, technocracy, etatism in lesser or grander forms, humanity-insensitive ideology.
5. The other animals, up against it, merely die; we humans have the permanent potential for creative discouragement. Three millenia ago the Indians in their affluence produced ascetic Hinduism and the Jews "servant" Judaism--the latter, out of discouragement with interminably complex Near Eastern politics [the same as now wearing down Kissinger]. God's "servant" is to "discern" God's will in this mess! But how can we "do theology" in this strange land, this secular-alien-foreign time?
6. We can begin by asking whether the metaphor is right for us: Is our assignment from God best described as being his discerning servants-announcers, "a light to the nations" (Is.49.6)? I follow the Scroll of Isaiah, and Jesus, in saying yes, this is the dominant model-role, inclusive of a positive valence for suffering encountered in obedience thereto (52.13-53.12). "The Son of Man [Jesus] has not come to be waited on [i.e., to be served], but to wait on other people [i.e., to serve], and to give his life...." (Mark 10.45 AT). "The right way to think of us is as Christ's servants.... managers...that can be depended on. I...care very little about being examined by you or by any human court....While my conscience does not trouble me..., that does not prove that I am innocent. It is the Lord who must examine me. Do not form any premature judgments, therefore, but wait until the Lord comes back. For he will light up the darkness that now hides things and show what the motives in people's minds are, and then everyone will get from God the praise he deserves." (1 Corinthians 4.5.)
"Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." (Romans 14.8.)
7. "Discerning of spirits" (1Cor.12.10) is a "gift" [cp.1Jn.4.1], polar to generosity of spirit. THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY (157, 19Feb75) does not violate the latter in saying, "We join the Hartford 18 in condemning the heretical 13" [opinions].
8. But back to that Hebrew word (#1, above). Physically, "interval of space/time"[as n.]; as prep., "between, among" [in dual, as one-in-midst, champion between armies]: **יָדַע**. Ability to separate, distinguish, perceive/feel as distinct--a higher-brain function lost in druggedness, "tiredness 2" [Hartmann's "mental [stress-caused] tiredness"], dreams (except, I'd add, for sharp emergents intervening in the dream's story-line--where I'd locate the dream revelation, biblical and extrabiblical). VERB: "perceive" with the senses/mind [latter, "understand, know"]; focus attention ["observe, mark, give heed to, distinguish, consider," reflect on--as Is.1.3]; "have discernment, insight, understanding," wisdom, intelligence, comprehension; "guard, watch over."