

Fear of Fear in Job 4:14

Aron Pinker

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.
Franklin Delano Roosevelt

The word פחד occurs many times in the Hebrew Bible having the sense “fear, dread, awe.”¹ However, in several places this sense seems inadequate. Two such obvious places are Gen 31:42 and 31:53 where the phrase פחד יצחק occurs, and the other is Job 40:17 where the phrase גידי פחדו occurs. These cases have been subject to considerable study and led to the suggestion that פחד could also mean “thigh,” “deity,” or “god Pahad.”² This paper suggests that Job 4:14 offers support for considering פחד a numen.

Job 4:14, reads פחד קראני ורעה ורב עצמותי הפחיד. The Versions translate

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| Septuagint: | Horror and trembling seized me, and caused all my bones to greatly shake; |
| Targum: | Fear (or ‘object of fear’) chanced to come upon me and the multitude of my limbs frightened; |
| Peshitta: | Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake; |
| Vulgate: | Fear gripped me and trembling and all my bones are frightened. |

It is clear from these translations that the versions struggled with the following problems:

1. Should we understand ורעה ... פחד as if they were coupled?
2. Should קראני have the sense “happen, occur”?
3. Should קראני be understood interpretatively as “seized, gripped”?
4. What is the meaning of ורב?
5. Are עצמות bones or body parts?

The versions do not seem to have any problems with פחד, which is rendered by all as “fear.” Only the Targum leaves open the possibility that it was an object. In the following we focus our discussion on the first three questions.

¹ Wanke, Stamm 200; Dahood’s translation of פחד as “cabal, pack (of dogs)” is strange, to say the least (Dahood, Philology, Glossary No. 2035; Psalms I, 80; Psalms II, 103.327.

² Malul, paḥad yiṣḥāq 195; Moyal, אור 27; Braslavi, פחד יצחק 37-38; Koch, פחד יצחק 113; Albright, Stone Age 324, n. 71; Hillers, Pahad 90-92; Meyer, Israeliten 254f.; Alt, God 10.26; Eissfeldt, El 32, n. 2.

The problems encountered by the versions and the approaches they adopted are reflected in the Standard English translations. For instance,

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| NLT: | Fear gripped me; I trembled and shook with terror; |
| NKJV: | Fear came upon me, and trembling, Which made all my bones shake; |
| NASB: | Dread came upon me, and trembling, And made all my bones shake. |
| RSV: | dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. |
| NJB: | a shiver of horror ran through me, and filled all my bones with fright. |
| Webster: | Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. |
| Young: | Fear hath met me, and trembling, And the multitude of my bones caused to fear. |
| Darby: | Fear came on me, and trembling, and made all my bones to shake; |
| ASV: | Fear came upon me, and trembling, Which made all my bones to shake; |
| NJPS: | Fear and trembling came upon me, Causing all my bones to quake with fright. |

Unfortunately, none of the aforementioned interpretations adequately reflects the text. This can be seen from the following.

1. The two nouns פחד and רעדה, or the two verbs פחד and רעד, are never coupled as a poetic pair, though פחד is coupled with a number of nouns / verbs (הדר, פחת, הדרה, חרדה, המשל, אימתה, יראה, מורא, חרד / רגז, רחב, חרד) and רעד / רעדה only with יראה. Also, קרא in קראני is singular (cf. Jer 13:22) and separates פחד from רעדה. Moreover, the following הפחיד is singular, making “Fear and trembling” entirely unlikely.
2. Dictionaries include קראני among the cases where קרא = קרה “happen, occur.” This would explain the translation “came upon me” but not “seized me,” which is in accord with the Septuagint and Vulgate. The word קראני with pointings as in Job 4:14 is a *hapax legomenon*. The only other occurrences of the form קראני are in Isa 49:1 and Jer 13:22, with slight differences in the pointing. In Isa 49:1 it is God’s alerting call, and in Jer 13:22, where it is usually translated “befallen me,” קראני could also mean “called me” as if the causes were anthropomorphized (cf. 2 Kgs 8:1). Thus, a disaster (Gen 42:38), evil (Deut 31:29, Jer 44:23), indefinite causes (Gen 49:1), war (Ex 1:10), all “call out” as if to announce their presence.
3. Nowhere else in the book of Job does קרא = קרה “happen, occur,” but קרא meaning “call” occurs frequently (1:4, 5:1, 9:16, 12:14, 13:22, 14:15, 17:14, 19:16, 27:10, 42:14).
4. The manifestation of פחד is described in the Hebrew Bible by the verbs נפל (1 Sam 11:7, Est 8:17, 9:2, 9:13, Ex 15:16, Job 13:11, Ps 105:38), בוא (Jer 49:5, Prov 1:26, 27), פחד (Ps 14:5, 53:6, Job 3:25, Deut 28:67), בהל (Job 22:10), היה (Lam 3:47, 2Chr 17:10, 19:7, 20:29), and נתן (1Chr 14:17). In particular, the verb קרה is not used to describe occurrence of פחד, though it is used six times for divine revelation. Thus, in the Hebrew Bible fear can fall (not “befall”), come, scare, terrify, be, or be given, but not happen. As in English, the construct “fear happened to me” is awkward in Biblical Hebrew. No wonder that some translation use “dread” rather than “fear”, or opt to interpretatively translate

