

The Fear of Yom Kippur

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Deuteronomy 31:1-30 is the portion of scripture traditionally read by Jews during the Sabbath service between the Feast of Trumpets and Yom Kippur. This day is called "Shabbat Shuvah," or "the Sabbath of turning." On this day, the rabbi / teacher traditionally gives a lengthy sermon about repentance, forgiveness, and the commandments of Yom Kippur. The day of worship is kind of a divine paradox. The shortest Torah portion (only 29 verses) is read on the day of the longest synagogue services.

This portion of scripture relates the last day in the life of the prince of Egypt. It is an eventful day, when Moshe concludes the writing of the first Torah scroll and hands over leadership to Yaho'shua (Joshua). In the verses that follow, Moshe would communicate the last of the mitzvot (commandments) to Yisra'el. Included in his last words are instructions concerning "hak'hel," or "gathering." Hak'hel is the mitzvah that calls for the Torah to be recited aloud every seventh year to the entire people of Israel. While the nation is united in worship during the Feast of Sukkot, all of the men, women, and children are to listen attentively as the king reads the Torah.

Just imagine this sight for a few minutes. Allow your thoughts to step out of this world of cell phones and fast food. Think quietly and enter the Holy Land. Picture hundreds of thousands of Hebrews dwelling in tents around Jerusalem. Now visualize them gathering around the Temple site. The king approaches a wooden platform with a Torah scroll in hand. It is a scroll that the King, himself, has penned. The crowd quiets as the king unrolls the scroll and begins to instruct the nation on the precepts of Elohim. Wow! Think of the lasting impact of this event. Those present would be inspired and encouraged to obey the same Torah that the King himself obeyed. Children would remember this experience for the rest of their lives. As the crowd watched and listened, they would experience a wave of emotions from amazement and awe to wonder and fear.

Through YHWH's divine wisdom, our short Torah parasha reveals the secret of gathering; the secret of hak'hel. This isn't a secret because it can't be told to others. Hak'hel is a secret because it hasn't been told to others. What is this concept that has been so hush-hush for many years? The secret of hak'hel is that spiritual energy is released and imparted when we gather to hear YHWH's word.

Amazing things happen as the Torah is spoken and studied. Miracles manifest, souls ascend, the Shekinah descends, and the adversary flees when YHWH's word is learned and applied. Don't feel so surprised by the secret? Most are familiar with the popular verse from Rabbi Sha'ul concerning this subject - "[Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Elohim](#)," Romiyah / Romans 10:17. Yet, many people are not familiar with a verse from our current parasha regarding the influence of the devar (word) YHWH and the secret of hak'hel. "[At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, at Chag Sukkot, when kol Yisrael comes to appear before YHWH your Elohim in the place that He shall choose, you shall read this Torah before kol Yisrael in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and your ger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear YHWH your Elohim, and shomer to do all the words of this Torah: And that their children, who have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear YHWH your Elohim, as long as you live in the land which you go over the Yarden to possess](#)," Devarim 31:10-13.

There it is in plain print. Hak'hel, the gathering of Yisra'el to learn Torah, results in the nation learning to fear YHWH. As the nation of Yisrael learns the Torah, each individual learns to fear YHWH.

Fear of Elohim isn't something that we are born with. It is a sensation that has to be learned. When we have a salvation "experience," we are not zapped with the fear of YHWH. We have to learn to fear Him. Fear is an emotional trait that must be acquired. Babies are not naturally afraid of falling out of a crib. Toddlers are not scared of busy streets. Kids have to be told not to play with electrical outlets. Adults are not naturally afraid of Elohim. We have to learn to fear Him through reading and studying His word.

The Torah is the only road a person can travel if one seeks to acquire the fear of YHWH. This is illustrated by the instructions given the king, "[And it shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to fear, YHWH, his Elohim](#)," Devarim 17:19. "This teaches us that fear is learned only by uninterrupted study. It is to be noted that it is written, 'so that he may learn to fear,' rather than 'so that he may fear.' The underlying idea being that fear is not naturally attainable. But, to the contrary, fear is far removed from one because of the physical nature of his senses and can be acquired only through learning," wrote Rabbi Moshe Luzzato in The Path of the Just.

To fear YHWH is a direct command of the Scriptures. It is one of the 613 mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah. Yet, it is forgotten by many and misunderstood by the majority. "You shall fear YHWH your Elohim, and serve Him, and shall swear by His Name. You shall not go after other Elohim," Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:13, 14. We know a lot about many of the commandments in the Torah. Now, as Yom Kippur is approaching, it is time to learn about the fear of YHWH.

What is it?

