Shalom Carmy

Rabbi Carmy is editor of *Tradition*.

"YET MY SOUL DREW BACK" FEAR OF GOD AS EXPERIENCE AND COMMANDMENT IN AN AGE OF ANXIETY

> Fear without love—surely there is here a deficiency of love; love without fear—there is nothing here at all.
> (*R. Yitzchak Hutner*)[1]

> If we rabbis prayed properly, we would not be so afraid of the synagogue presidents and boards of directors.
> (*R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik*)[2]

> Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
> Guilty of dust and sin.
> (*George Herbert*)[3]

> No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.
> (*C. S. Lewis*)[4]

I

They say that science has made it harder for people to fear God. Once upon a time, they say, illness was something over which people felt powerless, and so the sense of absolute dependence on God filled our spiritual horizon. Nowadays, we place ourselves under medical care first, and think of God second, if at all. Once we prayed for an adequate harvest. Today, when nature withholds her bounty, we either pay higher prices for tomatoes or eat something else.

Far from the fleshpots of Modern Orthodoxy, R. Yehezkel Lowenstein, addressing the Ponivezh Yeshiva in Bnei Berak only fifteen years after the Holocaust, seems to think that even his hearers are prone to false security:

TRADITION 41:3 / © 2008
Rabbinical Council of America

> Uprooting evil is long and hard work, and it is possible only after recognizing the physical suffering that is liable to befall one because of his vices and sins. The reason one doesn't think of this is that human beings have presumptions, so to speak, about this world. One feels secure in one's world and thinks it impossible that one will be harmed and will lose this world. Therefore one does not contemplate and fear physical punishment. One only lacks confidence in the world to come, and therefore we are more affected by promises about the world to come. For since we are not confident about the world to come, and we ask God to grant us the world to come, therefore we are agitated and worried that we will not merit the world to come."[5]

Has modern science indeed actually made us so secure? Leaving aside the unpredictable features of diagnosis and treatment even today, I want to ask: do scientifically controllable facts truly constitute the central reality for most of us? Are we really so assured that we are justified in having little room for God? Perhaps the opposite is true. Leave aside, again, the exceptional events that obsess some—terrorist acts, natural disasters and so forth—which, though most are sure they will never fall prey to, nonetheless happen. Can we honestly claim that our lives are free of uncertainty in the areas that count? You work for a company, let's say you even have job security and enjoy success: a new boss, appointed by people who know you not, nor have your interests at heart, comes equipped with a new set of priorities, and, from out of the blue, your situation is radically different from your once reasonable expectations. At home, in an era of family instability and a culture of divorce, you wonder whether you are exempt from the failures that plague some of your friends. Because sheer physical survival is not your primary problem in life, these anxieties and tribulations are more important to you than they would have been in another era. No, science certainly doesn't bestow upon you an easy mastery over your life.

Moreover, the "once upon a time," before modern life supposedly eliminated the need for a fear of God, is earlier than you might think. Previous moderns who chose to do so dismissed the fear of God without ever appealing to the marvels of omnipotent technology. Three centuries ago, Voltaire thought he had refuted Pascal's evocation of the terror aroused in him by the vast empty spaces that the astronomy of his day had discovered by pointing to the bustle of burgeoning urban centers. "As for me," he writes, "when I look at Paris or London I see no reason whatever for falling into this despair that M. Pascal is talking about; I see a town that in no way resembles a desert island, but is peopled, opulent,

civilized, a place where men are as happy as human nature allows."[6] Happy city dwellers we are, yet we know, as Voltaire did not know (or pretended not to know), that terrible loneliness and abandonment are often experienced in the midst of all that is opulent and civilized. *Plus ça change*—the desire to evade fear and terror are perennial; the rationalizations change, the underlying reality remains the same.

Someone suggested that the age of science may even enhance our sense of divine presence and human dependence on Him. She cites the famous aphorism ascribed to the Hafets Hayyim, according to whom all the inventions of modern science strengthen faith: the telephone, for example, demonstrates that what is spoken here can be heard elsewhere, thus reinforcing our sense of divine omnipresence. Others react that this may have been the way the Hafets Hayyim perceived the world, but is not typical of the average modern man in the street. I have a different problem: to me the thought that my private world can be listened in on, via up to date technology, suggests not only an analogy to the divine omniscience I am committed to, but also the very real threat of being spied on. Rather than enhance my fear of God, it brings to the fore my fear of the secret police.

Why doesn't the Hafets Hayyim seem to share my worry? Because he takes it for granted that his audience accepts nominal belief in the governance of God. God's involvement in human affairs, however, is not always clearly manifested. As R. Israel Salanter put it in his *Iggeret ha-Musar*—human beings are bound by their intellect but free in their imagination.[7] Comprehending the world through the imagination, the tangible present seems more real than invisible eternity. This principle explains many cases of weakness of will, what Aristotle called *akrasia*: the doctor, for example, who warns his patients to stop but continues smoking himself. Just as one overindulges in food and drink, because the pleasures of the table are imminent while the morning after is remote, so the prospect of divine attention is not as vivid to us as it ought to be. If R. Yohanan ben Zakkai (*Berakhot* 28b) wished for his disciples to fear God as much as they fear man, it is presumably because he knew that human surveillance is harder to ignore than the eye of God. For the Hafets Hayyim, the danger to faith is the feeling that "God does not see; God has abandoned the earth" (to quote Ezekiel 8:12); the telescope and the telephone reinforce our faith in the presence of things unseen and thus fortify our belief in God. The fear of God central to this conception is perfectly encapsulated in Vayikra's repeated phrase "and you shall fear your God, I am the Lord," appended to prohibitions like offer-

ing misleading advice, taking advantage of others, taking usury, oppressing the slave, or the injunction to honor the elderly, as interpreted by Rashi: since in these cases one can easily disguise one's motives, we are reminded that one cannot do so completely unobserved. Regarding these verses it may be worth adding R. David Zvi Hoffmann's suggestion that these sins involve the abuse of people who cannot defend themselves and thus depend on divine protection.[8]