entirely terrified. Indeed, קרא is typically used for the alerting call of the deity (Gen 3:9, 21:17, 22:11, Ex 3:4, 19:3, Lev 1:1, Num 12:5, 1Sam 3:4, 6:8, 10, Isa 42:6, 49:1).⁶

Could פחד be the name of a god? No deity by the name Pahad is known in the Ancient Near East. This does not mean that a god Pahad did not exist. The Ancient Near East was replete with gods of which we have no knowledge. Of the known deities the closest homophonically to פחד would be the ancient Egyptian god Ptah (metathesised Phat). In ancient Egyptian Ptah is written with two small signs (the “p” and the “t”), both of which can be placed side by side (in vertical writing) or one above the other (in horizontal), and the two signs are nearly always so placed for esthetic reasons. The “h”, an aspirated sound, was a tall thin sign and thus was nearly always written beside (in horizontal writing) or beneath (in vertical writing) the two smaller signs, with an image of a god as a determinative next to it. To transpose the “h” and the “t”, therefore, would have broken the rather strong esthetic rule and, although a scribal error might have produced this writing, it would not have been a frequent one. However, the vertical writing could be read as p-h-t, and it could even be inserted (perhaps erroneously) in a horizontal line of text. Since pht(y) was the word for ‘energy’ or ‘vigor’ (as of a king) it was appropriate to the god.⁷

While Egyptian orthography does not rule out the possibility of Ptah => Phat => Pahad, making פחד the nomen of a numen, biblical evidence seems to proscribe it. The only other occurrences of פחד in which its sense can be construed as related to the divine are Gen 31:42 and 31:53 where the phrase

⁶ The discussion in this paragraph relies on personal communication with Prof. Betsy M. Bryan, Alexander Badawy Professor of Egyptian Art and Archaeology, Johns Hopkins University, to whom I am most thankful. All the inferences are mine.

⁷ Rashi appears to assume פחד is a stand-in for God. Hizkuni, a 13th century commentator in France (?), says, “פחד כנוי אלהות – פחד יצחק” i.e. he swore by the God of his father Isaac (יראתו), and the Targum proves יצחק ליה יצחק. Mandelkern, *Veteris* 947, notes on פחד that פחד יצחק is synonymous with אלהי אברהם. It is similar to the later construct של מצרים (אלהותו) יראתו (אלהותו) של מצרים. Meyer, *Israeliten* 254f., speculated that פחד was the name of an ancient god in Beer-Sheba that was worshipped by Isaac and protected him. Later, when Jacob went with his clan to Egypt, he brought sacrifices in Beer-Sheba to this god of Isaac (Gen 46:1). However, it is not that is mentioned in Gen. 46:1 but rather the generic אלהי אביו יצחק. Speiser, *Genesis* 247, observes, “The appellative (Heb. פחד) remains obscure. It may have here its customary sense of ‘fear,’ in which case some references to the ordeal of Isaac (xxii) may be implicit; or it might be an altogether different term.” Most modern commentators consider פחד as referring to a deity but differ on its specific meaning. Some contend that פחד יצחק was a god of its own, the personal god of Isaac, and that the identification of פחד יצחק with God came later. Thus, פחד יצחק = “god of Isaac.”

