

The Beginning of Wisdom

Jewish Artist Lab Fourth Year

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Psalm 111:10

רֵאשִׁית חִכְמָה יִרְאַת ה' שְׂכָל טוֹב לְכָל־עֹשֵׂיהֶם תִּהְיֶה עִמָּדָת לְעַד.

The *yira* (fear/awe) of the Adonai is the beginning of wisdom, all who practice it gain sound understanding. God's praise endures forever.

Mishle 1:7

יִרְאַת ה' רֵאשִׁית דַּעַת חִכְמָה וּמוֹסָר אֲוִילִים בּוֹז.

The *yira* (fear/awe) of Adonai is the beginning of knowledge; fools scorn wisdom and discipline.

Da'at Mikra Commentary, Ps. 111:10

From this we see that the wisdom under discussion in our psalm is the practical wisdom that guides a person to take the proper path.

The Jewish Study Bible, Mishle 1:7

Fear of the Lord is the ground for wisdom to grow in; it is essentially conscience. In its most basic form, in the untutored child, it is unreflective fear of consequences. As wisdom develops, fear of God becomes a cognitive awareness of what God wants and does, and this type of fear is equivalent to knowledge of the Lord. Fear of God is effective in keeping one from evil even in secret deeds and even in spheres of behavior where the law does not apply. *Beginning of knowledge*: The commentators debated whether *re'shit* means first in time or first in quality, that is, the best part. The variant of this in 9:10 uses a word that definitely means "beginning."

Olitzky and Kravitz, Mishle 1:7

This verse has become the motto for the entire Book of Proverbs.

Gersonides (14th C), a medieval philosopher understood the words to refer to ethical virtues that were the necessary preliminaries to the intellectual virtues. Self-control, even for the philosophers, comes before the acquisition of knowledge.

Study is discipline. Learning is a process. For most people, there are no shortcuts to wisdom.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 74-76

The meaning of awe is to realize that life takes place under wide horizons, horizons that range beyond the span of an individual life or even the life of a nation, a generation, or an era. Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal.

Pirkei Avot 3:17

אם אין חכמה, אין יראת. אם אין יראת, אין חכמה

Where there is no wisdom, there is no *yira*. Where there is no *yira*, there is no wisdom.

Midrash Shmuel

חכמת אמתית רק מי שחכמתו וציורו נראה מפעולותיו היא החכמה האמתית כי
ימצא חכם גדול בתורה ואינו חכם ויש שאינו יודע אות אחת והוא חכם גדול.

True wisdom is one that is put into action. For a person very learned in Torah might have no wisdom. And a person who knows not one letter might be very wise indeed.

Yosef ben Yehuda ibn Akinin (12th C., Catalan)

I have come to understand the nature of God from the wisdom that went into the forming of the limbs of my body and the power of my soul. Now then, if one can perceive the nature of God from a microcosm, how much more from a knowledge of all things created, the heavens and the earth and what is between them... And when one perceives the genuine greatness of these things, he begins to understand the nature of Him who created them and then fears to sin before Him.

Menachem Meiri (13th C., Catalan)

Were it not for the commandments of the Torah...no man could achieve perfect ethical behavior in his worldly conduct, even if by nature he was ideally suited for it; for no man can achieve ideal ethical conduct as effectively as the one who holds on to the ways of the Torah. And so too, if a person has no natural inclination toward ethical conduct, the commandments of the Torah will not be sufficient to bring him to such perfection. For the commandments put a man in the right path only in a general way, they are unable to provide for subtle and new problems which constantly require the guidance of morality and ethics.

Travers Herford (20th C, England)

Wisdom that knows no fear of God is self-centered and worthless. Fear that is without wisdom is the feeling of a mere animal towards its master, not that of an intelligent and moral being towards God its maker, judge and father.