I have no wish to undervalue this traditional Musar insight. My concern, however, in this essay is with fear of God, and not exclusively with belief in divine omniscience and omnipresence. For many whose piety is superior to mine, the very awareness of divine presence is tantamount to the fear of God: "the lion has roared, who does not fear?" (Amos 3:8). There are great, unforgettable moments, when Amos's prophetic words correspond to our own experience. And in those moments the Musar formula is correct: our awareness of God, like that of Amos, engenders an overpowering motive to obey Him: "God spoke, who will not prophesy?"

Yet our hearts do not always resonate in this manner. One reason is the one we mentioned, the one that troubled the *ba'alei Musar*: the failure of our imagination, or rather its failure to testify to what we know intellectually. I believe that there are other factors, and that we will neither understand ourselves, nor understand what fear of God is for us, and should be for us, unless we analyze these factors in all their complexity. If the Hafets Hayyim worried about the imaginative failure to fear, we should worry that our fear is the wrong kind of fear.

Given our sense that piety has declined in the modern and postmodern age, and the general spiritual shallowness of a community that is both vulnerable to the dominant secular atmosphere and disinclined to serious self-criticism, one is tempted to regard our confusion about the fear of God as a purely negative phenomenon, the best cure for which is a heavy dose of emotionally loaded Musar preaching. Nevertheless, I believe that we would do well to subject our ideas about fear of God to careful analysis in the hope that understanding will fortify our religious sensitivity.

There are at least three factors that complicate our conception of what it means to fear God properly: First, as we have noted, fear of God is in "competition," so to speak, with other kinds of fear: fear of human beings, fear of natural disasters, fear of our own potentialities. Sometimes these fears motivate us to act rightly, as when we refrain from sin or do our duty for the sake of the social or natural consequences; sometimes our fears prevent us from obeying God, because we are swayed by

concern about the unpleasant consequences of acting rightly or abstaining from evil. Sometimes the concern itself for social or natural effects helps to constitute our positive relationship to God.

Second, the fear of God, in Jewish sources, refers to a range of normative experiences and motives. Jewish ethical and halakhic literature distinguishes between fear of punishment (*yir'at ha-onesh*), on the one hand, and the reverence or fear, associated with divine sublimity or the numinous (*yir'at ha-romemut*), on the other hand. Theological liberals and moral latitudinarians obsessively denigrate the former as a means to presuming the latter. However, as we shall see, both Halakha and common decency require a combination of both strands of experience. Third, there is a creative tension between the fear of God, in all its varieties, and other normative feelings that seem to contravene fear. The most notable of these is the love of God; others are the commandment to imitate Him and to cleave unto Him (*devekut*). In the list of 613 Biblical commandments, the *mitsva* to fear God is not derived from the verses in Vayikra that link fear of God to specific prohibitions and injunctions, but from the passages in Devarim where fear of God is joined to these other experiential imperatives.[9]

Viewed comprehensively, the theme of *yir'at ha-Shem* (fear of God) and its kindred experiences and commandments comes close to being co-extensive with the Jewish moral orientation and with the Jewish experience of God. This terminological ambiguity threatens to make the investigation unmanageable because so often the phrase *yir'at Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) and its cognates are used so broadly that it becomes a synonym or synecdoche for Jewish piety, and this imprecision tends to blunt the acuity of any attempted analysis. Our goal is not to exhaust the literature. We intend rather to highlight some of the obvious elements of the mitsva, including some that are regularly overlooked, some impediments to its fulfillment, and some ways in which it can be enhanced. Let us turn to the phenomenology and the practical implications of the fear of God, and its relation to love.

II. TYPES OF FEAR

Fear is inherently distressing. We dislike fear. The most natural response to fear, virtually by definition, is the desire to avoid it, either by disabling the cause of the fear, or by fleeing the occasion of fear. In the face of this fundamental, universal, perennial fact, it seems superfluous to invoke technological progress or the rise of the modern metropolis

to explain why many people avoid thoughts that encourage or mandate fear of anyone, including fear of God. Given the natural inclination to avoid fear, the first question that comes to mind, it seems, is not why people no longer fear God much, but why they would want to fear God at all. Why should anyone regard the experience of fear as valuable in itself? The modernist seems to have reason on his side in feeling that a deity who commands fear is not promulgating the kind of religion that he would care to patronize. To cultivate the experience of fear deliberately, to accept the commandment of fear as part of a divinely bestowed regimen, carries a flavor of paradox.

At least three significant strategies promise to dispel the air of paradox. The first understands fear of God as a healthy means to an end—namely, moral obedience. Precisely because fear impels us to avoid the source of fear, it exercises a potent influence on behavior. A child is taught to fear fire in order to deter him from playing with matches or putting her hand on the gas burner. So too, the fear of divine disapproval or retribution, as already noted, serves to motivate flagging commitment, to turn away from sin and to sustain the effort necessary to do one's duty. Thus *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, to take a representative medieval work, states that the reason we are commanded to fear God, which is clear to anyone with eyes to see, is that fear of punishment deters sin. From this perspective, God wants us to fear Him for our own good.