To fear YHWH is to "yirah YHWH." Scary Hebrew terminology? Not really. The phrase "yirah YHWH" is pretty simple to grasp. It literally means to be, "terrified, exceedingly dreadful, morally reverent, terribly frightened." We need the restraint that the yirah YHWH provides.

We need to understand that to yirah YHWH is to respect the results of life's decisions. When we yirah YHWH we are, in essence, acknowledging the laws that He has set in place to govern the universe. We are seeing Him as the Melek, the king of the universe. We are seeing the power of sin that causes curses to come our way.

Shabbat Shuvah is a wonderful time to finally understand what it means to yirah YHWH. Let's consider a few pasuks (verses) on the subject:

- *"The fear of YHWH, that is chochmah (wisdom); and to depart from evil is binah (understanding)," Iyov / Job 28: 28*
- *"The fear of YHWH is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil halakha (way to walk) a, and the perverted mouth," Mishle / Proverbs 8: 13*
- *"The fear of YHWH is the beginning of chochmah (wisdom): a tov binah (understanding) have all those that do His mitzvot (commandments)," Tehillim / Psalms 111: 10*
- *"By the fear of YHWH men depart from evil," Mishle / Proverbs 16: 6*
- *"Be not wise in your own eyes: fear YHWH, and depart from evil," Mishle / Proverbs 3: 8*
- *"Should you not fear me?" declares YHWH. "Should you not tremble in my presence?" -- Yermi'yahu / Jeremiah 5: 22 (NIV)*

From these scriptures, it is easy to see that the function of the fear of YHWH is to actually bring wisdom. The function of wisdom is to bring fear.

The yisar of YHWH is the means by which we turn away from evil. As we turn to YHWH and from evil we are made wise and we in essence fear sin. As we have the fear of sin we have the fear of YHWH. Should you walk around in dread of sin and its consequences? Should you always be thinking of sin? NO! This isn't the fear of sin. The fear of sin will cause you to think about sin as YHWH does.

Think of it this way, perhaps the fear of YHWH is, in fact, the things He is afraid of. Perhaps the fear of YHWH is having His fears in mind all of the time. Just imagine YHWH being scared!

If YHWH could be afraid of anything, what would it be?

What would cause the Creator of the universe to shrink back and shiver?

What makes Elohim scared? What are YHWH's fears?

If YHWH could be afraid of anything, it would be separation caused by sin. The one thing that could make YHWH recoil in shock is the idea of the Creator being separated from the creation. With this in mind, let's understand that to have the fear of YHWH is to actually have His fears and to personally fear what He fears. It is to fear the consequences of sin.

Yes, to have the fear of YHWH is to actually be concerned about what concerns Him. It is to dread what He dreads and run from what He runs from. It is to be upset over the same things that He gets mad at. Friend, to have the fear of YHWH is actually to have the fear of sin. YHWH is scared of the only power in the universe that separates Him from His creation, the power of sin, and He wants us to have that same fear.

In Mishle we are told that, *"The fear of YHWH is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil halakha (way to walk), and the perverted mouth," Mishle / Proverbs 8: 13.* To yisar YHWH is to fear sin, because it separates us from Elohim. What does it mean to fear sin? What does it mean, Hebraically, to sin? To fear sin we must first understand exactly what sin is and how it affects mankind. *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your Elohim, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear," -- Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 59:2, NIV.*

Sin is any act, thought, or word of rebellion that violates the will of YHWH as revealed in the Torah. The Messianic writings explain it this way *"Anyone who commits sin violates Torah, for sin is the transgression of the Torah,"* Yochannan Alef (First John) 3:4. To sin is to transgress or disobey the Torah. When we break a Torah commandment we also break our connection with YHWH. As we

rebel we are unplugged from our power source. Through choosing our ways over His Words, we separate ourselves from close fellowship with Him. YHWH doesn't change. He remains kadosh / holy. It is the sinner that changes and steps away from the Almighty. Sin is disobedience to the written word as revealed in Genesis - Revelation.

To have the fear of sin is to have wisdom of what sin is and how it affects us.

Just think about what happened to Adam and Eve / Chawa. After Adam originally sinned in the Gan Eden, Adam does something really strange. He hides. Here is a man now hiding in the bushes that had "walked with YHWH in the cool of the day." Why would he be hiding? Adam sensed that he did something wrong and this disobedience brought about the emotion of fear. Now get this, Adam wasn't afraid of snakes. He wasn't even scared of a talking snake that had tempted him to sin. But, Adam was terrified of the consequences of his actions. Adam was hiding because he was scared to death, and of death! He was terrified!

Adam, who once had a perfect, unhindered, relationship with YHWH, was now hiding because of his sin. The Rabbis teach that it was on Yom Kippur that Adam fell. Also, on that first Yom Kippur, animals were sacrificed as blood atonement for the remission of Adam and Chawa's sins. The skin from these animals clothed Adam and Chawa's nakedness and covered their sinfulness. Each time they looked upon their "clothing" they were reminded of their fall and the consequences of sin.

