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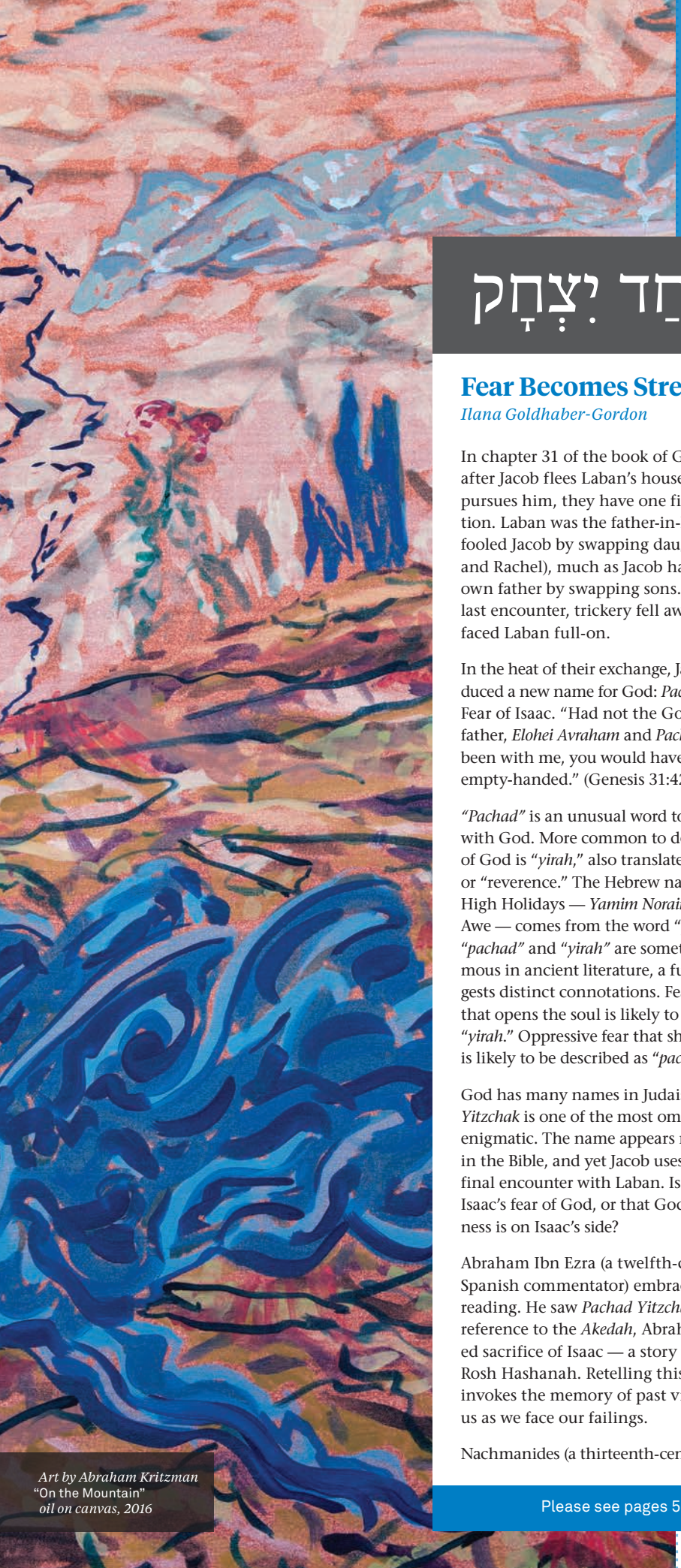

Art by Abraham Kritzman
"On the Mountain"
oil on canvas, 2016

פַּחַד יִצְחָק

Pachad Yitzchak / Fear

What do we fear as we approach the High Holidays?

Fear Becomes Strength

Ilana Goldhaber-Gordon

In chapter 31 of the book of Genesis, after Jacob flees Laban's house and Laban pursues him, they have one final confrontation. Laban was the father-in-law who had fooled Jacob by swapping daughters (Leah and Rachel), much as Jacob had fooled his own father by swapping sons. But in that last encounter, trickery fell away, and Jacob faced Laban full-on.