This approach is satisfactory up to a point. It provides a justification that agrees with everyday utilitarian ways of thinking about the instrumental value of fear. Just as adults accustomed to fire are not oppressed by their fear of it, so this kind of fear of God, once we internalize the norm, mellows into a sober caution of sin that no longer terrifies. There is even pleasure in recollecting the education in fear that makes us better able to conduct our lives. R. Nissim of Gerona applies the verse "Rejoice in trembling" (Psalms 2:10) to the sense of spiritual wholesomeness that accompanies the acquisition of this habit of mind.[10]

Yet because this approach to the fear of God focuses on the human inclination to sin, it is also problematic. If fear of God is merely a prophylactic, what place should it occupy in the ideal spiritual constitution? Augustine, forced to make room for the fear of God in the world to come, on the basis of Psalm 19 ("The fear of God is pure and everlasting") explains that this fear cannot be the fear that frightens away from evil, but rather the fear that helps one to persist in a good. Fully conscious of the oxymoron, he proposes the term "serene fear" for the eschatological form of punishment fear, by which he presumably meant

an intellectual knowledge that God's wrath deserves to be feared without the occurrence of fear as an emotion.[11] Others, however, who oppose embracing fear of sin in any guise as a permanent ingredient in their spiritual outlook, would dismiss it as suitable only to those whose inherent motivation to act rightly is weak or undeveloped. The tendency to get beyond fear of sin is accentuated in our culture, which does not treat sin or moral failure with sufficient gravity. Hence we don't imagine ourselves in need of sharp and constant reminders of our moral and religious fallibility, and concern about such matters is judged obsessive and damaging to the self-esteem we are set to cultivate with an earnestness that borders on the ferocious.

Consequently the first strategy soon requires assistance from the second. One distinguishes between the lower fear of God, which is merely the fear of punishment, and the higher fear, *yir'at ha-romemut*, characterized by a sense of awe or reverence or sublimity; truly it resembles love of God more than the inferior kind of fear. Awe is patently different from ordinary fear: the intellectual underpinning of fear is the belief that one is threatened; awe entails the contemplation or encounter with what is overwhelming, majestic, and grand. Of course, the distinction between higher and lower types of fear, well attested in the classic medieval literature, is indispensable for the phenomenology of God-fearing. Anyone skeptical about the pedigree of the distinction can find it in the aftermath of the encounter at Sinai (Exodus 20:17). Moses tells the people not to fear, for God's will is that "His fear be upon your faces, that you sin not." If the word *yir'a* has the same meaning throughout the verse, there is a straightforward contradiction: the people should not fear, because they should fear! Obviously there must be a distinction between the fear born of terror at the theophany and a more reflective fear that is the intended result of the experience.[12]

According to the verse just quoted, the goal of refined fear of God is to transform the raw experience of terror into an inner apprehension that precludes sinning.[13] Indeed, we should beware the temptation to use the distinction between levels of fear to downplay fear of sin and punishment. Because fear of punishment is unpleasant and because we are so desperate to think well of ourselves, we are often tempted to ignore the fear of divine punishment. We rush ahead, organizing an accelerated graduation from the unsophisticated category of retribution-fear into the ranks of the elite whose experience of God is identical with a profound reverence. Apart from the likelihood of self-deception about our own spiritual state, there is also a danger that such easily

achieved claims to reverence may remain little more than an aesthetic affair, like that experienced at the theater, attaching itself to religious images in place of Hamlet or Lear, where we reminisce or fantasize about reverence for God instead of fearing Him in the here and now.

For individuals who claim to have taken the fast track to *yir'at ha-romemut*, halakha's stubborn adherence to *yir'at ha-onesh* (fear of punishment) as a necessary component of the *mitsva* becomes a problem. Rambam provides an experiential and intellectual description of the encounter with God that engenders His love and His fear: love is the thirst to know Him, rooted in our consciousness of His infinite wisdom; fear is finite man's movement of recoil before the Infinite. This account says nothing about guilt, sin, or fear of divine judgment. In *Hil. Berakhot* 1:4, he teaches that the recitation of blessings of pleasure and mitsvot and thanksgiving serves to "remember the Creator always and to fear Him."[14] Again, no guilt or fear of punishment. Moreover, in *Hil. Teshuva* 10, he disparages fear based on punishment as appropriate only to the spiritually immature.[15] At the same time, the definition of fear in *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* picks out fear of punishment as the primary characteristic of *Yir'a*.[16] It is as if the Halakha insisted on catering to the lowest common standard instead of recognizing that standard's irrelevance to spiritually mature people.

It is terribly easy to satirize the self-serving ingredients in this outlook that disparages fear of punishment. The normative perspective of Halakha and simple self-knowledge confirm that we do not outgrow *yir'at ha-onesh*. But the obstacle here is not only the element of self-deception. There is something misleading, on phenomenological grounds, with the way we oppose the higher fear to the lower fear. Again, the distinction itself is well founded. But the problem with distinctions is that too often, in exhibiting the differences among different categories, we lose sight of what they have in common. The primary sources—most notably Tanakh—present in the raw, and without alluding explicitly to philosophical distinctions, an undifferentiated experience of fear; the medieval classification, for all its validity, comes later and, to that extent is secondary.

