



From 'Fear of God' to Wisdom

Parshat Ekev contains within it what seems to be a straightforward statement from Moshe's mouth regarding what Hashem requires of us once we enter Eretz Yisrael. We are to fear HaShem our God, to walk in His ways, to love Him, and to serve Him with full heart and soul. Moreover, we are to keep Hashem's commandments and statutes... for our good (D'varim 10:12-13).

Nechama Leibowitz suggests that Moshe's use of the expression, "What does Hashem require... but to fear" implies that Hashem is not demanding much, as if to say that Moshe is, perhaps, belittling the task.

Indeed, as R. Chanina observed: For Moshe, "Fear of God" was but a small undertaking. Nechama Leibowitz adds, however, that because Moshe was so modest and unassuming, he was probably unaware of his elevated capabilities whereby Fear of Hashem was natural, whereas for the rank and file this challenge was formidable.

Ramban reiterates that Yir'at HaShem, Fear of God, is not an

attribute that Hashem requires for His good; He demands it of us for our good. And if we would but understand that notion, then fearing God would indeed be a minimal task in our eyes.

For Albo, the Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, Yir'at Hashem is more than a command, per se; it is an overriding principle that embraces all the commandments of the Torah. And how is it acquired such that Man's soul is elevated "and prepared to attain eternal life"?

The answer is by action, by observing the commandments - but only following much effort and tribulation.

For only after Avraham endured his many trials did Hashem say of him: "For now I know that you are a God-fearing man" (B'reishit 22:12).

The task is, indeed, daunting. Beautifully, however, Nechama Leibowitz explains that what Moshe is really doing is indicating Hashem's kindness to us.

Yes, we should be doing all those things described in the above citation, namely, fearing, loving, waking in His ways, serving Him, and so on. But, no! Hashem made it easier for us: "He commanded us to observe merely His statutes and commandments", thus to achieve the same degree of perfection that we would achieve from the [very challenging] service with heart and soul.

In reality, we know that, ideally, we should love Hashem with all our heart, soul, and might, as we recite more than once a day. That is, we should use all our faculties in the service of Hashem: the intellectual, emotional, and practical aspects of our being.

Nevertheless, as psychologists and educationalists know, good deeds lead to moral virtues.

Fortunately, once we begin on that road to acquiring Yir'at Shamayim then, BE'H, we progress to achieving another very precious spiritual attainment, that of Wisdom (Chochma) - as expressed in the words of David HaMelech, "The Fear of God is the beginning [or essence] of Wisdom" (T'hilim 111:10). **MP**