

פחד אלהים

אבנר רמו

H.P. Lovecraft said: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear.”

A major theme in the Bible is fear and we find there an unusual number of biblical Hebrew words that are believed to mean “fear” or “terror.”

They include: **אימה** (Gen 15:12; Ex 15:16; 23:27; Deu 32:25; Jos 2:9; Jer 50:38; Ps 55:5; 88:16; Pro 20:2; Job 9:34; 13:21; 20:25; 33:7; 39:20; 41:6; Ezr 3:3). **בהלה** (Lev 26:16; Is 65:23; Jer 15:8; Ps 78:33). **בעתה** (Jer 8:15; 14:19; Ps 88:17; Job 6:4). **חיל** (Ex 15:14; Jer 6:24; 22:23; 50:43; Mic 4:9; Ps 48:7). **חלחלה** (Is 21:3; Eze 30:4, 9; Nah 2:11). **חרדה** (Gen 27:33; 1 Sam 14:15; 2 Ki 4:13; Is 21:4; Jer 30:5; Eze 26:16; Pro 29:25; Dan 10:7). **חת** (Gen 9:2; Job 41:25). **חתת** (Gen 35:5; Job 6:21; Eze 26:17; 32:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 32). **יראה** (Gen 20:11; Ex 20:16; Deu 2:25; 2 Sam 23:3; Is 11:2,3; 33:6; 63:17; Jer 32:40; Eze 1:18; 30:13; Jon 1:10, 16; Ps 2:11; 5:8; 19:10; 34:12; 55:6; 90:11; 111:10; 119:38; Pro 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 31:30; Job 4:6; 6:14; 15:4; 22:4; 28:28; Neh 5:9, 15; 2 Ch 19:9). **מוג לב** (Eze 21:20; see also: Ex 15:15; Jos 2:9, 24; Is 14:31; Jer 49:23; Ps 46:7; 75:4; 107:26). **מורא** (Gen 9:2; Deu 4:34; 11:25; 26:8; 34:12; Is 8:13; 32:21; Mal 1:6; 2:5; Ps 9:21; 76:12). **מגור** (Is 31:9; 66:4; Jer 6:25; 20:3, 4, 10; 46:5; 49:28; Eze 21:17; Ps 31:14; 34:5; 55:16; Pro 10:24; Thr 2:22). **פחד** (Gen 31:42, 53; Ex 15:16; Deu 2:25; 11:25; 28:67; 1 Sam 11:7; Is 2:10, 19, 21; 24:17, 18; Jer 2:19; 30:5; 48:43, 45; 49:5; Ps 14:5; 31:12; 36:2; 53:6; 64:2; 91:5; 105:38; 119:120; Job 3:25; 4:14; 13:11; 15:21; 21:9; 22:10; 25:2; 31:23; 39:16, 22; Cant 3:8; Thr 3:47; Est 8:17; 9:2, 3; 1 Ch 14:17; 2 Ch 14:13; 17:10; 19:7; 20:29). **פלצות** (Is 21:4; Eze 7:18; Ps 55:6; Job 21:6).

As the root of **יראה** (*yerah*) and **מורא** (*mora*) is *yra*, they indeed appear to have the same meaning. It seems likely that among other biblical words that mean “fear” there are linguistic associations.

In the Book of Jeremiah we find a similar expression: **פחדו איש אל-רעהו** - “**they turned in fear one toward another**” (Jer 36:16).

In the Book of Genesis we read: **ויחרדו איש אל-אחיו** - “**and they turned trembling one to another**” (Gen 42:28).

Yet in the Book of Isaiah (13:8) we find another variant of this expression: **יחילו איש אל-רעהו** (*yekhilun ish el-ree'hu*).