The oracle of doom in Isaiah 2, for example, contains a dramatic portrayal of fear and terror in the face of the divine. It is possible to read this chapter as a story of sin and punishment. The prophecy begins with chastisement for sins of idolatry, avarice and, in the most comprehensive sense, pride and arrogance. The "day" of the Lord is manifested in a frantic desire to flee from God, to hide from His crushing presence;

human pretenses are humbled. The retributive reading would view this frightening scene as no more and no less than the punishment inflicted upon the sin of pride. Yet the prophet is saying more than that: humility, the desire to flee and to hide, is not only the punishment exacted by an angry deity for sinful arrogance. They are presented as the appropriate response to the overwhelming experience of divine Infinity and Mastery. The sense of awe and terror engendered by the consciousness of sin reflects the same reality that Rambam describes as a response to the magnificence of divine wisdom.

When R. Soloveitchik wishes to evoke the numinous, the sense of reverence and awe that is an integral part of religious experience, he cites Isaiah 2 among other Biblical passages:

> To come close to God . . . is tantamount to self-effacement. Contact with Him undermines the very existence of man. The great fire engulfs the little candle. Infinity is not only the womb from which finitude emerges but also the bottomless abyss into which it plunges in its quest for the unattainable: "Enter into the rock and hide there in the dust for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty."[17]

This blurring of the lines between fear of punishment and the encounter with divine Infinity, is not accidental. To consider God's grandeur and our own smallness necessarily imbues us with an overpowering awareness of the magnitude of our debt to Him and profound dismay at the thought that we have failed Him and offended against Him. Conversely, confronting our sinfulness deepens the awareness of our unworthiness to stand before Him. Thus ontological finitude and moral guilt reinforce each other. In George Herbert's "Love," the soul draws back, laden with both "dust" and "sin," alluding to Job's final confession of insignificance and unworthiness (Job 42:6) which emerges, as we recall, not from remorse for his sins, but as response to the divine *mysterium tremendum*.

Alas, the catastrophic mood of Isaiah 2 is rarely part of our mediocre everyday religious experience. Even the minority for whom it is not too intense may be unable to make anything of the puzzling notion of flight and hiding from God. We will return to this text later. For the moment it is important to recognize that such imagery, and the powerful emotional response it precipitates, cannot be cleanly dissected into a fear of punishment, on the one hand, and the exalted fear of God's magnificence, on the other hand. Experientially, the two motives for fear are complementary, not contradictory. As we shall see, one of the strengths of R. Soloveitchik's teaching about fear and love of God is his insistence

on the complex relationship between "lower" and "higher" types of fear and love.

If, as I have suggested, we invoke too eagerly the distinction between different motives for fear of God in explaining our everyday religious existence, appealing to a distinction not readily accessible to introspection, perhaps we correspondingly neglect the more evident distinction between immediate, imminent, even instinctive fear of God and a more cognitive, reflective fear. In its unadulterated incarnation, the former does not depend on the beliefs of the individual who experiences fear—flinching from a quick serpentine motion, for instance, without first verifying whether the apparition is a snake or merely a piece of rope. Sometimes (as with a harmless snake or other phobias) fear declares itself even when we know there is nothing to fear: the amygdala, scientists hypothesize, reacts fearfully faster than the response mediated through the cortex that overrides the fear as groundless.[18] Philosophers who view emotions like fear as essentially cognitive (and my own inclinations run in that direction) may feel compelled to deny such reactions the status of emotions. From this perspective, fear requires a propositional attitude towards the object that is causing the fear; a cat, on this account, cannot fear dogs, because it has no belief that the dog will attack, and can best be described as being in a "state of fear," a physiological condition free of reflection.[19]

Traditional commentators may have captured something like this semantic distinction when they tried to explain the difference between the Biblical words *yir'a* and *pahad*. Rashi (Deuteronomy 11:25, following Sifre) defines *pahad* (when parallel to *yir'a*) as affecting those who are nearby, while *mora* describes the reaction of those far away; he then states that *pahad* is sudden, while *mora* is a long-standing worry. *Pahad* is thus caused by immediate perception, imminent rather than distant, sudden rather than given to reflection.[20]

Many intelligent religious people would view this kind of instinctive fear as inferior to fear of punishment. Fear of retribution, at least, is a rational response to a potential threat. There is nothing irrational about an individual who chooses to reinforce his, or her, fear of God, either by meditating on the harm caused by sin, or by arousing sensitivity to the sacred and to the greatness of God along the lines urged by the Rambam and others. As R. Soloveitchik puts it: "*Pahad* and love are contradictory, *yir'a* and love are not contradictory."[21] The experience associated with *pahad*, however, does not seem dependent on reflection. If suddenness plays a constitutive role, it bears a disquieting resemblance to being startled involuntarily by a loud noise or a snake. Aristotle taught that

being startled is not the same as being afraid: being alarmed in such cases does not impeach a man's reputation for bravery.[22] Whatever the case with courage, no Musar regimen I know advocates shouting boo at individuals as a dignified, reasonable part of their "working on" *yir'at ha-Shem*. Yet, if the goal is to shock the individual with a reminder of his psychic fragility and dependence on God, a sudden fright does the job as effectively, in the short run, as more sublime methods. Netziv says that God came to Moses and Aaron "suddenly" (Numbers 12:3) in order to frighten them. Ibn Ezra cites a view according to which Jacob's entreaty for divine help (Genesis 49:18) was his frightened reaction to the image of a snake representing his son Dan. In this connection, it is worth remembering that the prophecy in Isaiah 2 speaks constantly of the *pahad* aroused by God's overwhelming majesty.[23]

So far we have discussed the value of fear as a motive to obedience and as an opportunity for spiritual exaltation. Despite the initial expectation that fear of punishment serves only to spur obedience and that sublime fear addresses man's higher religious aspirations, we have seen that the phenomenological and psychological reality is more complicated. The overpowering fear of God that reduces the human being to confession of finitude and insufficiency cannot be separated from the knowledge of having fallen short in His service, and awareness of inadequacy before the moral claim of the Infinite leads directly to *yir'at ha-romemut*.

