

DAY TEN

“HOLY FEAR: THE DISCIPLINE OF OUR FATHER”

PSALM 119:73-80

In many respects, my pursuit of Counting the Omer has been a fascinating exercise for me as a Believer to undertake. As the Holy One has been instructing me through a consistent meditation upon the selected Psalms, I have been fascinated with what He has brought forth. Last night as I was considering today’s reading, I focused on *yod* (י), the tenth letter of the Hebrew *alef-bet* which begins our selection, and naturally caught notice of a few words that begin with *yod*. A verb for “fear,” *yarei* (ירא), really caught my attention as I was going to sleep, and so I meditated on the admonition to “fear the Lord” as I fell into my slumber. But then, in a remarkable change of direction, when I considered our verses for today again this morning, my heart was focused on something more that I had not originally planned. But before commenting on the course alteration, please take the time to read the following verses and reflect on their meaning for you:

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

PSALM 119:73-80

Yodh. Your hands made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments. May those who fear You see me and be glad, because I wait for Your word. I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant. May Your compassion come to me that I may live, for Your law is my delight. May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; but I shall meditate on Your precepts. May those who fear You turn to me, even those who know Your testimonies. May my heart be blameless in Your statutes, so that I will not be ashamed.

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As stated above, my first reaction to this section of Psalm 119 was riveted on the Hebrew word used for fear, *yarei*, and the two times it appears (Psalm 119:74, 79). Since I know that the “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10), it was not unusual for my reflection to consider more of the aspects of “fear,” and what the Holy One is trying to reveal, as He directs His people to better understand what He means when two of these eight verses include *yarei*. Almost immediately, I remembered the last admonition that Qohelet gives as the Book of Ecclesiastes concludes:

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: **fear [yarei] God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.** For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

These words have always been something to consider for those who take the Scriptures seriously. The assertion to fear God and keep His commandments, could not be more succinctly made.

Pondering other places where *yarei* is seen, I was drawn to some verses that are located in significant places in the Tanakh. First, the final words of the Prophet Malachi were meaningful:

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and **terrible [yarei; dreadful, NIV; fearful, NJPS]** day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6).

Of course, this reference is to the great and fearful Day of the LORD, which in most commentators’ and readers’ minds refers to Judgment Day. This was not exactly the same perspective presented by Qohelet, but seeing some usages of *yarei* expanded my thoughts on what “fear” should encompass.

Next, I was drawn to a very familiar verse that most Believers have heard, if not memorized:

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I **fear [yarei]** no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

Upon further reflection and study, I found that the verb *yarei* appears 385 times in the Hebrew text of the Tanakh (even though it is used in some diverse ways).¹ To further complicate things, I discovered a related word, *yarei* (יָרֵא), also translated as “fear” (a noun),² appearing in the Tanakh 44 times.³ Perhaps now you can understand why I decided it was time to get to sleep. Just thinking about the “fear of the Lord” was enough for my racing mind to handle!

Upon waking this morning and once again considering our Psalm selection (Psalm 119:73-80), I was already primed to really dig into the concept of fear, and just how our Father is trying to instruct us when He encourages us to “fear Him.” But without skipping a beat, I was most surprised when instead of dwelling on the concept of fear, I was further directed to look at another aspect of this Psalm. For whatever reasons, the Spirit focused me upon Psalm 119:75:

¹ This figure was determined using a lemma search of the Hebrew Tanakh (WTT) in BibleWorks 7.0.

² *Yirah* has a variety of possible applications, including: “fear, terror,” “a terror = obj. of terror,” “fear of God, reverence, piety” (BDB, 432).

³ This figure was determined using a lemma search of the Hebrew Tanakh (WTT) in BibleWorks 7.0.

“I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (Psalm 119:75).

Here, the Psalmist again begins the verse with *yod* (י), as the verb *yada* (יָדָע) is introduced and translated as “know.”⁴ This term always generates some deep feelings in my heart, because one of the passions of my life, just like the Apostle Paul, is to “**know Him** and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed unto His death” (Philippians 3:10). With this as a starter, the rest of the verse became the center of my meditation. From there I was directed to consider the following passage from Hebrews, which elaborates on much of what knowing the Lord can involve:

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Yeshua, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES’ [Proverbs 3:11-12]. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? **For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness**” (Hebrews 12:1-11).

Reading this passage, I began to realize that our Heavenly Father is not only to be feared or revered or awed, but also greatly loved for His faithfulness to us. When I considered the fact that in His love toward us, **He actually takes the time to discipline us because of His love**, I was overwhelmed. Loving correction can indeed be a blessing from the Holy One, as Job 5:17 tells us, “Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.”

Consider that a major part of discipleship is *actually developing discipline* in one’s life. Even some simple discipline like taking the time to Count the Omer and reflect upon a selection from Psalms every day (or using whatever other method you may find edifying), can seriously help a person who wants to encounter more of God. Not only do I find myself being enriched in my relationship with Him during this special season, but in His mercy to me **He is pouring out untold spiritual blessings** simply as a by-product of my initiative to follow Him. A healthy fear of the Lord, coupled with obedience to Him, results in the great abundant life He so desires His sons and daughters to have! As Psalm 25:12-14 describes it:

⁴ Cf. *BDB*, pp 393-395; William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), pp 128-129.

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“Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant.”

Will the Holy One indeed make known His secrets and His covenants as David proclaims? I am certainly one to testify that in recent days the basic discipline of obedience is certainly bringing our Heavenly Father’s blessings to my spirit. I hope that as you have joined with me in Counting the Omer, you too have received something special from Him!

And now can you imagine, it is still forty days until *Shavuot*?