In the heat of their exchange, Jacob introduced a new name for God: *Pachad Yitzchak*, Fear of Isaac. "Had not the God of my father, *Elohei Avraham* and *Pachad Yitzchak*, been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed." (Genesis 31:42)

"Pachad" is an unusual word to associate with God. More common to describe the fear of God is "*yirah*," also translated as "awe" or "reverence." The Hebrew name for the High Holidays — *Yamim Noraim,* or Days of Awe — comes from the word "*yirah*." Though "*pachad"* and "*yirah"* are sometimes synonymous in ancient literature, a full survey suggests distinct connotations. Fear-tinged awe that opens the soul is likely to be described as "*yirah*." Oppressive fear that shuts one down is likely to be described as "*pachad*."

God has many names in Judaism. *Pachad Yitzchak* is one of the most ominous and enigmatic. The name appears nowhere else in the Bible, and yet Jacob uses it twice in his final encounter with Laban. Is he stressing Isaac's fear of God, or that God's fearsomeness is on Isaac's side?

Abraham Ibn Ezra (a twelfth-century Spanish commentator) embraced the former reading. He saw *Pachad Yitzchak* as a veiled reference to the *Akedah*, Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac — a story we read on Rosh Hashanah. Retelling this story of terror invokes the memory of past virtue to fortify us as we face our failings.

Nachmanides (a thirteenth-century Spanish commentator) disagreed with Ibn Ezra. He understood the name *Pachad Yitzchak* to refer to God's expression of judgment, *midat ha'din*. Nachmanides' interpretation also offers a High Holiday connection: Rosh Hashanah is called *Yom HaDin*, the Day of (God's) Judgment. Here, the threat of judgment is against Laban, wielded by the fearsome God of Isaac.

Nachmanides was a kabbalist who understood that each patriarch channeled a different facet of God. Abraham expresses *chesed*, or kindness. According to Kabbalah, the counterbalance to *chesed* is either *din*, judgment, or *gevurah*, heroism, traits that limit *chesed's* flow. Isaac is associated with *gevurah*. The balance of *chesed* and *gevurah* is *emet*, divine truth. *Emet* is Jacob's trait.

These associations once puzzled me. The man who attempted to slaughter his son embodies kindness? The son who was bound on the altar represents heroism? And Jacob, with all his deceptions, is truth? I understood them better after a conversation with the biblical scholar Avivah Zornberg, who explained that these are the traits that each of the patriarchs grappled with the most, their successes as stunning as their failures.

Perhaps when Isaac was young, *Pachad Yitzchak* was his terror. Then he held out his hands for his father to bind. He lay on the stone table and looked straight at his father, his God, and his fears. Facing the limits of kindness, he came to embody strength, justice, and firm judgment. Perhaps Jacob was changed when he faced Laban, who had fooled him, and then Esau, whom he had fooled. Perhaps Abraham was changed when he faced the body of Sarah, who died when she learned that he had shown too much obedience to God.

This year on *Yom HaDin*, during these Days of Awe, may we face the traits we grapple with most, and be changed by the encounter.

Rabbi **Ilana Goldhaber-Gordon** is the rabbi educator at Congregation Beth Jacob in Redwood City, Calif.

Please see pages 5–7 for ***Consider and Converse***, our guide to this issue

NiSh'ma

On this page, we offer three takes on a beautiful — and complicated — story about Zusya, told by Martin Buber in his collection, Tales of the Hasidim. *Our commentators reflect on the relationship between fear and love. Our online version is interactive, and we welcome your comments.* —*S.B.*

Jeremy Gordon: Be careful what you wish for. This terrific tale reminds me of the time I smuggled my teenage self into a horror movie that still haunts my sleep. Standing before God, we should feel *yirah* — awe, fear. It's the essence of the High Holidays, *HaYamim HaNoraim,* literally, the Days of Awe. We are standing, being judged by our Creator, who knows the inner workings of our heart. This should be enough to send us under the bed. But I'm not convinced that we should encourage a Reb Zusya response — pleading to be absolved from the experience of *yirah*.

"Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Let me stand in awe of you like your angels, who are penetrated by your awe-inspiring name." And God heard his prayer, and God's name penetrated the heart of Zusya as it does those of the angels. But Zusya crawled under the bed like a little dog, and animal fear shook him until he howled: "Lord, let me love you like Zusya again!" And God heard him this time also.

Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim,* Schocken Books, 1947, pp.246-247

Zusya's late-seventeenth-century contemporary, Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, recommends we carry two slips of paper in our pockets. One is inscribed with fearful words; "I am but dust and ashes"; the second slip has a gentler inscription, "For my sake was the universe created." Sometimes, we need the experience — and the ability to share — love. Sometimes, we need the opposite. An early commentary on Creation (Bereishit Rabba 12:15) suggests that God initially wanted to create the world using only love, but God knew that such a world would collapse. The midrash asserts that God then considered creating a world built purely on the basis of judgment, but God knew that such a world couldn't survive. So, God "mixed hot water and cold water," and we find ourselves in a world of both love and fear.

Jeremy Gordon is the rabbi of the New London Synagogue, and the author of *Spiritual Vagabondry and the Making of a Rabbi*.

Ilana Kaufman: While Zusya loves God with confidence *and* authenticity, Zusya asks God, with self-judgment, to know awe by aligning his God-loving experiences with those of angels. To his fulfilled request, Zusya responds with cowering fear. Zusya quickly returns to loving God in ways familiar and sincere to Zusya — confidently and with authenticity.

In response to the tale of Zusya, Rabbi Jeremy Gordon reminds us that, during the Days of Awe, we are "judged by our Creator, who knows the inner workings of our heart." God hears and sees inside our hearts through *selichot* — petitionary prayers recited before Rosh Hashanah, when we ask, with sincerity, for forgiveness.

Acting with sincerity, authenticity, and confidence is our native state — our way of being of origin, in contrast to the self we become as we are pushed and pulled by forces of influence, including self-judgment and doubt. Acting in this native state enables us to experience open, awe-possible love for God. On the other hand, acting with self-judgment and cowering fear closes us to loving in sincere ways. When Zusya asks to return to his former state of loving God, God receives him by listening, seeing, and forgiving, which reminds us that our authentic and sincere ways of loving God are perfect.

Ilana Kaufman is the public affairs and civic engagement director, for the East Bay area, for the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council. As a strategic designer, planner, and problem solver, she engages with with Jewish organizations and philanthropic entities that are working at the intersection of Jewish communities, Jewish identity, and racial justice.

Hanan Harchol: The story of Zusya praying to God, from Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* captures the complexity of the relationship between love and fear. I agree with Rabbi Jeremy Gordon that both love and fear are necessary in our lives. But while we might interpret the lesson of the story as, "Be careful what you wish for," I suggest that this tale contains another lesson: that fear is, paradoxically, an integral and even necessary part of the process of building a real and meaningful connection. Fear leads to true love.

When we meet another person, we fearfully face "otherness." What many of us do initially is to fill in what we don't know about the other person with what we want the other person to be. A midrash (Genesis Rabbah 8:1) recounts that Adam and Eve were originally one being facing away from each other. God, unhappy with that position, divided them so that they could turn to face and know each other. Fear holds the key to growth. Instead of avoiding the otherness, instead of running away from the fear, we should try to embrace it. Try to exist within that uncomfortable, unknown space, the in-between, facing each other. By embracing the fear, we can reach a deeper, sustainable love where the fear and the love are intertwined as one. Maybe that is one way to interpret the concept of *echad* — the space where opposite forces, love and fear, exist simultaneously as a unified whole.

Zusya could tell that his love, at least as he was experiencing or understanding it, was not enough; his love was missing a counterbalancing force. Once he experienced fear, he wished to love "like Zusya again." Indeed, his understanding and experience of love were deepened in the process. I think this story is showing us that acknowledging fear is a necessary part of recognizing and gaining a fuller and deeper appreciation and understanding of true, unconditional, and infinite love.

Hanan Harchol is a New York-based artist, animator, filmmaker, and classical guitarist. His artwork addresses emotional and ethical themes through narrative drawings and animation. To view Harchol's animated series "Jewish Food for Thought" (funded by the Covenant Foundation) or for a deeper exploration of the relationship between love and fear, see his animation "Love & Fear" at hananharchol.com.

Jewish sensibilities are approaches to living and learning that permeate Jewish culture. The ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors they express — emanating from Jewish history, stories, and sources — provide inspiration and guidance that help us to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. Sensibilities are culturally informed senses or memes. This month, *Sh'ma Now* reflects on fear, *"Pachad Yitzchak"* — the fear of Isaac as he walked to the mountain and was bound and almost sacrificed by his father.

