

## Fear in Early Rabbinic Judaism

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### 1, Second Blessing Before the Shema in Shacharit

And enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and cause our hearts to hold fast to Your commandments, Make us single-hearted to love and fear (revere) Your name.

### 2. Deuteronomy 10:12

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God demand of you? Only this: to fear (*yirah*) the LORD your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and soul,

### 3. Birkhat HaChodesh—Announcing the New Month

May it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors that You bring this new month to us for goodness and for blessing. Grant us long lives, filled with peace, goodness, blessing, sustenance, and physical health; lives characterized by fear of heaven and fear of sin (*yirat shamayim veyirat chet*); lives free of embarrassment and shame; lives of wealth and honor; lives characterized by love of Torah and fear of heaven; lives in which our heartfelt requests will be fulfilled for good. Amen, Selah.

## Tannaitic Sources on Yirat Chet

### 4. Mishnah Sheqalim 5:6

There were two chambers in the Temple, one the chamber of secret gifts and the other the chamber of the vessels. The chamber of secret gifts: **sin-fearing persons** (*yirei chet*) used to put their gifts there in secret, and the poor who were descended of the virtuous were secretly supported from them. The chamber of the vessels: whoever offered a vessel as a gift would throw it in, and once in thirty days the treasurers opened it; and any vessel they found in it that was of use for the repair of the temple they left there, but the others were sold and their price went to the chamber of the repair of the temple.

### 5. Mishnah Sotah 9:15

When Rabbi Meir died, the composers of fables ceased.  
When Ben Azzai died, the diligent students [of Torah] ceased.  
When Ben Zoma died, the expounders ceased.  
When Rabbi Joshua died, goodness ceased from the world.  
When Rabbi Akiba died, the glory of the Torah ceased.  
When Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa died, men of wondrous deeds ceased...  
When Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai died, the splendor of wisdom ceased.  
When Rabban Gamaliel the elder died, the glory of the torah ceased, and purity and separateness perished.  
When Rabbi Ishmael ben Fabi died, the splendor of the priesthood ceased.  
When Rabbi died, humility and **fear of sin** ceased.

Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: from the day the Temple was destroyed, the sages began to be like scribes, scribes like synagogue-attendants, synagogue-attendants like common people, and the common people became more and more debased. And nobody seeks. Upon whom shall we depend? Upon our father who is in heaven. In the footsteps of the messiah insolence ( will increase and the cost of living will go up greatly; the vine will yield its fruit, but wine will be expensive; the government will turn to heresy, and there will be no one to rebuke; the meeting-place [of scholars] will be used for licentiousness; the Galilee will be destroyed, the Galilee will be desolated, and the dwellers on the frontier will go about [begging] from place to place without anyone to take pity on them; the wisdom of the learned will rot, **fearers of sin** will be despised, and the truth will be lacking; youths will put old men to shame, the old will stand up in the presence of the young, “For son spurns father, daughter rises up against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law a man’s own household are his enemies” (Micah 7:6). The face of the generation will be like the face of a dog, a son will not feel ashamed before his father. Upon whom shall we depend? Upon our father who is in heaven.

Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair says, “Heedfulness leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to purity, purity leads to separation, separation leads to holiness, holiness leads to modesty, modesty leads to **fear of sin**, **fear of sin** leads to piety, piety leads to the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection of the dead comes from Elijah, blessed be his memory, Amen.”

#### 6. Mishnah Eduyot 5:6

Akavia ben Mahlalel testified concerning four things. They said to him: Akavia, retract these four things that you say, and we will make you the head of the court in Israel. He said to them: it is better for me to be called a fool all my days than that I should become [even] for one hour a wicked man before God; So they shouldn’t say: “he withdrew his opinions for the sake of power.”... Whereupon they excommunicated him; and he died while he was under excommunication, and the court stoned his coffin. Rabbi Judah said: God forbid [that one should say] that Akavia was excommunicated; for the courtyard is never locked for any man in

Israel who was equal to Akavia ben Mahalalel in wisdom and the **fear of sin**. But whom did they excommunicate? Eliezer the son of Hanoah who cast doubt against the laws concerning the purifying of the hands. And when he died the court sent and laid a stone on his coffin. This teaches that whoever is excommunicated and dies while under excommunication, his coffin is stoned.