פחד יצחק occurs.⁸ It seems logical to assign פחד a meaning that is consistent with these three of its occurrences. The phrase פחד יצחק is of the same stock as אביר יעקב (Gen 49:24, Isa 49:26, 60:16, Ps 132:2, 5) or אביר ישראל (Isa 1:24), where the word preceding the name of the forefather is not a nomen. Indeed, having two names for different entities next to each other would be awkward in Biblical Hebrew, unless they are items of a list. Taking פחד to be the numen whose appearance terrified Isaac, as has been suggested by many, provides good sense for פחד in all three of its occurrences (Gen 31:42, 53, and Job 4:14) as a divine entity.⁹

The interpretation of פחד יצחק that is generally favored relies on the standard meaning of פחד = “fear” and Isaac’s presumed experience of fear at the Binding of Isaac. Yet, Koch claims that understanding פחד יצחק as the “god whom Isaac fears or feared” is completely incongruous with the textual evidence. The root פחד does not occur in the Tetrateuch and the older historical books, except in 1Sam 11:7, where a panicked fright affects an entire nation. Nowhere is it possible to associate with פחד (in contrast to יארה) anything akin to the positive experience of God’s closeness. The religious history of the patriarchs reflects no notion such as fear of the deity.¹⁰ Moreover, it is also obvious that this interpretation is not congruous with אביר יעקב (“Mighty One of Jacob”).

The association of פחד יצחק with Isaac’s experience at the Binding, while not compelling, is certainly suggestive enough that it cannot be discounted. At the same time, Koch’s observation is not entirely without merit. A god

⁸ Alt, God 33. Regarding פחד יצחק Alt says: “... we have here the last traces of an older usage no longer found elsewhere, in which פחד may be used for God, in poetry at least if perhaps not in prose. According to this, פחד יצחק would be an archaic title of the numen whose appearance terrified Isaac and thereby tied him to himself for ever.” It seems that the tradition of פחד being a numen persisted and found its expression in the theophoric name צלפחד = צל + פחד (Num 26:33, etc.). Note also that the biblical concept פחד יהוה (1Sam 11:7, Isa 2:10) or פחד אלהים (Ps 36:2) is associated with God’s fearful appearance.

⁹ Koch, פחד יצחק 113. Koch concludes with a preference for the derivation of פחד in פחד יצחק from pahda “thigh.” In his view the thigh is a euphemism for the genitalia, which symbolize the procreative power of the ancestor, continuing to live in his descendants.

¹⁰ The Bible tells about the Patriarchs’ custom to go to Egypt each time that a famine struck Canaan. Abraham goes to Egypt (Gen 12:10-20), Isaac almost went to Egypt (Gen 26:2), Jacob sends his sons there, and eventually the Israelites are enslaved there. Hagar was Egyptian (Gen 16:1), her son Ishmael marries an Egyptian (Gen 21:21). Finally, the most distinguishing bodily mark of an Israelite male, circumcision, was probably adopted from the custom of Egyptian priests (Haran, Ages 33).

that is primarily feared would not be in character with his descriptions in the Bible (Gen 26:2, 24). Perhaps the solution to this incongruity is in the recognition that פחד had for Isaac multiple meanings, one of which had an Egyptian pedigree. Southern Levant's geographic proximity to Egypt naturally led to ongoing relationships and mutual influence. Egypt pursued trade, conducted military campaigns, and maintained garrisons in the area. Its presence and influence is clearly attested by archaeological finds at various sites. We also note that in the patriarchal period Canaan was under the political aegis of Egypt.¹¹ Biblical evidence strongly suggests that Egypt played an important role in the history of the Patriarchs. One can assume that Isaac, who was raised by the Egyptian Hagar and roamed south of Be'er Sheba, was conversant in Egyptian. Perhaps, Isaac described God's appearance to him using the word פחד, which connoted to him not only "fear" but also "energy" or "vigor" (as of a king), as the Egyptian word pht(y) means. Thus, pht(y) of Isaac would be an excellent parallel of אביר יעקב ("Mighty One of Jacob").

