

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

REISHIS CHOCHMAH

Awe Of Heaven: The Beginning Of Wisdom

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

The beginning of wisdom is the awe of G-d, good understanding to all their practitioners; His praise endures forever.

ראשית חכמה

יראת ה' שכל טוב

לכל עשיהם תהלתו

עמדת לעד

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning

The root of the word יראתה is יראה. The Hebrew word for יראה (awe), explains Reb Tzaddok Hakohen, shares the same root as the word "ri'iyah - seeing"

G-d cannot be literally seen, of course, but His Presence can be felt or intuited. This is what King David experienced in the following psalm:



"When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have established -- what is man, that You are mindful of him? ...O G-d our L-rd, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"

What first inspired King David to come to this humbling yet uplifting realization? He looked upon the heavens. *Yirah* means looking and "seeing" G-d, engendering a sense of awe and reverence.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Finding True Wisdom

Awe of G-d is the basis for true wisdom.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Yirah: The Essential Ingredient

The Gemara teaches that all of a person's spiritual achievements in this world will render him a favorable judgment in the next world only if fear of Hashem was "in his storehouse" throughout his life. The Gemara draws an analogy to a person who tells his agent to bring a measure of wheat to the attic for storage. Afterwards, the person asks the agent if he had mixed preservative into the wheat. When the agent replies in the negative, the person tells him that it would therefore have been better not to have brought the

wheat at all, for it will spoil quickly and the effort will have been worthless.

The acquisition of Torah wisdom and philosophy without a foundation of Yiras Hashem is similarly flawed. Yiras Hashem is the preservative that keeps the wisdom fresh and wholesome and enables it to become integrated into the one's being. As Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa states, *"Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. And anyone whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure."*

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

A Picture of Majesty

The Rambam guides us in visualizing images that bring us to know G-d:

"When a person contemplates [Hashem's] great and wondrous acts and creations, obtaining from them a glimpse of G-d's endless wisdom which is beyond compare, then he will promptly love, praise, and glorify Him, longing exceedingly to know the great Name of G-d..."

The pen-and-ink drawing depicted a massive mountain crowned by a jagged peak. At the foot of the mountain, there were bare trees whose highest branches reached not even past



the sole of the mountain's feet. Beside the grove of trees were two mere specks, represented in the drawing by a small dot and a few sweeping, comma-like marks. They were the people.

"The scene is meant to express the grandeur of nature," the artist explained to his viewers. "Compared to the mountain, the men are miniscule."

But even this massive mountain is only a speck compared to the earth, and the earth is but a speck in the

solar system; man keeps falling further and further away as our mind's eye soars through the cosmos. And all of it, in its unfathomable vastness, is but an emanation of G-d – a tiny corner of physicality carved out of unknowable spiritual realms. What are we that G-d deigns to interact with us, that He tends to us and lifts us from our obscure existence?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe tells us that the Rambam says it is not enough to be awed by the wondrous deeds of our Creator. **A person must also view himself in comparison to the infinite greatness of Hashem. From this understanding, Yiras Hashem is born.**

Try This!

There are situations in which a person tends to feel small; while flying on an airplane, standing under the night sky, driving through the mountains, watching powerful waves crash into the shore, or perhaps being in the presence of a great individual. This week, think of a situation that arouses this feeling within you, and flash upon that image when you say the words "Yiras Hashem" in Reishis Chochmah. Try to do this exercise whenever you say the word "yirah" in your tefillos.

Did You Know

► *Negel Vasser Comes First*

Because the ראשית חכמה prayer includes the name of Hashem (ראשית 'חכמה יראת ה') it is recited after washing *negel vasser*.

Men and women should wash their hands immediately after reciting מודה אני even though the individual may remain in bed. He washes according to the ritual procedure—pick up the vessel of water with the right hand, pass it to the left hand, and pour water over the right. Then with the right hand pour over the left. Follow this procedure until the water has been poured over each hand three times.