The fear / awe (yirah)⁰ of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.²

Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal… What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe.³

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¹ Yirah a feminine noun when used in the construct state, the h is converted to a t, and becomes yirat.
² Proverbs 9:10
³ Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Between G-d and Man, pg. 52, 75
The Ten Days of Awe

between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

Everything is in the hands of Heaven - except the fear of G-d.⁴

Yirat HaShem is so much more than fear of G-d and so much more than awe - it is an awe-inspired love of G-d. Yirat HaShem is connected to joy and humility. It has to do with walking in G-d’s ways (see Deuteronomy 10:12). The Sages of Israel connected Yirat of the LORD to a focused form of seeing.

What we share here and want to focus on during these Ten Days of Awe is a drop in an ocean of the depths of what Yirat HaShem means. Our hope and prayer is that during this time you will be more fully awakened to see the cosmic glory of G-d that is present in every moment of your life.

⁴ Talmud, Berachot 33a

http://his-israel.com
Day 1

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear (yara)\(^5\)?

The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

( Psalm 27:1)

According to the Bible the principle religious virtue is yirah. What is the nature of yirah? The word has two meanings, fear and awe. There is the man who fears the Lord lest he be punished in his body, family, or in his possessions. Another man fears the Lord because he is afraid of punishment in the life to come. Both types are considered inferior in Jewish tradition. Job, who said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,” was not motivated in his piety by fear but rather by awe, by the realization of the grandeur of His eternal love.

Fear is the anticipation and expectation of evil or pain, as contrasted with hope which is the anticipation of good. Awe, on the other hand, is the sense of wonder and humility inspired by the sublime or felt in the presence of mystery. …Awe, unlike fear, does not make us shrink from the awe-inspiring object, but, on the contrary, draws us near to it. This is why awe is comparable to both love and joy.

In a sense, awe is the antithesis of fear. To feel “The Lord is my light and my salvation” is to feel “Whom shall I fear?” (Psalms 27:1). “G-d is my refuge and my strength. A very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, and though the mountains be moved into the heart of the seas” (Psalms 46:2-3).

~ Rabbi Joshua Heschel, *G-d In Search Of Man*, p. 76-77

\(^5\) Yara is the root of yirah.
Day 2

Humility is the fear [standing in awe] of the LORD.
(Proverbs 22:4a)

William Beebe was an explorer and a friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Often when he visited the President, the two men would go outdoors at night to see who could first locate the Andromeda galaxy.

Then as they gazed at the tiny smudge of distant starlight, one of them would recite, “That is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It is 750,000 light-years away. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.”

After that thought had sunk in, Roosevelt would flash his toothy grin and say, “Now I think we’re small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

~ Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations, #2213

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6 image credit - NASA/JPL-Caltech

7 Nasa gives the number of galaxies in the observable universe as \(1.7 \times 10^{11}\)
“Even in paradise it is possible to be indifferent to the wonder of being. In fact, lack of awe may be the genesis of sin. When I stop being completely amazed at the very existence of the cosmos, at my very being within it, when that sense of overwhelming presence ceases to permeate who I am, then the possibility of my own self-determination arises within me. Suddenly I become far more important than all the evidence supports. I have intimations of divinity, and that is enough to allow me to turn from the face of my Creator and question whether or not His word is really “good for me.”

What did Havvah\(^8\) see? It’s quite impossible that she saw that the tree was good for food. What she saw was the possibility of becoming better than what she was called to be. What she saw was an alternate reality where she decided what was good for food. Havvah was tempted to add to the wonder of the world by ignoring the mystery of being.

Each of us stands before the Tree. Each of us must decide, “Is this tree good for food?” We are surrounded by the Presence of all that we are not. We can stand in awe of it or we can determine to add our own little bit of creation. We can be shaped by the power of His might, or we can attempt to shape a world stamped with our mark. It just depends on what we see.”

~ Skip Moen, *The Absence of Awe*

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\(^8\) Eve
Day 4

This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.
(Psalm 118:23)

Tameness is not an option.
Take surprise out of faith and all that is left is dry and dead religion.
Take away mystery from the Gospel and all that is left is frozen and petrified dogma.
Lose your awe of G-d and you are left with an impotent Deity.
Abandon astonishment and you are left with meaningless piety.

