

1. The Orthodox Forum, *Yirat Shamayim: The Awe, Reverence, and Fear of Gd*

<http://hirhurim.blogspot.com/2008/12/yiras-shamayim.html>

2. Cases

- Reuven, age 11, has always been more religiously intense than other children. Of late, he has begun *shuckling* wildly in shemoneh esreih. His father asks him about this, and Reuven replies that his *yetzer hara* distracts him during davening, and he *shuckles* as a result of fear that his prayer is unacceptable to Hashem. Should Reuven's father view this *shuckling* as problematic, or as an expression of Yirat Hashem?
- Sarah, age 13, washes *netilat yadayim* repeatedly before bread, sometimes going through a cycle of seven washings in an attempt to make sure her hands were fully dry before washing, that the water reached her entire hand, and that she did not touch anything with her wet hands before drying them. Sarah's mother is worried; how can she determine whether this is compulsive behaviour indicative of an anxiety problem?

Definitions

3. The Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.org), *Anxiety Disorders*

Generalized anxiety disorder includes persistent and excessive anxiety and worry about activities or events — even ordinary, routine issues. The worry is out of proportion to the actual circumstance, is difficult to control and affects how you feel physically. It often occurs along with other anxiety disorders or depression.

4. Dr. Moshe Halevi Spero, *Judaism and Psychology: Halakhic Perspectives*, pg. 85,87

As a psychological construct, anxiety differs from fear, an instinctive, automatic response, in that (1) it is unique to man, and (2) its source is usually vague and not objectifiable... For psychology, anxiety is a signal of internal danger and is symptomatic of psychic conflict...

The root of all anxiety is the longing which we, as infants, experience in the caretaker's actual or feared absence.

5. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, *Orot haTeshuvah* 8:3, 8:7

כל חטא מדאיב את הלב, מפני שהוא סותר את האחדות שבין האישיות הפרטית עם כל ההויה כולה... כל קציצה מוסרית, ברעיון ובמעשה, בתכונה ובמזג, גורמת חתיכות רבות שמביאות יסורים רבים פנימיים לכל מערכי הנשמה...

6. Fergus/Rowatt, *Personal Uncertainty Strengthens Associations Between Scrupulosity and Both the Moral Appraisals of Intrusive Thoughts and Beliefs that Gd is Upset with Sins*, *J. Social and Clinical Psychology* 33:1 '14

Understanding how individuals react to uncertainty is a topic that has garnered substantial interest from social psychologists (see Hogg & Blaylock, 2012) and clinical psychologists (see Birrell, Mearns, Wilkinson, & Freeston, 2011) alike... Although intolerance of informational uncertainty is important, social psychology researchers assert that difficulties tolerating another type of uncertainty—labeled personal uncertainty—underlie a broad range of phenomena (van den Bos, 2009). Whereas slight variations in the definition of personal uncertainty are evidenced in the literature (Hogg & Blaylock, 2012), van den Bos defined personal uncertainty "as a subjective sense of doubt or instability in self-views, worldviews, or the interrelation between the two" (p. 198). According to van den Bos, personal uncertainty is often an aversive experience and motivates individuals to engage in behavior that allows them to feel less uncertain about themselves.

7. Dr. Allan Compton, *A Study of the Psychoanalytic Theory of Anxiety III*, *J. of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 28:4 (1980) pg. 740

These debates also reflect a fundamental difficulty. Fear is usually construed, by analysts as well as by others, as a learned response which occurs in circumstances that seem objectively to justify the response, whereas anxiety is not seen as learned but as resulting, at least in part, from some other mechanisms which are associated with pathology and from circumstances not objectively justifying a fearful reaction, a response to stimuli whose nature is not apparent.

8. Rabbi Yaakov Kanaievsky, Etzot v'Hadrachot pg. 55, as cited at <http://www.ohelfamily.org/?q=content/totally-engrossed-extreme-piousness-or-obsessive-compulsive-disorder>

Such thinking is a tactic of the yeitzer hara in order to make observance of the mitzvos so burdensome that he will eventually, G-d forbid, shirk the yoke of the Torah.

Can Anxiety be Yirat Hashem?