The understanding of **יחילו** as “**they shall be in pain**” by the Greek (and English) translators, led them to disconnect this word from the following **איש אל-רעהו** “**one toward another.**” However, if **יחילו איש אל-רעהו** (*yekhilun ish el-ree'hu*) is a complete expression, then the

similarity to the expressions in verses Gen 42:28 and Jer 36:16 suggest that **יחילו** (*yekhilun*) is a letter-substitution error of **יחרדון** (*yakhredun*) - “they (turned) in fear (one toward the other).”

This understanding is supported by the reading:

תרא אשקלון ותירא, ועזה ותחיל מאד, ועקרון, כי-הביש מבטה
“Ashkelon shall see it, **and fear**, Gaza also, **and shall be sore pained**, and Ekron, for her **expectation shall be ashamed**” (Zec 9:5; see also: Jer 5:22).

Yet the inner comparison of this verse suggests that **תחיל מאד** (*thakhil meod*) is a letter-substitution error of **תחרד מאד** (*thekhrad meod*) - “will be very fearful” (e.g. 1 Sam 28:5).

In the Book of Deuteronomy we read:

היום הזה אחל תת פחדך ויראתך על-פני העמים תחת כל-השמים-אשר ישמעון שמעך, ורגזו וחלו מפניך.

“This day will I begin to put **the dread of you and the fear of you** upon the peoples that are under the whole heaven, who, when they hear the report of you, **shall tremble, and be in anguish** because of you” (Deu 2:25).

However, the content of this verse and the comparison with the previous verses suggest that here again **וחלו** (*vekhalu*) is a misspelled **וחרדו** (*vekhardu*) - “and they will be afraid.”

This verse also raises the possibility that some of the words from the root **רגז** (*rgz*) may also mean “fear.” This is particularly applicable to verses: Ex 15:14; 1 Sam 14:15; Is 32:11; 64:1; Jer 33:9; 50:33; Eze 12:18; Joel 2:1; Ps 77:17; 99:1). Such an understanding may help us understand the following case.

In the Book of Genesis we read that after Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers:

וישלח את-אחיו, וילכו; ויאמר אלהם, אל-תרגזו בדרך
“And he sent his brethren away, and they departed; and he said to them: [See that] **you fall not out by the way**” (Gen 45:24).

The English translation here does not conform to the Hebrew text and this suggests that the translators were not sure about the meaning of the words **אל-תרגזו בדרך**. The Greek translator wrote here: “do not get angry on the way” but we have to wonder why Joseph would give such an advice to his brothers. However, if we would recall that on their first return from Egypt the brothers became terrified when they found their money in their sacks of provisions (Gen 42:27-28), we may view Joseph’s words here as saying that this time they should not fear on their way because he did not instruct his servants to put their money back in their sacks of supplies.

In the Book of Psalms we read: **יבשו ויבהלו מאד-כל-איבי** - “All my enemies shall be **ashamed and sore affrighted**” (Ps 6:11; see also: Ps 83:18).

In the Book of Isaiah we read: **אל-תיראי כי-לא תבושי** - “Fear not, for you shall not be **ashamed**” (Is 54:4; see also: Zec 9:5).

In the Book of Isaiah we also read: **כלם יעמדו, יפחדו יבשו יחד** - “let them stand up; they shall fear, they shall be **ashamed together**” (Is 44:11).

These verses indicate on the association between “fear” and “shame.” However, it is not clear whether it was fearful to be ashamed, or was it “shame” to be frightened.

In the Book of Isaiah we also find: **וּשְׁבִיחַ קְצָרֵי-יָד, חֲתוּ וּבִשּׁוּ** - “**Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and ashamed**” (Is 37:27; see also: 2 Ki 19:26; Is 20:5; Jer 8:9; 17:18; 48:1, 20, 39; 50:2; Eze 32:30).

However, the connection between “fear” and “shame” suggests that here **חֲתוּ** (*khathu*) is a **ד** (d) - **ת** (th) dental exchange and a letter-deletion error of: **פַּחַדוּ** (*pakhadu*) - “were fearful.”

