

Psalm 34:9-14

Praise for Deliverance from Trouble: Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

“fear of the Lord”

(from <http://thelivingwords.ancient-hebrew.org/fear.pdf>)

Fear is an abstract concept, but there are two Hebrew roots translated as “fear” which make this abstraction more concrete. The first root is **pahhad**. Job 4:14 says “Fear (**pahhad** - noun) came upon me, and trembling, and caused all my bones to shake (**pahhad** - verb).” The noun **pahhad** (meaning “shaking”) is translated “fear” while the verb **pahhad** (meaning “to shake”) is translated “to shake.”

The second root is **yara**. In Genesis 3:10, Adam says, “I heard your voice in the garden and I feared (**yarah**) because I was naked and I hid myself.” In Deuteronomy 6:13, we see the same Hebrew word (**yarah**) in a more positive context, “You will revere (**yarah**) Yahweh your Elohiym and you will serve him and in his name you will swear.

Many conclude **yarah** – from the root **yara** – has two meanings, fear and reverence, but this would be a misunderstanding of the Hebrew vocabulary from a non-Hebraic perspective. Have you ever been so afraid or been in the presence of something so amazing that you felt it in your gut? Many Hebrew words describe a feeling rather than an action. This strong emotional feeling is seen in the literal concrete meaning of **yara** as a “flowing of the gut” that can be applied to fear or reverence.

The Hebrew for “fear of the LORD” is written with two nouns, **yirat Yahweh**. When a noun precedes another noun, the first noun is in the construct state connecting it to the second noun and forming one concept (similar to a compound noun in English). Here is a complete list of construct phrases with “Yahweh” found in the book of Genesis: the angel of Yahweh; the eyes of Yahweh; the face of Yahweh; the garden of Yahweh; the mount of Yahweh; the name of Yahweh; the voice of Yahweh; the way of Yahweh; the word of Yahweh.

Why do we think the “fear of Yahweh” is our fear and not Yahweh’s? If the Hebrew verb **yara** literally means “to flow out of the gut” the question becomes, “What flows out of the gut of Yahweh?” A non-Hebraic translation of Psalm 34:11 is, “I will teach you the fear of the Lord” which communicates “I will teach you how to fear the Lord.” Perhaps a better understanding would be, “I will teach you that which flows from the gut of Yahweh.”

“fear the Lord”

(from <http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Eikev/Yirah/yirah.html>)

The word translated “fear” comes from the Hebrew word **yirah**, which has a range of meaning. Sometimes it is the fear we feel in anticipation of danger or pain, but it can also mean “awe” or “reverence” (like the feeling you get when gazing from the edge of the Grand Canyon).

In Jewish tradition, there are three “levels” or types of **yirah**. The first is the fear of unpleasant consequences or punishment. This is perhaps how we normally think of the word “fear” which motivates us to flee, to do (or not do) something, or to barter with whatever is causing the fear. The underlying motivation of this fear is physical, social, psychological, or emotional self-preservation.

The second type of fear is the kind that motivates people to do good deeds because they are afraid God will punish them in this life or in the world to come. The underlying motivation of this fear is spiritual self-preservation.

The third (and highest) kind of fear is a profound reverence for life that comes from rightly seeing. This type of fear discerns the Presence of God in all things and is sometimes called the “Awe of the Exalted.” Through it we behold God’s glory and majesty in all things. Fearing and seeing are linked and united in a love for good that creates a spiritual antipathy toward evil. This antipathy toward evil – this hatred of evil – is a way of fearing and revering God. Instead of self-preservation, this fear is motivated by a desire to preserve and exalt the presence of God in all things.

Psalm 34:9-14

Praise for Deliverance from Trouble: Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

New Revised Standard Version	21st Century King James	Complete Jewish Bible
9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.	9 O fear the LORD, ye His saints! For them that fear Him suffer no want.	8 (9) Fear <i>ADONAI</i> , you holy ones of his, for those who fear him lack nothing.
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.	10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.	11 (10) Young lions can be needy, they can go hungry, but those who seek <i>ADONAI</i> lack nothing good.
11 Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.	11 Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.	12 (11) Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of <i>ADONAI</i> .
12 Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?	12 What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?	13 (12) Which of you takes pleasure in living? Who wants a long life to see good things?
13 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.	13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.	14 (13) [If you do,] keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceiving talk;
14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.	14 Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.	15 (14) turn from evil, and do good; seek peace, go after it!

1. Verse 9: Who are “his holy ones” referred to in verse 1? This is a psalm attributed to David; do you think David counts himself among “his holy ones”? What does the psalmist say “his holy ones” should do? Why?
2. Verses 9 & 10: Why mention the young lions? How are they a reflection of “his holy ones”? How is “those who seek the Lord” a reflection of “those who fear him”? How does “lack no good thing” focus “have no want”?
3. Verse 11: What does the psalmist call the listener of the psalm? How is this related to the young lions and “his holy ones” in verses 10 and 9 respectively? What will the psalmist teach them? What are some things which might be included in this curriculum?
4. Verse 12: What motivation(s) on the part of the listeners is the psalmist appealing to?
5. Verses 13 & 14: What actions does the psalmist tell the listeners to do? Given the difference between fearing the Lord and the fear of the Lord, are these actions examples of “fearing the Lord” or of “the fear of the Lord”? How might these actions be examples of both?
6. Verse 13: This psalm is attributed to David “when he feigned madness before Abimelech”. Consider the following (adapted from <http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/327/how-is-psalm-34-linked-to-1st-samuel-21>)

The superscription refers directly to 1 Samuel 21:14, where David, surrounded by the Philistine king Achish and his men before the city of Gath, saves himself by playing the madman. But Abimelech appears in Genesis 20 while Achish appears in I Samuel 21. Did the editor make a mistake? Why did the editor detect a link between the psalm and this incident in the David story? Perhaps he saw the psalm’s emphasis on God’s rescuing power.

What does the psalmist (presumably David) tell the listeners to keep their lips from doing in verse 13? What did David do when surrounded by the Philistines? How might this show David was a “young lion” at that time?
7. What are some things that motivate you to fear the Lord? Are there ways in which you “fear the fear of the Lord”? Are there ways in which you can be like the psalmist and “teach” the fear of the Lord?