~ Michael Yaconelli, Dangerous Wonder: The Adventure of Childlike Faith
Day 5

Every person should have two pockets. In one pocket should be a piece of paper saying: “I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). In the other pocket should be a piece of paper saying: “For my sake was the world created” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5)
- Rabbi Simcha Bunim

“To feel the awe of G-d is to recognize before whom we stand in prayer and service. Who are we and what are we really? It is astonishing that a tiny speck of dust that exists for only the blink of an eye in the grand immensity of time and space can commune with the omnipotent, omnipresent, and all-knowing Lord of the Universe.

To have the awe of G-d is to internalize the truth that any importance that we have arises out of G-d’s infinite compassion and lovingkindness, and not from any merit that we have earned on our own.”

~ Rabbi Yoel Glick, Yirah - The Awe Of G-d
Day 6

In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.
The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of G-d was moving over the surface of the waters.
(Genesis 1:1-2)

Amazement never ceases for the enlightened mind.
At every moment it views in astonishment the wonder of an entire world
renewed out of the void, and asks,
“How could it be that anything at all exists?”

~ Rabbi Tziv Freeman, Wonder

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9 image credit - NASA/Harrison Schmitt
Day 7

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord.
(Isaiah 1:18)

“There is a place where we are afraid to go. This is the place of G-d’s abode, a place never meant for men, where unshackled creation roils against cosmic madness. All of our lives we attempt to enter and avoid this place. The tension of religious experience is found here, in the deepest desire to know G-d, to be fully known, and, at the same time, to be utterly afraid of being known and to know. And so we construct our reasonable answers to life’s questions; all the questions that never ask what it means to be in the presence of awe.

There is a place, a place where the imperative of awe witnesses to our infinite insignificance, a place that surpasses all we imagine powerful, a place where reason itself fails us because reason was never meant to describe what exceeds its boundaries.

When you and I come close to this place, when the hem of His garment sweeps by, or the sound of His voice reverberates from some forgotten passageway, when we know He has been here because the air tastes different. In that moment of revelation, we are no longer able to say what it was, or who it was, or why it was. We discover the helplessness of our vocabulary. We know, but we cannot say how we know. In that place there is only act and response.

Endless wonder is endless tension… Endless wonder unlocks an innate sense of indebtedness… all we own we owe.”

~ Skip Moen, Not Knowing What To Ask

“All that is left to us is a choice—to answer or to refuse to answer.”

~ Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, p.6

10 Image credit - Magdala, Encounter
Day 8

It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear (morah\textsuperscript{1}), And He shall be your dread. (Isaiah 8:13)

“Though I am not a psychiatrist, what he said helped me to understand the true nature of that prayer which was ordained by the Sages of Israel. And that is what I told that psychiatrist: Everyone seems to be beset with fears of all kinds. Some are afraid that they will not be able to succeed in their careers, others fear losing their wealth or status or that they will fail to attain sufficient prominence. Many people are afraid of sickness and bodily weakness. In generations past, fear of leprosy engulfed the world; today people live in fear of cancerous growth. Many people do not go to see a doctor even when they have pains lest he diagnose “the disease.”

Man is plagued constantly by all sorts of lesser fears. I am not a psychiatrist, but I do know that one major source of fear can wipe out all of these lesser fears. What fear can overtake man, thereby uprooting all other fears, such as that of failure, of poverty, of old age, of rejection or of disease? Only the fear of the Lord! That is the reason behind the expression in the High Holy Day prayer, “Cast [Your] fear, O Lord our G-d, upon all [Your] handiwork and [Your] awe upon all that [You have] created.” We pray that this great fear will free us from those other ones which lurk everywhere, upsetting our lives.”

~ Rav Soloveitchik, *On Repentance*, pp. 223-224)

\textsuperscript{1} Morah (teacher) and yirah (fear/awe) are both are from the root *yarah*. 
Day 9

Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.  
(Psalms 2:11)

“In the deepest recesses of our hearts fear and love dwell together; they reveal themselves in joy. We rejoice in the consciousness of G-d's love and nearness but tremble at the same time because of the awfulness of His presence.”

~ Paul Philip Levertoff, Love and the Messianic Age
Day 10

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!
Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles and the judgments he uttered.
(1 Chronicles 16:11-12)

“There will come a time, very soon, when we will be shown miracles so great, they will make the ten plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea appear as ordinary as nature itself.

So great, no mind can begin to fathom them; so powerful, they will transform the very fabric of our world, elevating it in a way that the wonders of the Exodus never did.

For then, our eyes will be opened and granted the power to see the greatest of miracles: Those miracles that occur to us now, beneath our very noses, every day.”

~ Rabbi Tzvi Freeman, Greater Miracles