To these practical and emotional motives one may add a third, intellectual rationale for fear of God. Emotions like fear are more than events in the human nervous system. As we know through our reasoning capacity, we also grasp reality through properly functioning emotional capacities. Those who truly crave the most important kind of knowledge, that is the knowledge of God, and who believe that knowledge is not merely, or even primarily, a matter of knowing the truth of all the right propositions, would desire to experience the fear of God in all its varieties, both *yir'at ha-onesh* and *yir'at ha-romemut*. The inherently distressing features of the experience would not deter such individuals. Love of truth is sometimes strong enough to cast out the fear of fear.[24]

Although I do not wish to ignore this philosophical thread in the quest for authentic fear of God, most of us, a large part of the time, prefer the easy life to the examined life. Therefore, it is unwise to assign dominant status to the pure desire for theological truth. As we shall see momentarily, when we discuss R. Soloveitchik's doctrine on love and fear of God, giving appropriate weight to the "lower," primitive, biological sources of religious phenomena has its pragmatic advantages as well.

III. LOVE VS. FEAR?

The commandment to fear God is routinely paired off with the commandment to love Him. Our present purpose is not to survey the extensive literature on the love of God, but to better elucidate the role of fear. As with the varieties of fear itself, we must guard against the theorist's inclination to overdraw the contrast between the two. As with the different levels of fear, we must also beware the impulse to praise love as a way of denigrating fear.

Offhand, the tendency to dispense with fear of God once one begins to speak of His love is demonstrably false and misleading. In the most basic sense, love is either an attraction to that which is loved, or the desire to promote what is loved. Fear, as the emotion corresponding to love, is either the desire to distance oneself from what is feared, or to resist and destroy it. When Rambam speaks of the love and fear of God, love is delineated as attraction and fear as recoil. In theory, however and in practice as well, one might be strongly committed to what one loves, and express that love by promoting it—caring for the welfare of a human being, furthering the success of an idea—without feeling any desire for closeness with it. And one may act against a person or idea and yet enjoy his company and feel attracted to the idea. In Rambam's account, the individual committed to God always loves God, if what is meant is the fulfillment of His will; yet there are moments when the worshipper experiences a powerful desire for His presence (love) and moments characterized by withdrawal (fear). Both are necessary.

At the outset we cited R. Hutner's dictum: "Fear without love—surely there is here a deficiency of love; love without fear—there is nothing here at all." Reflection on the classical ethical literature confirms his judgment. R. Bahye ibn Pakkuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot* is one of the most perfectionist of these treatises. He is impatient with spiritual aspirations willing to compromise the ideal. Yet, in the climactic section of the book (10:6), devoted to the love of God, when the subject is the marks identifying the lover of God, he lauds (following Exodus 20:17) "the signs of God's fear and dread upon his face." Interestingly, in this chapter the primary reason to prefer *yir'at ha-romemut* to fear of punishment is that fear independent of considerations of reward and punishment is unconditional and therefore abiding. Ramban, commenting on the commandment of love in the first section of *Shema*, offers two reasons that fear-based chastisements in Deuteronomy persist, although one might think that love makes fear superfluous: one is that fear is still needed as a

motivating factor; the other is that the truly pious person combines fear and love. Ramban betrays no sense that these two explanations are in conflict, because they are not.[25] Fear and love are intertwined.

Similarly, R. Kook asserts the Kabbalistic doctrine that the higher fear is above love alone, because only with the higher fear, whose source is *Bina*, does man understand the absolute nature of commitment to God, and only then is total love possible. In an early sermon from 1892, he suggests that we do not recite Hallel on Rosh Hashana because the ultimate judgment reflects a superior consciousness to the gesture of thanksgiving (=love) represented by Hallel. Along these lines he interprets the dispute about the permissibility of fasting on Rosh Hashana: the ideal consciousness, integrating love and fear, has no room for fasting; for those who are not capable of comprehending this, fasting may be an appropriate way of marking the awesome day.[26]

The psychological and spiritual realism that is a hallmark of R. Soloveitchik's thinking is fully in evidence in his presentation of love and fear in *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*. In the earlier sections of the work, where he focuses on the juxtaposition of "natural consciousness" (*Havaya tiv`it*) and "revelational consciousness" (*Havaya gilluyit*) he emphasizes that the natural love of God is rooted in ordinary human biology and psychology: we are attracted to God because we expect Him to satisfy various needs. For the Rav, this is no reason to disparage the "lower" love; we are biological creatures and do not leave our creaturely needs behind us any more than we outgrow the fear of harm if we offend against Him. Halakha instructs us to fear God, and it also tells us to bless Him at moments of enjoyment, in the appreciation of food and special natural phenomena.[27] The centrality of petition in halakhic prayer, which the Rav did so much to explicate, testifies that these aspects of the human condition are dignified and respectable elements in our dialogue with the Creator.[28]

This natural self-interested outlook, however, cannot transcend its finite horizons. This occurs only when God breaks into our finite world with His commanding presence at Sinai. We are enjoined to remember the fear and trembling that accompanied that event and that continues until this very day as the divine commanding voice reverberates perpetually through our lives. Yet this God-man nexus, which exhausts itself in obedience to God, does not allow for a personal relationship. That is possible only when the human being identifies with the divine commandment (*devekut*). At this stage, both fear and love are transmuted from self-centered performances into gestures of genuine identification

with the divine.[29] For our purposes, the crucial lesson is that love of God is not an alternative to fear, nor is it a stage of religious consciousness inherently superior to fear.