The Fear of Isaac

Josh Gressel

You are commuting home on a familiar route, your mind in a freeway fugue. Traffic is moderate at this hour, and you are cruising just above the 65-mph speed limit. Without warning, you see two cars careening toward each other in the lane before you. You slam on your brakes and battle to control your car as it hurtles, screeching, toward the accident. Your mind signals, "So, this is it" with a nauseating sense of inevitability.

But as you brace for the collision, the cars in front of you move in different directions and you pass unscathed through the opening. What seemed an inevitable sentence of doom has been miraculously averted. You feel an enormous sense of relief, and then a commensurate outpouring of spontaneous gratitude: "Thank God for having spared me this awful sentence."

According to Menachem Ben Shlomo, a thirteenth-century commentator, you have just had an experience of *Pachad Yitzchak*, the "fear of Isaac." Mentioned only twice in the Torah and not once in the Talmud, this unusual phrase comes up in our High Holiday liturgy. It stems from Yitzchak's near death on Mt. Moriah, when his life was spared at the last minute by an intervening angel.

The concept of *"Pachad Yitzchak"* is about religious relief experienced in the aftermath of extreme emotions. The fear/relief sequence is an emotional seesaw experience. As a propaganda technique, it capitalizes on a fearful experience that creates an openness that can then be capitalized on. It is the idea behind the "good cop/bad cop" dynamic, in which one officer's tough interrogation is followed by a cup of coffee and an understanding smile from a different officer. The same principle also has been used in advertising, where the sequence is fear/relief/commercial message. One example creates a scene where we fear for the wellbeing of a mouse, followed by relief for its survival, followed by an advertisement for cheese.

How might we understand this automatic sense of overwhelming gratitude we feel after extreme fear? Neuroscientists explain some of it in terms of a sudden flooding of specific neurotransmitters to various parts of our brain. There is even a burgeoning field of "neurotheology" that investigates the link between neuroscience and religious and spiritual experience. At its best, this field provokes some fascinating questions about the nature of reality in general and spiritual or religious experience in particular. Does understanding how mystical experiences affect the workings of the physical brain detract from their significance? Are some people hardwired to seek out religious answers to life's questions?

In a moment of extreme fear, we are stripped of all our ego defenses. This fear is not existential anxiety — that diffuse and vague feeling that keeps us keyed up without a specific reason — but rather a pure and deep fear felt as we stand naked, helpless, and defenseless before God, just as Yitzchak did when lying prone on the altar before Abraham's outstretched knife. This is the vulnerability we feel when there is nowhere to hide, when we declare, *"Hineni,"* "Here I am." This vulnerability is itself a terrifying thought for most of us. But *Pachad Yitzchak* reminds us that this fear can bring us into unmediated contact with a deeper reality: We *are* ultimately naked, helpless, and defenseless before God, before life's unfolding. That deep truth evokes a variety of responses in us, one of which is a sequence of deep worship and profound gratitude. This is, essentially, what we pray for at the High Holidays — that we be granted this terrifying and uplifting truth about ourselves and our relationship to God while standing safely in our pews.

Josh Gressel is a clinical psychologist in private practice in the San Francisco Bay area and a student of Jewish mysticism. He gratefully acknowledges his teacher, Rabbi David Derovan of Beit Shemesh, Israel, who helped him with source material on *"Pachad Yitzchak,"* and neuroscientist Jacob Rinaldi, who directed him to relevant neuroscientific source material.

Less Fear, More Resolve

Nigel Savage

"Who shall live and who shall die," a line in the prayer *Unetanneh Tokef*, is the emotional highpoint of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgy. The power of it is that, despite antibiotics and micro-surgery, we really don't know who will live and who will die; not in the coming year and not in the coming day. Those of us who were in New York City on Rosh Hashanah in 2001, five days after 9/11, remember the power of reciting this haunting, awful, and awe-filled prayer. The shul community was in full attention; people wept — some silently, others audibly.

Close to 3,000 people were murdered by terrorists in the attacks on 9/11. Since then, terrorists have killed another 403 people in the United States. In that same period, deaths by handguns amounted to 406,496.