9. Devarim 10:12-13, 10:20

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמְךָ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֵת ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְלַקֵּת בְּכָל דְרָכֶיךָ וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וְלַעֲבֹד אֵת ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ: לְשֹׁמֵר אֵת מִצְוֹת ד' וְאֵת חֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב לָךְ: ... אֵת ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ תִירָא אֹתוֹ מֵעַבֵד וְבוֹ תִדְבֹק וּבְשִׂמּוֹ תִשָּׁבַע:

10. Rambam, Sefer haMitzvot, Aseh 4

והמצוה הרביעית היא שצונו להאמין יראתו יתעלה ולהפחד ממנו, ולא נהיה ככופרים ההולכים בקרי, אבל נירא ביאת ענשו בכל עת, והוא אמרו יתעלה (ואתחנן ו) "את ד' אלקיך תירא..."

11. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:1, 5

אל יאמר אדם "הריני עושה מצות התורה ועוסק בחכמתה כדי שאקבל כל הברכות הכתובות בה או כדי שאזכה לחיי העולם הבא, ואפרוש מן העבירות שהזהירה תורה מהן כדי שאנצל מן הקללות הכתובות בתורה או כדי שלא אכרת מחיי העולם הבא, אין ראוי לעבוד את ד' על הדרך הזה, שהעובד על דרך זה הוא עובד מיראה ואינה מעלת הנביאים ולא מעלת החכמים... כל העוסק בתורה כדי לקבל שכר או כדי שלא תגיע עליו פורענות ה"ז עוסק שלא לשמה, וכל העוסק בה לא ליראה ולא לקבל שכר אלא מפני אהבת אדון כל הארץ שצוה בה ה"ז עוסק בה לשמה, ואמרו חכמים לעולם יעוסק אדם בתורה ואפי' שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה...

12. Rashi to Berachot 33b

"הכל בידי שמים" - כל הבא על האדם ביד הקב"ה; כגון ארוך, קצר, עני, עשיר, חכם, שוטה, לבן, שחור, הכל בידי שמים הוא, אבל צדיק ורשע אינו בא על ידי שמים, את זו מסר בידו של אדם, ונתן לפניו שתי דרכים, והוא יבחר לו יראת שמים.

13. Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, *Kovetz Ma'amarim*, tr. by Prof. Harvey, *Yirat Shamayim in Jewish Thought*

"The end of the matter, all having been heard, fear G-d, and keep His commandments, *for this is the whole man*" [Ecclesiastes 12:13]. The intention in this is that it should not enter your mind to say that the fear of G-d is a virtue in a human being and whoever does not have the fear of G-d is a human being but lacks a necessary virtue. The text comes to tell us that this is not so. For one who does not have *yirat shamayim* is not a human being at all, but an animal, *for this is the whole man* [i.e., *yirat shamayim* is the whole man] and without it one does not have the rank of a man....

If a beast of prey must be bound with an iron chain, how many chains are needed to stop a terrible beast like man? Now, when G-d created man, he certainly created the chain to bind him so that he not destroy the world. And what is this chain? It is the fear of G-d, which alone has the power to stop a man from being like a beast of prey.

14. Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 432

להיות יראת ד' על פנינו תמיד לבלתי נחטא, כלו' שנירא ביאת ענשו ולא יהיה ללבנו בלי מגור אליו כל היום, ועל זה נאמר "את ד' אלקיך תירא."

15. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, Orot haTeshuvah 14:14

Even regarding matters which require practical rather than intellectual repair, such as issues between people, the greatness of every thought of teshuvah is still beyond estimation. This is true even when the thought of teshuvah comes from simple fear, fear of punishment, for even the most minor of traits arouses the holiest and greatest traits in one's spirit and in the world...

16. Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah 1:7

["ויאמר ד' על עזבם את תורת (ירמי' ב:יג)"] א"ר חייה בר בא: 'אותי עזבו' אוותרה [הייתי מוותר להם], שמא את תורת שמרו, שאילו אותי עזבו ותורת שמרו השאור שבה היה מקרבן אצלי. רב חונה אמר למד תורה שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה את בא לשמה.

17. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Mesilat Yesharim, Introduction

ומי שיתבונן במ יראה שאין החסידות תלוי באותם הדברים שיחשבו המתחסדים הטפשים, אלא בדברי שלמות אמיתי וחכמה רבה, הוא מה שמשה רבנו, עליו השלום, מלמדנו באמרו (דברים י יב): "ועתה ישראל מה ד' אלקיך שואל מעמך, כי אם ליראה את ד' אלקיך ללכת בכל דרכיו ולאהבה

אותו ולעבוד את ד' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך, לשמור את מצות ד' ואת חקתיו." כאן כלל כל חלקי שלמות העבודה הנרצית לשמו יתברך, והם: היראה, ההליכה בדרכיו, האהבה, שלמות הלב, ושמירת כל המצות.
היראה היא יראת רוממותו יתברך שיירא מלפניו כמו שיירא מלפני מלך גדול ונורא, ויבוש מגדולתו על - כל תנועה שהוא בא להתנועע, כל - שכן בדברו לפניו בתפלה או בעסקו בתורתו.

18. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 2:2

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו? בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ, מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע ד' הגדול... וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו ויפחד ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות...

19. Rabbi Dr. Shalom Carmy, *Fear of Gd as Experience and Commandment*, pg. 274, see #1 above

In *Hil. Berachot* 1:4 he teaches that the recitation of blessings of pleasure and mitzvot and thanksgiving serves to "remember the Creator always and to fear Him." Again, no guilt of fear of punishment. Moreover, in *Hil. Teshuva* 10, he disparages fear based on punishment as appropriate only to the spiritually immature. At the same time, the definition of fear in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* picks out fear of punishment as the primary characteristic of *Yir'a*. It is as if the Halakha insisted on catering to a lowest common standard instead of recognizing that standard's irrelevance to spiritually mature people.

20. Rabbi Avraham Elya Kaplan, *B'lkvot haYirah*, as cited by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (source #1 above, pg. 259)

היראה לא צער היא, לא כאב, לא דאגת תמרורים. ומשל למה היא דומה? לרטט יראתו של אב על בנו הקטן האהוב לו, בשעה שהוא מורכב על כתפו והוא רוקד עמו ושוחק לפניו, להיות נזהר בו שלא יפול... יש כאן שמחה שאין דומה לה, עונג שאין דומה לו. והיראה הנעימה כרוכה על עקבם.

21. Talmud, Shabbat 31a-b

אמר רבה בר רב הונא כל אדם שיש בו תורה ואין בו יראת שמים דומה לגזבר שמסרו לו מפתחות הפנימיות ומפתחות החיצונות לא מסרו לו, בהי עייל? מכריז רבי ינאי: **חבל על דלית ליה דרתא [חצר], ותרעא לדרתא עביד!**

22. Talmud, Berachot 6b

מאי "כי זה כל האדם"? אמר רבי אלעזר: אמר הקב"ה 'כל העולם כלו לא נברא אלא בשביל זה.'

23. Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* III 23

ואמנם היה איוב מדמה שאלו שיחשבו הצלחות הם התכלית, כבריאיות והעושר והבנים, כל עוד שהיה יודע ד' על דרך ההגדה וספור לא על דרך עיון, ומפני זה היה במבוכות ההם ואמר המאמרים ההם...

24. William Zev Harvey, *Yirat Shamayim in Jewish Thought*, pp. 17-18, see #1 above

The fundamental difference, according to Rabbi Soloveitchik, between *yirah* and *pahad* is that the former is rational and the latter irrational. *Yirah* is based on "wisdom and intellect" (*hokhmah ve-sekhef*), while *pahad* is what psychologists call "phobia." In *pahad*, a person is helpless. In *yirah*, a person is able to take measures, to resolve difficulties, to defend oneself against dangers. *Yirah* is related to *ra'oh* (to see): "if a person has eyes in his head and sees correctly the processes of historical development in the world, and the laws regulating the universe, and conducts himself with intelligence and carefulness in the paths of life – he will be full of *yirah*." *Yirat shamayim*, explains Rabbi Soloveitchik is closer to love than to fear...

25. Mishlei 2:4-5

אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תתפשנה: אז תבין יראת ד' ודעת אלקים תמציא:

26. Talmud, Berachot 33b

ואמר רבי חנינא: הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים, שנאמר "ועתה ישראל מה ד' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה..."

27. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, *Mesilat Yesharim*, Introduction

הוא מה שאמר שלמה (משלי ב ד): אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה, אז תבין יראת ד'. אינו אומר אז תבין פילוסופיה, אז תבין תכונה, אז תבין רפואה, אז תבין דינים, אז תבין הלכות, אלא אז תבין יראת ד'. הרי לך, שלהבין היראה צריך לבקש אותה ככסף ולחפש אותה כמטמונים.

28. Rabbi Dr. Shalom Carmy, *Fear of Gd as Experience and Commandment*, pg. 274, see #1 above
Sometimes (as with a harmless snake or other phobias) fear declares itself even when we know there is nothing to fear: The amygdala, scientists hypothesize, reacts fearfully faster than the response mediated through the cortex that overrides the fear as groundless. Philosophers who view emotions like fear as essentially cognitive (and my own inclinations run in that direction) may feel compelled to deny such reactions the status of emotions. From this perspective, fear requires a propositional attitude towards the object that is causing the fear; a cat, on this account, cannot fear dogs, because it has no belief that the dog will attack, and can best be described as being in a "state of fear," a physiological condition free of reflection.