Despite all the halakhic, existential, and Musar evidence mentioned above, establishing the honorable status of the fear of God as a Jewish virtue and its compatibility with love, fear is often set against love. What is the basis of this negative judgment? We shall examine three types of factors: one kind of objection to fear is that, *pace* the substantiation offered above, fear is inherently inferior to love and should be so recognized. Or one may hold that fear is a valuable component of religious life but is marred by baleful side effects. Lastly, we must return to our opening question: do certain elements in modern life impede the cultivation of *yir'at ha-Shem*?

IV. LOVE BETTER THAN FEAR?

It is customary to laud the love of God as *lishmah*, something pursued for its own sake, free of instrumental calculations. This is what Hazal mean when they oppose the idea of Abraham or Job serving God from love with the alternative of serving Him from fear.[30] Rambam, in *Hilkhot Teshuva* 10, offers his magnificent vision of love of God as a kind of madness. Fear lacks a corresponding image of reckless commitment, and therefore suffers by comparison. It is disparaged as not being *lishmah*.

We tend to think of fear as driven by ulterior motives because we tend to identify fear with punishment-fear and love with unconditional love. As we have seen, however, fear is not always reducible to the calculus of self-interest. The highest praise for Abraham, the prototype of serving God out of love, is that he "feared God" (Genesis 22:14). Love, for its part, admits a variety of forms, some of which are as much *she-lo lishmah* as the inferior model of fear. Just as fear may be nothing but the desire to escape punishment, there is a love that is no more than the desire for benefit. The *Hovot ha-Levavot*, listing several levels of worship, classifies serving God for the sake of reward in this world and the next slightly below service motivated by fear of punishment, in this world and the next.[31] While unconditional commitment is superior to self-interested motivation—and that distinction is often associated with the contrast between love and fear—it is important to recognize the interaction between love and fear in their various forms.[32]

A more weighty theological formulation of the superior standing of love derives from Ramban's dictum that love corresponds to the posi-

tive *mitsvot* (*mitsvot aseh*) and that fear corresponds to the negative commandments (*mitsvot lo ta'aseh*). The halakhic principle that, in certain circumstances, positive obligations override negative ones indicates that, in the halakhic and theological arena, the works of love predominate over the imperatives of fear.[33] Explicating this principle, R. Hutner develops the insight that positive obligations, rooted in love, differ from negative precepts, rooted in fear. The latter is simply a matter of obedience to God's will; the former additionally constitutes the idea of the *mitsva*. R. Hutner's language here is opaque. At the risk of psychologizing the metaphysical, we may take him to mean that the life of the *mitsva* creates a positive identity, while adherence to prohibitions does not.[34] If the goal of religious practice is to form a positive identity, then educating towards positive actions is more important than concentrating on the necessity of avoiding sin. In concrete terms: lighting Sabbath candles, from this perspective, is more positive than refraining from violation of the Sabbath prohibitions; being a philanthropist is a more positive expression than abstaining from the abuse of people exposed to one's power.

Sound familiar? R. Hutner goes on to observe: "the discerning person recognizes that among the people of our generation it is much easier to get them to make an effort to do something good than to get them to refrain from an improper act, and this demonstrates that even the general element of good in them, hovers in the air, because in the healthy process turning away from evil is the basis of doing good." Why modern people are that way is a question for another time. The immediate moral is that any attempt to demote fear of God in the name of love founders because good intentions without self-discipline and the ability to turn away from evil lack substance.[35] Elsewhere, R. Hutner champions the integration of love and fear as expressions of different psychological powers. Love is expansive in both the practical and intellectual spheres: it reflects man's desire to do and to know. Fear contracts the scope of human initiative: refraining from action and accepting the limits of human intellectual aspiration.[36]

In view of R. Hutner's famous affinity for Maharal of Prague, his failure to engage Maharal here is telling. Maharal maintains that the virtue of fearing God does not come under the category of *imitatio Dei*, since God does not fear Himself. For that reason fear of God is lower than humility. Humility creates a community between God and man—God dwells with the humble; this cannot be said about fear.[37] R. Hutner, by contrast, holds emphatically that every component of human virtue,

fear of God included, must be rooted in God's ways. With respect to fear of God, the model is His will to contract His creativity by completing His work on the seventh day and affirming a finite world.[38]

V. IS FEAR OF GOD DEBILITATING?

The Talmud (*Megilla* 25b) discusses whether the curses and blessings and warnings in Leviticus 26 should be translated during public reading. Why not? Because dwelling on these matters could dishearten the people with thoughts of inevitable doom or motivate them to act out of fear of punishment or love of reward.[39] The fact that curtailing exposure to the word of God is even raised as a possibility implies that the concerns expressed are, in principle, legitimate. Although fear of God is a vital component of Jewish piety, allowing an intense emphasis on fear to flood the religious awareness is dangerous. Speaking of fear in general, R. Soloveitchik suggests that a modicum of fear is good, and too much is bad.[40]

Does fear of God have side effects that would deter us from its uncritical encouragement? Modern academic ideologists would say so. Two American social historians, commenting on the changes wrought by 19th-20th century capitalism, write:

> A fearful individual was no longer appropriately pious but rather risked being incapable of taking the kinds of initiatives, of displaying the kinds of confidence, desirable in the new world shaped by republican optimism and business dynamism. Fear was dangerous, and the individual who deliberately sowed it was abusing authority.[41]