"On the Mountain," *by Abraham Kritzman*

Overall, roughly 33,000 people are murdered every year in the United States. Slightly more — roughly 35,000 — die in traffic fatalities. In Israel, more people have died in traffic accidents since the establishment of the State of Israel than in all the wars and incidents of terrorism combined. Even more shocking are the number of deaths from respiratory diseases.

In the United States, several trillion dollars have been devoted to the war on terrorism since 9/11; quantitatively less has been spent to address avoidable deaths. Fear drives the enormous sums we spend on defense. And yet, we rarely consider the additional human costs, above and beyond the financial costs of imposed security measures.

Two interconnected stories: On October 10, 1982, on Shemini Atzeret, outside the Great Synagogue of Rome, two smartly dressed men arrived. When asked by the shul's security guards to identify themselves, they lobbed several grenades into the shul and sprayed the crowd with bullets. The target of the attack was the shul my sister often attended while living in Rome that year as an au pair for an Orthodox family.

And here is a postscript. Soon after the attack, the 10-year-old boy in her charge, Gadi, a talented violinist, started a new

music class. It was nearby and he walked home by himself. But one day, she picked him up, and when she entered the school and asked for Gadi, she was told that there was no Gadi in the class. When my sister described him, the teacher replied: "Oh, you mean Giovanni." And my sister realized that Gadi, 10 years old, had figured out that (a) Gadi was a Jewish name; (b) to have a Jewish name potentially made him a target; and thus (c) he'd be safer using an Italian name.

What I learned: First, in assessing risk and responding to it, let us acknowledge some sense of proportion. While we guard against terrorism and fight terrorists and terrorist ideologies, the resources we deploy should be proportionate to the threats and human costs. If, as a society over the past fifteen years, we had deployed a proportion of the resources devoted to the "war on terror" to a "war on sugar" or a "war on guns," fewer people would needlessly have died, and projected death rates would continue to fall for another two generations.

And, second, it is now more than 80 years since Franklin D. Roosevelt famously told Americans, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Though a cliché, these words are so true today. We need to be more resolute and less fearful. In the 1930s, Americans faced enormous challenges — the Depression, Nazis, and the assault on Pearl Harbor — with resolve. Today, we need a clear sense of hope and vision — the antidotes to the fear that incapacitates us. It's not about having no fear at all, but rather about how we operate within the fear and move forward. Since last Rosh Hashanah, we have seen the inauguration of perhaps the most unique presidential administration in the history of this republic. For many people, it has ratcheted up their — our — sense of fear to wholly new levels. And so, we must remain steadfast. We must not give in to our fears, and we must not act based on our fears. Rather, we must hold fast to hope and to vision — this year, more than ever before. Vision and hope are what we should be considering as we enter these holy days. And this might be our meditation as we chant the words of the *Unetanneh Tokef*.

Nigel Savage is the CEO of Hazon, Hebrew for "vision," which he founded in 2000. Hazon works to create a more sustainable Jewish community and a healthier world for all. He can be reached at Nigel@hazon.org.

Embracing Fear

Ebn Leader

"And thus, Eternal One our God, instill Your fear in all Your works and Your dread in all You created. That all Creation shall be in awe and all creatures shall worship You."
—Rosh Hashanah liturgy, Renew Our Days, Rabbi Ron Aigen

With all my being, I long for God. This sentence, while not yet a description of my life, does set the parameters for my life of practice. Looking to the deep devotion expressed in the first paragraph of the *Sh'ma*, I continue to try to make every experience, emotion, and thought bring me closer to God.

Fear is part of the emotional spectrum I experience. As such, I do not ask whether it is a good idea to fear God. Rather, I ask this: How is fear part of my relationship with God? How do I frame my fear so that it brings me closer to a God I truly believe in?

Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl, an early Hasidic master known by the name of his book, *Me'or Einayim*, teaches that God sends us small human fears — regarding loss of life or loved ones, regarding our health, property, or honor — in order to teach us how to fear and love God while trying to avoid getting caught up in the small fears themselves. (See *Me'or Einayim* on *Parashat Kedoshim*.) Most of us have a negative attitude toward fear, and we strive to overcome it or "make it go away." Yet the practice of reorienting fear toward God requires that we take a different stance — one of evoking and embracing fear in a particular context. Feeling such fear is one of the central practices of Rosh Hashanah, and it is referred to often in the liturgy. I draw on another early Hasidic master, Meshulam Feibush Heller of Zbarazh, to present a practice of embracing such fear. (*Yosher Divrei Emet* 2:53)

Every year on Rosh Hashanah, the world is created anew. But God's first act of Creation is not to deliver something new. Rather, the first act of Creation is *tzimzum* — the kabbalistic notion that God draws what already is, inward, into God, into the source of all being, into the root that precedes differentiation, in order to make room for something new to come into being. Every Rosh Hashanah, God takes in a breath and breathes us in, together with the entire universe, and then God breathes a new world out.

