Sefat Emet- Parashat Kedoshim
Rabbi Michael Balinsky

Leviticus 19: 14. You shall not curse a deaf person. You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person, and you shall fear your God. I am the Lord.

The *Sefat Emet* in this teaching expands upon *Rashi's* explanation of the connection between the possibility of taking advantage of someone and the requirement the Torah makes to fear God. Why is the fear of God connected directly to these *mitzvot*? *Rashi* sees the admonition to fear God here as a reminder to the person that all is known, if not to others, but certainly to God. Fear of God will help insure a deep sense of honesty and integrity within the individual and a wholeness which guides his interactions with others. It is not enough for the Torah to prohibit placing a stumbling block before the blind. In these areas of interaction with others, which involve more than actions but also perceptions, the additional imperative of fearing God is needed to insure proper behavior.

Professor Zev Harvey summarizes this well:

> In *Bava Metzia* 58b, Rabbi Judah explains that all these cases are instances of "something relegated to the heart" *(davar ha-masur la-lev),* that is, something that cannot be known by observers. For example, one must not pretend to be interested in buying something one does not have the money to buy (a violation of Leviticus 25:17). Again, one must not advise someone to sell his good field and buy a jackass, and then purchase his field as soon as he has sold it (a violation of Leviticus 19:14).
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> The biblical phrase "and thou shalt fear thy God" is used, thus, in situations in which one is able to do something unethical without it being known to other human beings. The one who pretended interest in buying what he had no money to buy can claim that at the time he thought he had the money; and the one who gave the bad advice about the field and the jackass can claim that at the time he thought it was good advice. In these situations, the unethical deed is not knowable to other human beings, but is known only to God, who knows all thoughts. In such cases where the fear of human beings cannot prevent one from doing the unethical deed, only the fear of God can do so. "The fear of God" ("and thou shalt fear thy God") in these Levitical texts is thus a fundamental ethical principle, and seems to be a conceptual forerunner of the Rabbinic concept of *yirat shamayim.* One Rabbinic text that echoes this ethical principle is found in *Tanna de-bei Eliyahu,* 23 and recited daily in the morning prayers prior to *Pesukei de-Zimrah:* "Let a person always be a fearer of God *[yerei shamayim]* in secret, assent to the truth, and speak the truth in his heart:' Yirat ShamayimThe Awe Reverence and Fear of God.

Rashi on Leviticus 19:14

ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל: לפני הסומא בדבר לא תתן עצה שאינה הוגנת לו, אל תאמר מכור שדך וקח לך חמור, ואתה עוקף עליו ונוטלה הימנו:

You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person: Before a person who is "blind" regarding a matter, you shall not give advice that is improper for him. [For instance,] do not say to someone: "Sell your field and buy a donkey [with the proceeds]" while [in truth,] you plan to cheat

him since you yourself will take it from him [by lending him money and taking the donkey as collateral. He will not be able to take the field because a previous creditor has a lien on it.] - [*Torath Kohanim* 19:34]

ויראת מאלקיך: לפי שהדבר הזה אינו מסור לבריות לידע אם דעתו של זה לטובה או לרעה, ויכול להשמט ולומר לטובה נתכוונתי, לפיכך נאמר בו ויראת מאלהיך המכיר מחשבותיך. וכן כל דבר המסור ללבו של אדם העושהו ואין שאר הבריות מכירות בו, נאמר בו ויראת מאלקיך:

and you shall fear your God: [Why is this mentioned here?] Because this matter [of misadvising someone] is not discernible by people, whether this person had good or evil intentions, and he can avoid [being recriminated by his victim afterwards] by saying, "I meant well!" Therefore, concerning this, it says, "and you shall fear your God," Who knows your thoughts! Likewise, concerning anything known to the one who does it, but to which no one else is privy, Scripture says, "and you shall fear your God." - [*Torath Kohanim* 19:34]

Sefat Emet

שפת אמת ויקרא פרשת קדושים

ברש"י דבר המסור ללבו של אדם נאמר בו ויראת מאלקיך. פשוט שע"י היראה יכולין לקיים דבורים המסורים ללב. אמנם ג"כ י"ל שאלה המצות התלוין בלב ע"י שמקיימין אותן זוכין ליראה. כי כל מצוה במעשה מתקן מעשה האדם. וכמו כן מצות התלוין במחשבת לב האדם מתקנין לבו של האדם. וכן שמעתי מפ"ק אא"ז מו"ר ז"ל ע"פ ולא תונו כו' את עמיתו ויראת מאלהיך כו' שע"י שמירת אונאת דברים זוכין ליראה. ובאמת ב' הפירושים אמת ע"פ מ"ש שכר מצוה מצוה. ובוודאי ע"י עומק היראה יכולין לקיים יותר מצות התלוין בלב לכן שכר המצוה היראה כדי לקיים עי"ז המצוה בטוב יותר וכן לעולם

Rashi writes that likewise, concerning anything *hamoser lilibo shel adam,* known to the one who does it, but to which no one else is privy, Scripture says, "and you shall fear your God." It appears clearly that through fear of God one is able to fulfill and observe those commandments to which only the person is privy. We can also say that when we observe these commandments which depend upon personal integrity, something relegated to the heart, we are merited to achieve fear of God. For any mitzvah requiring an action is a *tikkun* for a human action. Similarly, *mitzvot* dependant on something relegated to the heart act as a *tikkun* for the human heart.

I similarly heard from my grandfather that the command Leviticus 25:17: You shall not therefore defraud one another; but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. This prohibition not to defraud someone includes not wounding someone's feelings, *ona'at devarim*. By being careful in not wounding someone you merit fear of God.

In truth both interpretations are true according to the teaching that the reward of doing a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*. Surely through a deepening of one's fear of God you can better fulfill those *mitzvot* relegated to the heart and therefore the reward for the mitzvah of fear is in order that you can fulfill the mitzvah even better. ..

Translation Rabbi Michael Balinsky

However, the *Sefat Emet* is not satisfied with Rashi's explanation . In other places in the Torah, fear of God is seen as an end in itself. It is an independent mitzvah and an ideal state of religious consciousness. The *Sefat Emet* posits a second approach, that having proper fear of God is not necessarily the beginning point or a pre- condition or an ethical principle, but the end goal of someone who behaves with wholeness. It is a spiritual consciousness achieved through the move towards wholeness, honesty and integrity and it is not a necessary condition to create wholeness and integrity. How I engage others through my actions and relationship to them will improve and grow my consciousness and fear of God.

He accepts that both explanations are correct and true. One is then left with a spiral that deeply links our relationship with others as a crucial dimension of our religious growth which then continues to inform our relationship with others. Fear of God is a reminder how to behave and a spiritual goal for which to strive. Ethics and spiritual growth merge.