The complaint about lack of initiative is echoed by R. Avigdor Nebenzal, who tells of a student whose childhood dream was to be a pilot, but who was eventually dropped from pilot training course, along with the other religious fellows. One of the officers explained that the religious were educated from childhood to obey, while the pilot requires the ability to improvise as well. Is the imputation true? R. Nebenzal, while rejecting the view that religion is inherently tied to lack of initiative, acknowledges the problem with respect to contemporary education.[42]

The social historians go further than R. Nebenzal: they indict the traditional religious mentality of deficient confidence and optimism. No doubt defenders of traditional religion can point with pride to examples of entrepreneurial resourcefulness and realism in taking the measure of human beings and situations. And in the intellectual realm I hear a

familiar voice retort: "Rabbenu Tam did not improvise? Rambam did not create? R. Hayyim of Brisk displayed no initiative?" Whether confidence in modern society and optimism are unqualified virtues is also open to question. No doubt some traditionally religious people are timid investors and unduly pessimistic in evaluating people and situations. One wonders, however, whether, at least to some extent, the objections mask a discomfort less with the fear of God than with the fear of sin. It is likely that God-fearing people, tempted by the chance to exploit new social, economic, political or technological orders, hesitate more than others due to moral qualms or concern about unforeseen consequences. If sin is as grievous an affair as religion makes it out to be, then, when in doubt, caution is advisable. It is thus possible that conscience, from the modern point of view, makes cowards of religious people, and that this side effect, if it exists, must either be tolerated or circumvented. Though there are times when we are indebted to practical boldness, the political record of recent generations indicates that caution is often justified. In any event, our firm commitment to a life of *yir'at Shamayim* and *yir'at Het* should not blind us to the need to examine how these commitments affect us.

The great role model for such self-examination is R. Kook. He was profoundly concerned about the harm caused by fear to the Jewish life of his time. Mostly, he believed that "evil, wild fear" resulted from "continued exile and persecution by base and evil enemies." The diminution of joy undermines individual elevation; even more so does it cripple the nation. "The first condition [of redemption] is removal of surplus fear from the collective soul, and particularly from the souls of the exceptional individuals. . . ."[43] He knows that "the fear of punishment that enters the bones, to the point of pervasive cringing, prevents the spread of the holy light of love and reverence toward the sublime, and this causes spiritual and physical sicknesses, to the community and the individual," and he believes that contemporary vulgar heresy (*kefira gassa*), which wrecks faith in divine providence, may serve as an antidote to excessive punishment-fear.[44] Passages like this abound in R. Kook's writings. But so does the assertion that even under ideal circumstances, fear can have deleterious effects. Discussing repentance, he argues that Yom Kippur must be followed by the joy of Sukkot because the hard work of repentance is psychologically exhausting, like a necessary but difficult surgery, and requires joyful, pleasure-filled recuperation to restore a healthy psychic balance.[45]

VI. CHEAP GRACE, HELLFIRE, SHUL PRESIDENTS—OBSTACLES TO FEAR OF GOD

So far we have considered only critiques and qualifications regarding *yir'at Shamayim* with a place in traditional Jewish thought. Before seeking distinctively modern aids to fear of God, let us deepen our understanding by thinking about some of the obstacles.

The most substantial of these is our spiritual slackness. Most of the time, reminders of our finitude and moral inadequacy are unwelcome. In our communities, equanimity about our spiritual attainments is strengthened by the low level of halakhic observance among our fellow Jews and by the moral failings of society as a whole. Since we don't hold our fellow Jews responsible for their deviance, and they are therefore beyond divine chastisement, we naturally assume that we, who are superior to them, as we see it, are likewise above trembling before God's mysterious wrath. It is all too easy to congratulate ourselves for not being as other human beings, if I may coin a phrase. It makes no sense that God would demand of us more than we have given, or that we, of all people, ought to feel uncomfortable, let alone overwhelmed, by His presence.

Liberalized Protestantism, which, in a secularized form, passes for common therapeutic wisdom, smiles on what the German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace"—in other words, "the grace we bestow on ourselves," the notion that human beings are saved by divine grace and therefore no unpleasant effort to change is required.[46] The believer has nothing to fear. Over two centuries ago, when Dr. Johnson contemplated the mournful possibility that he might be damned, and a nice clergyman wondered what he meant, he slapped him down by saying, passionately and loudly: "Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly." Even then, Boswell felt compelled to apologize: Johnson's temperament was melancholy, and on his deathbed, when it counted, he was more confident in his salvation; Christianity and tranquility must go together.[47] What would have been made of him today, or of R. Yohanan ben Zakkai (*Berakhot* 28b), who expressed deathbed uncertainty about his final destination, one can only imagine.

Hell, of course, is not in fashion, by which I mean not only the idea of eternal damnation, but the colorful panoply of future torments portrayed in works like the *Reishit Hokhma* or Dante's "Inferno." Not knowing what to say about hell presents a second obstacle to *yir'a*. Consider this recently reprinted anecdote: The Gra once remarked that

it is wrong to view the descriptions of hell in the *Reishit Hokhma* as hyperbole. Whereupon one of his disciples fell into a prolonged illness, from which he almost died. When he recovered and took his master to task for precipitating the ordeal, the Gra repeated that the book should be taken literally, but softened the impact of these words by adding that if a human being knew how much suffering in this world could alleviate the pangs of hell, he would not hesitate to suffer like Job all his days.[48]

Why would this type of discourse fall flat in many places? We may gain constructive insight by identifying factors not evident in our previous discussion:

1. The media saturate us with numbing images of violence, both real and fictional. Increasingly lurid descriptions of pain and torment are necessary to sustain interest and arouse horror. Eventually these too pall. At the same time, because of medical and political advances, we are unaccustomed to, and therefore extraordinarily sensitive to graphic descriptions of pain. Earlier generations may have responded affirmatively or tuned out repetitive accounts of hellfire; they were unlikely to treat them as exercises in a camp, or, alternatively, to be scandalized by their verisimilitude.