God is not a great dragon about to swallow us. We are of God, and because of this we are transparent to God. It is as if God knows us through God's own self-awareness rather than through external observation. (Moses ben Jacob Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim* 8:13) Therefore, to ride the in-breath of God to the source is to unravel every knot we have become ensnared by. To come that close to God is to work through every crooked brokenness that shapes who we are. To ride God's in-breath is to face all our difficulties without turning away, to have them all seen without seeking a place to hide.

The deeper we ride this in-breath into God, the closer we get to the possibility of re-creation. This rebirth, a new beginning, is both the promise and the challenge that the High Holidays extend to us. Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world, is when — to the extent that we are willing to embrace the fear of consciously being transparent before God — we can adopt a fresh start and be created anew. In this process, even our most subtle mistakes will shine out and will need to be faced, addressed, and resolved.

The most common word for "fear" in Jewish devotional texts is "*yir'ah*," which has the same letters as the word "to see," "*yir'eh*," and "to be seen," "*yera'eh*." Fear of God can be understood, then, as the experience of being seen fully within divine consciousness.

And for all of us on Rosh Hashanah, this is the path to re-creation in God, to the possibility of a new birth for ourselves and for the entire world.

Ebn Leader became a student of Rabbi Arthur Green's in 1999. He is one of three co-editors who worked with Green in editing *Speaking Torah: Spiritual Teachings from around the Maggid's Table*. He joined his teacher in establishing the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College in Newton Centre, Mass.

Editor-in-Chief
Susan Berrin

Founding Editor
Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, *z"l*

Design
Emily Rich

Contact
info@shma.com

For editorial inquiries, contact
sberrin@shma.com

Advisory Board
Rachel Brodie
Richard Hirsh
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Consider & Converse

A Guide to *'Pachad Yitzchak''* — 'Fear'

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the theme of *"Pachad Yitzchak"*— "the fear of Isaac" — an illusion to the Akedah (the binding/sacrifice of Isaac). (Bereshit 31:42 and 31:53) The Akedah instills a certain fear, one we experience throughout the reading of the *machzor* (High Holiday prayer book) as we liturgically journey toward God's judgment. *Pachad Yitzchak* connects the fear of standing before God at the High Holidays with the fear engendered as we absorb the escalating political cacophony of the world around us.

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or "meaning-making" as solely an individual activity. That's why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and prompts for individual contemplation and informal or more structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation, inviting a small group of friends and family to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal might be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at http://forward.com/shma-now/.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other's comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen, before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

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Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Rabbi **Ilana Goldhaber-Gordon** [page 1] introduces readers to some of the source material on *"Pachad Yitzchak"* — "Fear of Isaac" — and invites us to understand the relationship between the fear of Isaac, associated with the Akedah (the Binding of Isaac), a story traditionally read on Rosh Hashanah, and a different Hebrew word for "fear"— *"yirah,"* which can also be translated as "awe" or "reverence." Goldhaber-Gordon explains that the Hebrew name for the High Holidays — *Yamim Noraim*, or Days of Awe — comes from the word *"yirah."* She writes, "Fear-tinged awe that opens the soul is likely to be described as *'yirah.'* Oppressive fear that shuts one down is likely to be described as '*pachad*.'" She goes on to note one kabbalist's view that each of the patriarchs was understood to be channeling a different facet of God. For example, Abraham expresses *chesed*, "kindness." According to Kabbalah, the counterbalance to *chesed* is either *din*, "judgment," or *gevurah*, "heroism," traits that limit *chesed's* flow. Isaac is associated with *gevurah*. The balance of *chesed* and *gevurah* is *emet*, "divine truth." *Emet* is Jacob's trait," she writes. Why would the man who agreed to sacrifice his son embody kindness? Why would the son who allowed himself to be bound on the altar represent heroism? And why does Jacob, who is known for deceiving his brother, embody truth? What role does fear play in your experience of the High Holidays? Do you experience fear as awe when reciting the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah? How does the liturgical re-enactment of the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies — the trembling with fear or awe — transform your experiences of the holiday?

