

Hashem, your G-d, shall you fear. (10:20)

Fear is a powerful word which connotes various emotions, from respect to anxiety, love to awe. Since Hashem is beyond anything we can imagine, the definition of fear with regard to the Almighty must also be unique. The notion of comparing the fear one should have for a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, to that which one should have for Hashem begs elucidation. The *Midrash Tanchuma (Beha'alo secha)* teaches us that the *es*, conjunctive word, which precedes (*es*) Hashem *Elokecha (tira)* instructs us to fear one who has mastered the Torah. (Clearly, such mastery involves much more than erudition. It applies to one who embodies the Torah, eruditely, spiritually and ethically – in mind and action.) What aspect of fear of Hashem includes the *talmid chacham*? It certainly does not mean fear of retribution. Scholars do not go around excoriating and issuing maledictions against people. For the most part, they are in their own world of devotion to Hashem. We may disturb that world by gently “knocking” and ask to be allowed in to obtain counsel and inspiration, blessing and encouragement. Fear? What is there to fear? The Torah scholar is a unique individual whose entire persona is honed by the Torah that he has learned and the relationship he has established with Hashem. Where does fear enter the equation?

In his work, “A Vort From Rav Pam,” Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes Rav Pam as suggesting that the fear the Torah expects that we manifest towards our Torah sages is much like that mentioned concerning Avraham *Avinu* following the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak. After waiting for a century to finally beget a son the caliber of Yitzchak, a son who was worthy and would carry on his life's work, Avraham was instructed by Hashem to slaughter his son, sacrifice his hope, his future, his legacy. Just as he was about to execute Hashem's command, he was stopped, by an angel representing Hashem. The angel said: “Now I know that you are a *yarei Elokim*, G-d-fearing man, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me (*Bereishis* 22:12).

Without a doubt, Avraham had reached an unprecedented pinnacle of service and devotion to Hashem. Yet, following such outstanding achievement, he is merely described as having just proven he is a *yarei Hashem*. Is that all? We really do not understand the depth of meaning concerning fear of Hashem. Rav Pam cites the *Zechusa D'Avraham* who explains (based on *Kabbalistic* sources) that there are two levels of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven: *yiraah tataah*, lower fear; and *yiraah ilaah*, higher fear. The lower fear is an apt description of the primary source of fear to which most of us can relate: a fear of getting into trouble; of being on the receiving end of anger catalyzed by our misdoings; a fear of punishment. This fear motivates him to refrain from sin, because once one understands the consequences, he would have to be slightly “off” to continue with his errant behavior.

We identify a higher level of *yiraah*, one that is even more sublime than *ahavah*, love (of Hashem). This fear is one that is inspired solely by his feelings of *afsius*, nothingness, of *bitul lifnei romemuso u'kedushaso Yisborach Shemo*, total obedience and subservience before the sublime, lofty greatness and holiness of his (Creator). Such fear transcends not only punishment, but even love.

The Torah wants us to have a similarly profound fear of the *talmid chacham*, because the scholar is someone who has devoted every aspect of his being to serve Hashem. He has spent his life immersed in the sea of Torah, plumbing its depths and delving into its profound wisdom. In addition to his uncanny erudition, he has refined himself spiritually by struggling to elevate his *neshamah*, soul, overcoming his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, under the most challenging circumstances. He has perfected his *middos*, character traits, thus developing an intimate relationship with Hashem through his constant prayer. In other words, the scholar embodies the Torah at its apex. He is the perfect specimen, a consummate *nachas*, source of satisfaction and pleasure to Hashem. When we come across such a holy Jew, it is incumbent for us to treat this individual with the respect and reverence that he deserves. This is the meaning of fear of a *talmid chacham*.

Horav Rafael Boruch Toledano, zl, was such an individual. He possessed a vast knowledge of Torah – both the revealed and the hidden. His primary ambition in life was to study Torah and perform *mitzvos*. Nothing else mattered. He excelled in *mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro*, between man and his fellowman. If there was a possibility somehow to alleviate the pains of one who was ill or poverty stricken, he was there. On the other hand, he refused to turn a blind eye to one who would desecrate the Torah. To him there was no compromising on the supremacy of the Torah. His prayers were a lesson in total self-abnegation and devotion to Hashem. When he *davened*, one could sense that he was speaking directly to the Almighty (which is something that we should all feel). His majesty and nobility, his modesty and humility, were products of his *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. They all focused together in total harmony to create a *tzadik* whose feet walked the earth, but whose mind was in Heaven.

As *Rav* of Meknes, Morocco, *Rav Toledano* not only oversaw the Jewish spiritual concerns of his community, but he was also a Torah giant who was present for all Jews. His prime concern was always the children, and providing for their Jewish education. The distance from Meknes to Oujda in eastern Morocco is approximately 400 kilometers. When word reached him that the education of the Jewish children in Oujda was hanging in the balance, he immediately left to speak with the powers that be. We must keep this trip in perspective. It was during World War II, the roads were dangerous, and love for Jews was at an all-time premium. It was not a time to take a trip in the best of health – a state which *Rav Toledano* never was in. He was a sickly person who was physically weak his entire life.

The *Rav* arrived in Oujda and immediately convened a meeting of the heads of the community. He explained to them the significance of a Jewish school. True, it was World War II, and people were short on funds. Nonetheless, Torah study must prevail. It must take center stage in the life of a Jew. He begged them to support the local Torah institutions. They listened, smiled, and said that they were not interested. It was not uppermost on their list of priorities. When he heard their response, the *Rav* began to weep. At first, it was a few tears; then it became full-blown crying. The men attempted to assuage his feelings, to get him to stop crying. They understood his concerns, but Torah study was not prioritized on their “to do” list.

“Do you think I am crying about you? No! I am crying for myself! Our sages teach that anyone who has fear of Heaven, his words (requests) will be heard (listened to). I spoke with you; I pleaded with you, but you ignored my requests. This is a sign from Hashem that I lack sufficient fear of Heaven. Thus, the onus of guilt is upon me.”

When they heard these pure, heartfelt words, they realized that they were standing in the presence of greatness. Their hard-heartedness suddenly softened, as they opened up their hearts and their wallets in support of the children of Oujda.