

Fear of G-d - Yirat Hashem

Hashem is the teacher that wants you to do well. What does a good teacher do? He gives you the questions and material for the test beforehand. The gemara in Shabbat (31a) says that Hashem revealed to us what these questions are. Were you honest in your business dealing? Did you have a set time to learn Torah? Were you toiling in chochma? In pilpul? Were you involved in pirya verivya? Did you work to make the world a growing place? Were you anxiously waiting for moshiach? (sipisa leyishua?) Rava says you can have all these question right but there's one more thing. Did you have Yiras Hashem? If yes, it's all good. The gemara in Shabbas (31b) says that "G-d only created this world, so that his creatures should have yiraa". In Parashas Eikev it says: (Sefer Devarim is the segway between the written law and the oral law. There's a famous medresh that says that the she china would speak through Moshe's throat. Devarim is basically a speech/ a pep talk given by Moshe Rabbeinu). "And now Yisrael, what does Hashem your G-d ask/request of you? Only to fear him." Is this such a simple thing, the Gemara in Berachos asks?

Rav Elya Lopian (He went to the Gerar rebber th get a beracha and the Gerar Rebbe told him that someone who had a revelation from Elyahu Hanavi doesn't need a beracha from me. His grandson asked him to share what happened. He says, I wasn't sure. His wife was sick, doctor says that theres no hope for her. He goes into his room and davens. After a little while, an old man with a white beard knocks on his door and tells him to follow him. They go deep into a forest, the old man point to a plant, he says grind it up, make a tea out of it and give it to your wife. Rav Elya Lopian bends down, picks up the root of the plant, looks up, and the old man is gone. He tells his grandson, I was never sure who that was, I guess the Gerar rebbe knew who that was.) He says in his sefer Lev Eliyahu : Whats the minimalist language of "Ki im Leyira et Hashem Elokeca?" Yiras Hashem is the gate way to everything- to meaningful service of G-d. The Shem Mishmuel- the Sokochover says that same thing. In Machshava, yiras Hashem is the key to open the doors to everything. So the question is, how do we get this key? What is this key? Most people believe in G-d. We have to define the meaning of Yiras Hashem.

Yiras Hashem, at the simplest level, the Rambam refers to it in his hilchos teshuva. It's literally fear of punishment. Most believe in G-d, Most believe that the Torah was given at Har Sinai and most believe that there is a reason why we are here. Do we believe in the 13 principles of faith

(listed by the Rambam)/ in the ani maamins? Do we believe in techiyas hameisim? I believe in perfect faith that G-d sees everything, all my actions, all my thoughts, everything. I believe that G-d is going to reward me according to my actions, deeds and thoughts. And I believe that G-d is going to punish me according to my actions, deeds and thoughts. If you **really** believe in those two then you're never going to sin. The gemara in Sotah says the only reason a person can sin is because a person becomes temporarily insane. The mesilas Yesharim and the Ramabam says that this is the basest level of Yiras Hashem. But Rav Yisroel Salanter says if only we had this fear of G-d, it would good. He himself was working decades on this. Someone once came to the Kotzker rebbe and ask how do you fear G-d? Imagine you are walking through a forest, late at night, by yourself, pitch black. You start hearing growling. By the light of the moon you see a pack of wolves surrounding you with blood dripping at their jaws and foam at their mouths. You walk into a dark alley and a guy pulls out a gun and puts it to your head. Would have trouble feeling fear? Do you know who G-d is? What do you know about him? Do you know what it takes to face a bet din shel maala? It's a crazy thing. If you have a real fear, it's really scary. If you think back on your life, up until this point, what we've done so far, do you the seriousness?

The next level is Yiras Hacheit, what's the difference? Rav Chaim Kanievsky discusses this in his sefer Orchos Yosher. It's different than Yiras Haonesh. Yiras Haonesh, you're afraid to do something because G-d is going to come and smack you down. Yiras Hacheit, you are afraid to do something because you know that G-d is watching. By Yiras Haonesh, are there any positive emotions towards the punisher? No. But by Yiras Hacheit, you fear the sin not the punishment. Why do you fear the sin? If you've ever been in a serious relationship; be it with a girlfriend, a parent, a person you really care about. What happens if you know that there is something, that if you do it, you are going to hurt this relationship so much. You don't know if you'll ever be able to talk to the person the same way. Yiras Hacheit is a person who cares about his relationship with G-d. He recognizes that Hashem is the source of everything. He fears the sin itself. Do we understand what a sin is? The purpose of this world, according to the Mesilas Yesharim, is to attach to Hashem. You know what a sin does? When you sin, you bring a seperation made of iron between you and Hashem. A sin just makes a person feel so far away. He is being distanced from G-d. The Vilna Gaon, when he was 6-years old, accidentally touched muktza on Shabbat. We know the prohibition is moving muktza. But he touched muktza. He passed out, he was so afraid. Rav Soloveitchik, walked into a room and accidentally knocked the light with his elbow, and all of sudden he was shaking, he had to sit down. Rav Soloveitchik wasn't afraid

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that Hashem was going to punish him, he had a different level of fear. This is something that, even if you do a sin accidentally it can make us distant.