#### 7. Mishnah Avot 3:9

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa said: anyone whose **fear of sin** precedes his wisdom, his wisdom is enduring, but anyone whose wisdom precedes his **fear of sin**, his wisdom is not enduring. He [also] used to say: anyone whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom is enduring, but anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom is not enduring.

#### 8. Mekhilta R. Ishmael on Ex 20:17

Ex 20:17 states, “Moses answered the people, “Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him (*yirato*) may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray.””

Mekhilta interprets: "And so that His fear be upon your faces." "**fear**" (here) is shame-facedness (*boshet*). Shame-facedness is a good sign in a man. "So that you not sin." We are hereby apprised that shame-facedness leads to **fear of sin**, viz. (Jeremiah 6:15) "Were they ashamed that they committed abominations?"

#### 9. Mishnah Sotah 8:1, 5

It is stated: “And it shall be, when you draw near to the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people” (Deut 20:2) This priest identified in the verse is the priest anointed for war, the priest who is inaugurated specifically to serve this function... The Torah dictates the priest’s address: “And he shall say to them: Hear Israel, you draw near today to battle against your enemies; let not **your heart faint; fear not, nor be alarmed, and do not be terrified of them**” (Deut 20:3)... “Let not your heart faint” due to the neighing of horses and the sharpening of the enemy’s swords. “Fear not” due to the knocking of shields [*terisin*] and the noise of their boots [*calgassin*]. “Nor be alarmed” by the sound of trumpets... “And the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say: What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house” (Deut 20:8). Rabbi Akiva) says, “That is fearful and fainthearted” is to be understood as it indicates: that the man is unable to stand in the battle ranks and to see a drawn sword because it will terrify him. Rabbi Yossi HaGelili says, “That is fearful and fainthearted”; this is one who is **afraid because of the sins** (*mityare min averot*) that he has.

## Fear (Reverence) for one's teacher

### 10. Mishnah Avot 4:12

Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua said, “Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your colleague as the fear (reverence) (*mora*) your teacher, and the fear (reverence) for your teacher as the fear (reverence) of heaven.

### 11. Mekhilta R. Ishmael Ex 17:9 (ARN A 27:4 with minor changes—honor instead of fear.

"And Moses said to Joshua, “Pick some me for **us** and go out to battle,” (Ex 17:9) -- whence it is seen that he equated Joshua with himself. All men are hereby apprised of proper deportment. Moses did not say to Joshua "Choose for me men," but "Choose for us men." And whence is it derived that the honor due one's friend is to be as beloved by him as the fear (*mora*) of his teacher? From "And Aaron said to Moses: 'I pray you, my lord.'" (Num 12:11) Now was Aaron not Moses' brother, and older than he? How, then, is "I pray you, my lord" to be understood? He equated him with his teacher. And whence is it derived that the fear of one's teacher is to be equated with that of Heaven? From "And Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, answered: "My lord, Moses, destroy them" (Num 11:28) — Just as the Lord can destroy them, so, can you.

### 12. Avot d'Rabbi Natan 6:1

Yose ben Yoezer said, “Let your house be a gathering place for the sages.”(Mishnah Avot 1:5) How so? This teaches us that a person's house should always be open to the sages, and to their students, and their students' students, so that a person should be able to say to his friend, “I will save a place for you there!”

Another explanation: How should your house be a gathering place for the sages? When a student of the sages enters and says, “Teach me!” – If you have something to teach, teach it, but if not, let him go on his way. He should not sit before you on a bed, or a chair, or a bench. He should sit before you only on the ground. And anything that comes out of your mouth, he should accept with reverence (*eimah*), fear (*yirah*), quaking (*ritat*), and trembling (*zi'a*).