Through the Ruach HaKadosh we can then live in constant awareness of the effects of our Torah keeping and our Torah breaking. This awareness doesn't cause us to walk around legalistically obeying commandments. Nor does it cause us to be neurotic about our actions. Rather, this constant awareness actually blesses us, as we stay tapped in to YHWH and His will. "Blessed is the man that fears YHWH, who delights greatly in His mitzvot," Tehillim (Psalm) 112:1. As we delight in His Torah we fear breaking our connection by violating His word. "Every branch in Me that bears not fruit He takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, He purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit," said Y'shua in the book of Yochannan (John). In all honesty, it is because of a lack of fear that we sin. Sin is rampant within churches, synagogues, and homes because we do not fear its consequences.

The fear of sin will cause us to be concerned about outcome. As we truly learn to yirah YHWH we will become afraid of going astray. Before we act we will begin to ask ourselves, "what if I do this or don't do this?" This type of thinking is vital to following the Master. "I have set YHWH always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved," Tehillim (Psalm) 16:8. To be interested in the results of our actions is to acknowledge that we do reap what we sow.

Unfortunately, our society has taught us that when we do wrong we should always expect immediate physical consequences. This just isn't so. There is usually a space between cause and effect. This space is called "time." If we go out and sin tonight, we may or may not literally see the physical results of that sin tonight. Some time may have to pass. Nevertheless, the results have been set in motion. However, our teshuvah can actually stop what has been decreed. As we approach Yom Kippur we need to continually purify ourselves through prayer and meditation upon our actions.

The Ripple Effect

Scientists say that between 2,500 and 10,000 small earthquakes ripple our planet every day. Most are minor tremors, but many remember the October 17, 1989 quake that interrupted the World Series in San Francisco. An even bigger quake hit Missouri in 1812 and changed the course of the Mississippi river. And a huge earthquake in China in 1976 killed almost 400,000 people. These tremors shake our confidence in the very ground we walk on and bring fear to the heart of men. Scientists never know which small daily earthquake might trigger a deadly disaster. Similarly, we cannot foresee the full consequences of our sins.

We all sin everyday. It is impossible to tell what consequences we will face for each of our sins. When we violate the Torah through "little" sins or "big" sins we really don't know what the effects will be. As humans, we tend to categorize sins.

One imagines that the curse for stealing one dollar will be less than robbing a bank. But, the same Torah prohibition has been broken. We can't see which sin will bring about the big earthquakes in our lives. Yet, as we yisar YHWH and fear sin, we will in essence sin less. We will understand the results of our actions. Again, it is because of a lack of fear that we sin. What will happen if we eat a little pork, work on the Sabbath, fantasize about someone of the opposite sex, talk about other people, spend money on the Shabbat, or disrespect our family? Do we really want to find out? Do we really want our fellowship with Elohim to be disconnected?

We need to fear sin and fear YHWH until the fear does not depart from us. On Shabbat Shuvah, we need to really think about our actions and consider the consequences of what we do and what we don't do. Then, we need to change our actions. *"By the fear of YHWH men depart from evil," Mishle / Proverbs 16: 6.* One must apply this teaching and not just read it.

As Yom Kippur is only days away, it is the greatest time to recognize our need for YHWH and the secret of hak'hel. The fear of YHWH is an attribute that must be learned through study and submission. It is acquired as one shares the secret of hak'hel by gathering together to Midrash and learn the Torah. Remember that the current parasha commands the Torah to be read aloud every seven years during the Feast of Sukkot. This commandment supports the annual reading cycle that starts over every year at the end of Sukkot. Our parasha also gives

the final 613th commandment. This is the instruction for every believer to write a Torah for himself - "now, [write this song for yourselves](#)," Devarim 31:19. The Jewish sage Rambam commented on this, "If you write it with your own hand, it is as if you received it at Mount Sinai; but if you do not know how to write, others may write for you. Anyone who writes a Torah scroll -- even one letter, it is as if he wrote all of it." The fear of YHWH is imprinted upon our lives as we write the Torah, study the Scriptures, fear YHWH, and submit to Elohim in our lives. Through living the Torah, we can become a living Torah.

Yom Kippur is the day Adam showed no fear of sin, and thus ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. On this upcoming Yom Kippur, let's walk in the fear of YHWH and eat from the Tree of Life - the Torah. ["Afterwards shall the children of Yisrael make teshuvah \(repentance\), and seek YHWH their Elohim, and Dawid their Melech; and shall come with fear to YHWH and His abundant tov in the latter-days ,"](#) Hoshea (Hosea) 3:5. Selah.