- **Ebn Leader** [page 4] explores the emotional and spiritual benefits we derive from a fear (*"pachad"/yirah"*) of God. Ebn shares the teachings of Rabbi Menachem Nahum of Chernobyl, an early Hasidic master known by the name of his book, the *Me'or Einayim*, who writes, "God sends us small human fears — regarding loss of life or loved ones, regarding our health, property, or honor — in order to teach us how to fear and love God while trying to avoid getting caught up in the small fears themselves." He suggests that we must acknowledge and embrace fear as one of the "central practices of Rosh Hashanah… referred to often in the liturgy." Is there a relationship between society's diminishing concern about sin and the diminishing fear of God? How would rehabilitating the notion of sin transform our experiences of the High Holidays? Ebn shares a mystical teaching and practice that as God creates the world anew each year, "to the extent that we are willing to embrace the fear of consciously being transparent before God — we can adopt a fresh start and be created anew. In this process, even our most subtle mistakes will shine out and will need to be faced, addressed, and resolved." How do you understand Rosh Hashanah as a time of transparency? Is it a time to do an "accounting of your soul" in order to begin a new year fresh?

- **Nigel Savage** [page 3] writes about channeling fear. "We need to be more resolute and less fearful. In the 1930s, Americans faced enormous challenges — the Depression, Nazis, and the assault on Pearl Harbor — with resolution. Today, we need a clear sense of hope and vision — the antidotes to the fear that incapacitates us. It's not about having no fear at all, but rather about how we operate within the fear we may have to move forward." How do you channel fear or become immobilized by it? What is the relationship between trust and fear? During the omer, as the Israelites are wandering through the desert, Moshe tells them not to fear the journey, if they can trust and believe in God and God's miracles." How does fear embolden us to do our work in the world? In *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*, Pema Chödrön writes, "Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth." How do you channel your fears — especially those on a global scale?

Consider & Converse

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Reflective Questions

can help to integrate the ideas in these articles with one's own sense of self.

- **Josh Gressel** [page 3] writes about where fear happens in the brain. As a psychologist, he helps us to approach the High Holidays and to come face-to-face with our immortality. We are faced with abundant challenges, and with the need to craft a response rather than to fold into fear. Gressel writes, "This fear is not existential anxiety — that diffuse and vague feeling that keeps us keyed up without a specific reason — but rather a pure and deep fear felt as we stand naked, helpless, and defenseless before God, just as Yitzchak did when lying prone on the altar before Abraham's outstretched knife." In this moment, are we paralyzed, humbled, or emboldened by fear? How do we acknowledge and respond to this state in healthy ways? How do we distinguish between our fears and an overarching anxiety about the year ahead?
- In *NiSh'ma,* [page 2] our simulated Talmud page, three writers explore a wonderful story about Zusya, as told by Martin Buber in his collection *Tales of the Hasidim.* "'Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Let me stand in awe of you like your angels, who are penetrated by your awe-inspiring name.' And God heard his prayer, and God's name penetrated the heart of Zusya as it does those of the angels. But Zusya crawled under the bed like a little dog, and animal fear shook him until he howled: 'Lord, let me love you like Zusya again!' And God heard him this time also." (Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, Schocken Books, 1947, 246-247) Our commentators reflect on the relationship between fear and love. Writer, artist, and animator **Hanan Harchol** writes that "fear is, paradoxically, an integral and even necessary part of the process of building a real and meaningful connection. Fear leads to true love." He goes on to say that "this story is showing us that acknowledging fear is a necessary part of recognizing and gaining a fuller and deeper appreciation and understanding of true, unconditional, and infinite love." Rabbi **Jeremy Gordon** shares a story: "God initially wanted to create the world using only love, but God knew that such a world would collapse. The midrash asserts that God then considered creating a world built purely on the basis of judgment, but God knew that such a world couldn't survive. So, God 'mixed hot water and cold water,' and we find ourselves in a world of both love and fear." Where were you when you experienced penetrating fear? How did you resolve it? How do you understand the relationship between fear and love?