Similarly in the Book of Job we read: **יִשְׁחַק לַפַּחַד, וְלֹא יִחַת** - “**He mocks at fear, and is not affrighted**” Job 39:22). Here again the understanding of the English (but not the Greek) translator suggests that he believed that here **יִחַת** (*yekhath*) is a misspelled **יִפְחַד** (*iphkhad*) - “be afraid.”

In the Book of Micah we read: **וּיִרְאוּ, יִפְחַדוּ** - “**and shall be afraid []**” (Mic 7:17).

The Greek translator wrote: “amazed and afraid.”

In the Book of Isaiah we read: **וְאַל-תִּירָאוּ, וְאַל-תִּפְחַדוּ** - “**Fear you not, neither be afraid**” (Is 44:8). The comparison between these verses and the understanding of the English (but not the Greek) translator suggest that here **תִּירָאוּ** (*thirhu*) is a vowel letter exchange error of **תִּירָאוּ** (*thirau*) - “be afraid.”

Now we read in the Book of Deuteronomy: **וְאַל-תִּירָאוּ, וְאַל-תִּחַת** - “**fear not, neither be frightened**” (Deu 1:21; see also: Gen 9:2; Deu 31:8; Jos 8:1; 10:25; 1 Sam 17:11; Is 51:7; 54:14; Jer 23:4; 30:10; 46:27; Eze 2:6; 3:9; Mal 2:5; Job 6:21; 1 Ch 22:13; 28:20; 2 Ch 20:15, 17; 32:7).

However, the understanding of the Greek (and English) translators suggests that **תִּחַת** (*thekhath*) is again a **ד** (d) - **ת** (th) dental exchange and a letter-deletion error of **תִּפְחַדוּ** (*thiphkhad*) - “be afraid.”

However, some of the biblical words that contain the letters **חַת** (khth) apparently do not mean fear.

In the Book of Isaiah we read: **וּבְעוֹד שְׁשִׁים וְחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנָה, יִחַת אֶפְרַיִם מֵעַם** - “**And within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, [that it be not] a people**” (Is 7:8).

The Greek translator wrote here “will cease” which suggests that he believed that here **יִחַת** (*yekhath*) is again a **ד** (d) - **ת** (th) dental exchange and a letter-deletion error of **יִחַדַּל** (*yekhdal*) - “will cease” (e.g. Gen 11:8; 1 Ki 15:21; Jer 51:30; 2 Ch 16:5; 2 Ch 25:16).

Similarly, we read in the Book of Isaiah:

וְהָאָרֶץ כְּבִגְד תִּבְלֶה-וּיִשְׁבִּיחַ כְּמוֹ-כֵן יָמוּתוּן; וַיִּשְׁוַעְתִּי לְעוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה, וְצַדִּיקְתִּי לֹא תִחַת.

“And the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but My salvation shall be forever, and My favor shall not be abolished” (Is 51:6).

However, the comparison with the previous verse suggests that here **תחת** (*thekhath*) is also a **ד** (d) - **ת** (th) dental exchange and a letter-deletion error of **תחדל** (*thekhdal*) - “will cease.”

We have seen that in several biblical verses there is association between “fear” and “shame.” We also read: **ואל כל-פנים בושה ; וכסתה אותם פלצות** - “**and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces**” (Eze 7:18). The understanding of **פלצות** (*palatsuth*) as “fear” by the Greek (and English) translators is supported by the content of verses Is 21:4; Ps 55:6; and Job 21:6).

However, the comparison between: **סביב בעתהו בלהות** - “**Terrors shall overwhelm him on every side**” (Job 18:11), and **תעה לבני, פלצות בעתתני** - “**My heart is bewildered, terror hath overwhelmed me**” (Is 21:4), suggests that **פלצות** (*palatsuth*) is a letter-substitution error of **בלהות** (*balahoth*) - “terror.”