

## What is asked of us? - Parshat Ekev

*And now, Israel, what does YHVH your God ask of you? Only this: to fear/be in awe of YHVH your God; to walk in all [God's] paths and to love and to serve YHVH your God with all your heart and with all your soul, keeping YHVH's mitzvot and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good. (Deut. 10:12-13)*

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם-לִירְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בְּכָל-דִּרְכָיו  
וּלְאַהֲבָה אוֹתוֹ וּלְעַבֹד אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְכֶּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה  
וְאֶת-חֻקָּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב לָךְ:

- 1) Fear provides an opening to enter into the Gate of Love. That is why when the verse says, “...**what does God ask of you,**” it very specifically starts by saying, “**And now...**” meaning, when God asks for you to fear, that is for now, in this moment, for you to take the yolk of God upon you. But this is not the ultimate goal [God] wants. Rather, this is what will bring you up into the realm of love. (Or HaChaim, R. Chayim Ibn Attar, Morocco, 18<sup>th</sup> c.)
- 2) Fear is the anticipation and expectation of evil or pain... Awe, on the other hand, is the sense of wonder and humility inspired by the sublime or felt in the presence of mystery...Awe is the acquisition of insights which the world holds in store for us. 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 compatible with both love and joy. In a sense, awe is the antithesis of fear... There is thus only one way to wisdom: awe. Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a market-place for you...A return to reverence is the first prerequisite for a revival of wisdom...Wisdom comes from awe rather than from shrewdness. It is evoked not in moments of calculation but in moments of being in rapport with the mystery of reality. The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe. (R. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*)
- 3) And therefore, Adonai, may a Godly fear infuse the whole of your Creation, and may the awesome knowledge of Your presence dwell in all your creatures. Let all created beings have awe of this Reality and humble themselves before It. Let them all become as one society, to do that which is Godly with *levav shalem*, with a whole and peaceful heart (excerpt from the High Holydays *Uv'chen* prayer, translation by Toba Spitzer)
- 4) The first *Uvchen*...calls us to acknowledge ourselves as created beings living in a world where we are not completely in charge. It is terrifying, and we acknowledge our fear at the absence of control in our lives. We also share our awareness with each other. (R. Sheila Peltz Weinberg, commentary in the Kol Haneshama machzor)

❑ **What experiences of awe have you had? What, if anything, was its relation to fear? What in your experience are the relationships (if any) between awe/fear, a sense of commitment or service, and love?**