Why did the author of the book of Job use the numen פחד?¹² It has been noted by many that this author made a considerable effort to give his book an archaic tenor suitable for the Patriarchal period.¹³ He could not use אלהי יצחק since the phrase was closely associated with Isaac's clan and would undermine the universal nature of the dialogue. His solution was to use part of the phrase and let his Israelite audience make the proper association.

¹¹ The question "Why did Jacob use אלהי יצחק rather than אלהי יצחק?" troubled Jewish Medieval commentators. Rashi explains that Jacob did not want to say אלהי יצחק because Isaac was still alive and the name of the deity is not associated with one of the righteous (צדיק) as long as he is alive (Tanhuma on Toldot 7). In Gen 28:13 the term אלהי יצחק is used by God because at that time Isaac lost his sight and was considered as dead. However, Jacob was afraid to make such a judgement and therefore he used פחד יצחק. Though clever, this explanation rests entirely on homiletic reasoning. Ibn Ezra felt that Isaac's experience and devotion during his ordeal are a merit that extends to his son. This explanation cannot obviously apply to both cases in which אלהי יצחק occurs.

¹² Haran, Ages 29-30. Haran says: "It is well known that poetry tends to use archaic terms, but each type of poetry uses archaic terms that are fitting for it". The Book of Job stands out in its use of ancient names for the deity. For instance, אלהי occurs 31 times, אל occurs 55 times, אלה occurs 41 times, אלהים occurs 14 times (but only 4 times in the Dialogue). The Tetragrammaton occurs only once in the Dialogue.

¹³ Driver, Problems 73. Driver's emendation of רב into ריב, "quaking" makes good sense (cf. Ps 38:4). Already Ehrlich, on the basis of Job 33:19, emended רב into ריב rendering it "pain." However, the sense "pain" does not fit the context. Eliphaz trembles and shudders before the Divine being awed.

Job 4:14,

פחד קראני ורעדה ורב עצמותי הפחיד

*means:*Pahad called me, and a trembling, and quaking shook my bones¹⁴

where Pahad is a numen, of the kind encountered by Isaac in the ancient past. This was understood by the audience to imply that the revelation to Eliphaz took place in the patriarchal times causing him to tremble, and shaking up his skeleton.

To maintain the archaic nature of the Book of Job its author seems to hark back in Job 4:14 to an ancient tradition of a god that revealed himself to Isaac. Neither the audience nor the author probably understood פחד יצחק or פחד any different than “God.” However, in the period of nascent monotheism described in Genesis, where the first revelations of the deity occur, they bear a personal stamp. Isaac’s impressions of the deity were its awesomeness, vigor, and energy subsumed in the homophonic words פחד and pht. The author of Job by invoking פחד was only interested in its antiquity, in an ancient name of God. He invoked the conceptual chain פחד => פחד יצחק => God. In this context, Job 4:14 should be translated *God called me, and a trembling, and quaking shook my bones.*

Summary

I argue that the standard interpretations of Job 4:14 that assume פחד = “fear” and קרא = קרה “happen, occur” do not provide a natural, unforced, textually and contextually consistent understanding of the text. It is suggested that in Job 4:14 פחד is a numen, קרא is “call,” and the verse means “God called me, and a trembling, and quaking shook my bones.”

Zusammenfassung

Meine Argumentation geht davon aus, dass die Interpretationen von Hiob 4:14, welche annehmen dass פחד = “Angst” und קרא = קרה “geschehen, passieren” bedeuten, kein natürliches, zwangsloses, textuelles und kontextuales Verständnis des Textes wiedergeben. Es wird vorgeschlagen, dass, פחד in Hiob 4:14 ein Numen und קרא einen “Aufruf” bezeichnen. Der Vers bedeutet “Gott rief mich, und Zittern und Schwanken erschütterten meine Knochen”.¹⁵

¹⁴ Tur-Sinai, Book 82. Tur-Sinai translates רב as “terror” but offers no rationale. This meaning too does not fit the context.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Dr. J. Wiener for his help with German translations.

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Dr. Aron Pinker
 11519 Monticello Avenue
 Silver Spring, Maryland 20902 U.S.A.
aron_pinker@hotmail.com