Traditional commentators may have captured something like this semantic distinction when they tried to explain the difference between the biblical words *yir'a* and *pahad*...

How do we tell the difference?

29. David Greenberg and Eliezer Witztum, *Current Treatments of OCD*, Chapter 10, pg. 175

[O]bsessions of OCD appear to mirror the prevalent habits and values of a culture. Religious symptoms are common in OCD in cultures in which religious practice and ritual are important. It appears that if a topic is dealt with scrupulously in everyday life, then it is a likely focus for the symptoms of OCD that will emerge in that culture.

30. David Greenberg and Eliezer Witztum, *Current Treatments of OCD*, Chapter 10, pg. 176

OCD symptoms of a religious nature are not found in all areas of ritual, nor necessarily in the areas of ritual most hallowed by the religion. In our experience with religious Jewish patients, for example, Sabbath observance is a very important feature of religious life associated with many detailed laws but does not appear frequently among the religious obsessions of OCD in our clinic. However, cleaning the perianal region before prayer gets one line in the footnote of a latterday code of Jewish law, but this ritual presents often in patients with OCD in our practice. The presentation of OCD in a religious context is less typically religious than it is classically obsessive-compulsive...

31. Paul Cefalu, *The Doubting Disease: Religious Scrupulosity and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Historical Context*, *Journal of Medicine and the Humanities* 31 pp. 111-125 (2010)

Any attempt to project OCD onto earlier historical figures should take care to consider the social, philosophical, and theological contexts in which such figures lived. Arguably, the sources of religious scrupulosity for Early Modern devotional writers were not their idiosyncrasies or faulty neurochemistry, but scripture itself, or at least the narrow sort of scriptural exegesis carried out by Reformed theologians.

32. OHEL, *Totally Engrossed: Extreme Piousness or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder?*

The key question to ask a religious person who is irrationally scrupulous about religious matters, is: "Are your chumros enhancing your religious development or impinging upon it?" Herein lies the answer. A person who davens an exceedingly long Shemoneh Esrei may merit the same heavenly assistance that allowed the Chassidim Harishonim to be involved in davening for nine hours a day while still mastering Torah study (as described in Gemora Berachos). He then is not suffering from any mental dysfunction. A person who is just repeating words over and over again, however, and feels frustrated and depressed by this imprisoning ritual, will not grow in his religious observance and is victim of mental illness, not piety. This person needs treatment.

33. Jedidiah Siev, Lee Baer, William E. Minichiello, *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder with Predominantly Scrupulous Symptoms: Clinical and Religious Characteristics*, *J. of Clinical Psychology* 67:12 pp. 1188-1196 (2011)

The majority (70%) of individuals with scrupulosity reported that their symptoms have interfered with their relationship with Gd or religious observance. In contrast, significantly fewer (32%) individuals with nonscrupulous OCD endorsed such interference, $\chi^2 (1) = 20.31, p < .001$. The groups did not differ in the percentage who viewed their symptoms as facilitating their relationship with Gd or religious observance: 20% (scrupulous) versus 16% (nonscrupulous), $\chi^2 (1) = 0.40, p = 0.527$. It is noteworthy, however, that even as many as 20% of scrupulous participants endorsed believing that their symptoms of scrupulosity helped their religious experience (see Table 2).

34. Dr. David Greenberg's test (*Current Treatments of OCD*, Chapter 10, pg. 180)

- Compulsions transcend requirements of religious law
- Compulsions have a narrow focus on one area of religious experience
- Compulsions focus on something that is trivial to religious practice, but normal for OCD
- Compulsions cause the patient to ignore, or to be unable to fulfill, other areas of religious law
- The patient repeats actions because of doubt, where law would not require it.

A concluding thought

35. Rabbi Dr. Shalom Carmy, *Fear of Gd as Experience and Commandment*, pg. 290, see #1 above

At the inauguration of the Hebrew University in 1925, R. Kook quoted Isaiah 60:5: "Then you shall see and brighten, and your heart will fear (*pahad*) and expand." Why fear at the moment of eschatological glory? Because novelty is not always an unmixed blessing. The same events may rightly cause shock and a contraction of the heart for some, even when a sense of expansion and satisfaction are also appropriate. The most realistic response to many new developments is not uncritical optimism but a fear that is nevertheless ready to ripen into joy.