Then there is the highest level of Yira. Rav Wolbe says the recognition that we exist before our creator. And this recognition is so strong, that we see ourselves almost as negated. Without this recognition, a person is living for themselves. When we read the 10 commandments we hear “lo Yihyeh lecha elokim acherim, “you shall have any other G-d’s.” This isn’t such a big deal. We think idolatry is so outdated. Franz Rozenzweig, one of the biggest philosophers of the early 20th century says idolatry is very real. Idolatry is when people are worshipping themselves- giving themselves a license to do anything they want. If a person doesn’t live with this recognition, Rav Wolbe says, a person living for themselves. Rabbeinu Yonah what’s the root of yiras Hashem? It is from the same source of loving fellow man. We think that the more religious a person becomes, the meaner the person becomes- the fewer people he speaks to. Hakaras Hazolat- recognizing that there is a world beyond you. You have to care about others than yourself. If you don’t care about other people who you can see, how will you have an appreciation for G-d- that you can’t see? Every talmid chacham, you grow in your relationship with G-d, you grow in your relationship with fellow man. Rav Soloveitchik says Yiras Hashem is Reiyas Hashem (seeing G-d). A person sees G-d in everything. So what’s the anti-thesis of Yiras Hashem? The opposite is kicking (be-eit-tah). To kick. A person without Yiras Hashem, kicks away his rebbe, his parents and ultimately G-d. It basically means, no one can tell me what to do. A person who has this trait, is in trouble, his whole life will be a chillul Hashem.

The Vilna Gaon once had a talmid who went off the derech. The Vilna Gaon told him I know what you think that when you go to heaven, you’re just going to have to explain to G-d why you weren’t religious, and you’ll be punished for one thing- you weren’t religious. Make no mistake, you’re going to give a din va cheshbon for every time you put something into your mouth and you didn’t say a beracha. On every thin you do. The guy got so scared, he became frum. There’s a book called Reishit Chochma, it describes in detail what happens in gehennom. The Vilna Gaon was once reading from it and someone in the audience had a heart attack. So when the Vilna Gaon went to go see him and wish him a refuah sheleima, the guy asked by the way, none of that stuff is literal right? The Vilna Gaon said, oh we’ll talk about that later, when you’re feeling ok.

We have to recognize that this world has a purpose. Recognize that each and every one of us here, has a purpose in Hashem’s plan and we are not living for ourselves. The way to really reach this, the Rambam says, appreciate G-d’s greatness through nature. Also, “im ein chochma, ein yiraa”.

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You have to learn, if you're not wise, recognizing the greatness of the soul and lowness of materialistic things. What does that mean? That this is not with me for a long time. Recognize, how long is this yetzer hara going to be burning inside of me for her. How long? A year, two years? Even 40 years! But then it's gone. But there is something that lasts on forever. Just think, open your eyes, acquire wisdom, understand how this world works, look at the natural life cycle of a human being. How many years of tests are we even talking about? Do you know what eternity is? Rav Dessler says picture a beach, the longest beach in the world. Picture how much sand is on that beach. Now every 1000 years, a sea gull comes, take 1 grain of sand, goes and drops it in the water and comes back 1000 years later and does it again. How long will it take for all the sand to be gone? A trillion years? That amount of time is nothing compared to eternity! So figure it in, how much longer will have these desires vs. eternity. Just honestly open up your eyes to reality, to this world. Your going to have to start seeing it. Understand that a person who can see realistically what this world is about, that's a person who's going to come to Yiras Hashem. The Mesilas Yescharim says the most important thing in life is to think, clarify, and make true for himself, what is your obligation in this world. Think for 5 minutes a day and ask yourself: When you are 119 years old, looking back at your life, what is really a successful life? Is it really having a house as big as a hotel? Or a garage with an elevator in it and cars that together cost about 5 million dollars? Is that what it's about? Would anyone here say that that's what life's about. I don't think anyone in their right mind would say that. But why do so many people spend their lives chasing that? Because people are not clarified. People are not thinking, sitting down every night and thinking. There's a book called *The Closing of the American Mind* by Professor Bloom from Yale, he basically says that Americans have lost the ability to think. He says an American can't sit in one place by himself and think about one topic for 3-5 minutes. Focus yourself. Every night, do this from now till the end of your life. What am I living for? We have to ultimately focus on this. We have to have a passion, be focused, and understand why we're living. It's all up to you. You are going to decide how you will be your entire life.