פרק קיא

Psalm 111

א הללויה | אודה ה' בכל־לִבְבֵי בָּסוּד וְשִׁירִים וְעֵדָה: ב גְּדִלִים מַעֲשֵׂי ה' דְּרוֹשִׁים לְכָל־חַפְצֵיהֶם:
ג הוֹדוּ וְהִדְרֵם וְהִגְדוּ וְהַדְרֵם עֲמֻדַת לַעֲד: ד זָכַר עֲשָׂה לְנַפְלְאוֹתָיו חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם ה': ה טָרַף נֶתַן לִירְאָיו יִזְכֹּר
לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ: ו פֶּחַ מַעֲשָׂיו הַגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לְתַת לָהֶם נִחְלַת גּוֹיִם: ז מַעֲשֵׂי יְדָיו אֲמַת וּמִשְׁפָּט נְאֻמִּים
כָּל־פְּקוּדָיו: ח סְמוּכִים לַעֲד לְעוֹלָם עֲשׂוּיִם בְּאֲמַת וְיִשָּׁר: ט פְּדוּת | שָׁלַח לְעַמּוֹ צִוָּה לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ
קְדוֹשׁ וְנִרְאָ שְׁמוֹ: י רֵאשִׁית חֲכָמָה | יִרְאֵת ה' שָׁכַל טוֹב לְכָל־עֹשֵׂיהֶם תְּהַלְתּוּ עֲמֻדַת לַעֲד:

Halleluya.

I praise the Lord with all my heart in the assembled congregation of the upright.

The works of the Lord are great, within reach of all who desire them.

God's deeds are splendid and glorious; God's beneficence is everlasting;

God has won renown for God's wonders.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate; he gives food to those who fear God;

God is ever mindful of God's covenant.

God revealed to God's people God's powerful works, in giving them the heritage of nations.

God's handiwork is truth and justice; all his precepts are enduring, well-founded for all eternity,
wrought of truth and equity.

God sent redemption to God's people; God ordained God's covenant for all time;

God's name is holy and awesome.

The beginning of wisdom is yirat hashem, all who practice it gain sound understanding.

Praise of God is everlasting.

פרק קיב

Psalm 112

א הללויה | אֲשֶׁר־יֵאֵשׁ יִרְאֵת־ה' בְּמִצְוֹתָיו חֲפָץ מְאֹד: ב גְּבוּר בְּאֶרֶץ יְהוָה יִרְעוּ דוֹר וָדוֹר וְשִׁירִים יִבְרָךְ:
ג הוֹן וְעֵשֶׂר בְּבֵיתוֹ וְצַדִּיקְתּוֹ עֲמֻדַת לַעֲד: ד זָרַח בַּחֲשֶׁךְ אֹר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם וְצַדִּיק: ה טוֹב אִישׁ
חוּנָן וּמְלִיכָה יִכְלָקֵל דְּבָרָיו בְּמִשְׁפָּט: ו כִּי־לְעוֹלָם לֹא יִמוּט לִזְכֹּר עוֹלָם יְהוָה צַדִּיק: ז מִשְׁמוּעָה רָעָה לֹא
יִירָא נִכּוֹן לִבּוֹ בְּטִיחַ בַּה': ח סְמוּךְ לִבּוֹ לֹא יִירָא עַד אֲשֶׁר־יִרְאָה בְּצָרָיו: ט פֶּזֶר | נֶתַן לְאֲבִיוִיִּם צַדִּיקְתּוֹ
עֲמֻדַת לַעֲד קָרְנוֹ תְרוּם בְּכָבוֹד: י רֵשַׁע יִרְאָה | וְכַעַס שָׁנָיו יִחַרֵק וְנִמְס תַּאֲצוֹת רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֹד:

Halleluya.

Happy is the man who yire hashem, who is ardently devoted to God's commandments.

His descendants will be mighty in the land, a blessed generation of upright men.

Wealth and riches are in his house and his beneficence lasts forever.

A light shines for the upright in the darkness; he is gracious, compassionate, and beneficent.

All goes well with the man who lends generously, who conducts his affairs with equity.

He shall never be forsaken; the beneficent man will be remembered forever.

He is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is firm, he trusts in the Lord.

His heart is resolute, he is unafraid; in the end he will see the fall of his foes.

He gives freely to the poor; his beneficence lasts forever; his horn is exalted in honor.

The wicked man shall see it and be vexed; he shall gnash his teeth; his courage shall fail.

The desire of the wicked shall come to nothing.