2. Counseling against hellfire sermons, the prominent 19th century rabbi, R. Yaakov Ettlinger, writes:

> Mentioning the punishment of hell and other things (and he is angry and rebukes and offends the audience), these things provoke hatred. But when he reproves them with the words of the Torah itself, saying: "Listen brothers, this is what God spoke," nobody can hate him, for everyone will recognize the truth . . . and this arouses love.[49]

One could interpret this statement as counseling soft words and a mild tone. Hell is inadvisable because 19th century German Jews don't care for it. R. Ettlinger's precise language suggests another reading: when the preacher speaks about hell, he is not citing mainstream Biblical or halakhic sources, but relatively marginal and overwrought invective; as he fulminates away, the discourse has the idiosyncratic flavor of the preacher's wrath where he would do better to call upon the word of God. The lesson to contemporary speakers is to avoid subjectivity when broaching unpleasant subjects like rebuke or fear of God.

3. Most significant for a constructive analysis of the fear of God today is the change that has occurred in our conception of what it means to experience the wrath of God. In the old preaching, sin was understood primarily as transgression worthy of punishment: the imagery was

similar to that of conventional corporal punishment or torture.[50] Fear of God's rod was fear that He would visit upon us our iniquities. But for many people today, the primary fear is that of meaninglessness. To fear God is to fear abandonment by God. Today, the desolate soul is less frequently overwhelmed by God's numinous presence than by His thundering absence. In a word, the dominant emotion of contemporary spiritual apprehension is anxiety rather than fear.

The causes and scope of this change will not further occupy us here. One could view the development with dismay, as it testifies to an etiolated sense of responsibility: the individual for whom "turning away from evil" and fear of evil's consequences is not a motivation for doing good, is deficient in the old-fashioned conception of guilt. One may be justified in going against the grain of the modern temperament, attempting to reverse it by strenuously reaffirming the punishment model. Or one may recognize that, for better or for worse, new analogies and new ways of thinking about fear of God are needed. The new can supplement the old, or at least, for those whose yearning for love is lacking in fear, help to build a bridge from spiritual numbness to sensitivity.

In an age of anxiety, our fear of others is also transformed. Here is a third challenge to the God-fearing life. We are less obsessed with whether we have done right than we are anxious about where we stand with others and how we measure up to their standards. At the outset we noted that fear of other people and subjugation to their judgment can be a barrier to the fear of God. By the same token, fear and reverence towards those whom we are commanded to respect, and who merit our reverence, is an important ingredient in attaining the fear of God.

R. Soloveitchik reports that a psychiatrist once told him that he would like to eliminate the "Impress Your fear" (*U-ve-khen ten pahdekha*) from the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur prayers because fear is the primary cause of neurosis. The Rav responded that most people are plagued by many fears: anxiety about one's career, status, wealth, popularity or fame; fear of illness, old age and vulnerability; great fears and little fears. Only the fear of God can transcend and cast out the multitude of petty fears.[51] The fear of God liberates. If rabbis prayed properly, the Rav said on another occasion, they would not be intimidated by shul presidents. Conversely, one may suggest, shaking off the yoke of petty fear frees us to fear the One worthy of our fear and awe.

The practical realization of this ideal is difficult. One strand in Jewish ethical literature seems to negate absolutely any notion of legitimate fear of unworthy objects. The *Hovot ha-Levavot*, for instance, praises

the saint who sleeps in the open air, unprotected against wild animals, and who explains that he would be ashamed to show fear of anyone but his Creator.[52] R. Bahye b. Asher states flatly that it is wrong to fear any human being except for those whose fear is commanded—parents, teachers and lawful political authority.[53] Nonetheless, the Halakha recognizes fear of a belligerent litigant as an acceptable reason for a judge to excuse himself from hearing a case.[54] Samuel, aware of the likely threat from Saul, hesitates to anoint a king in his stead, and does not initially rely upon divine intervention to safeguard him.[55]

R. Yeruham of Mir, one of the most eminent pre-Holocaust Musar instructors, teaches that great personalities, like Jacob preparing to meet Esau, relate their experience of fear to their situation before God, even while recognizing that, when threatened by another person or by a wild animal, the object of fear itself is the ordinary fear of the adversary.

> Obviously, Jacob's fear of Esau was not what we understand regarding the weak person's fear of the violent; surely Scripture does not speak about this, and such fear would not be laudable in the holy Patriarchs. Jacob's fear was that he had become defiled by sin (Rashi to Genesis 32:11). Yet in the end the expression of this fear was his fear of Esau and his four hundred retainers, a natural fear characteristic of every human being to fear a robber or a wild animal . . . and that fear of Esau, that is part of every human being's nature, was for Jacob a fear of Heaven.[56]

Most readers of these words do not align themselves with the radical school of *bittahon* (trust in God), which denies and frowns upon the efficacy of human effort and scorns all forms of worldly fear. The unreality we rightly or wrongly impute to this pious approach may lead us to abandon any orientation to *bittahon*. When the fear of God does not tower above all other fears, we exaggerate the potency of those threats and misinterpret the harm that adversity and hostility can visit upon us. We grant the Shul president from hell, of whom we would be less afraid, according to the Rav, if we prayed properly, an almost metaphysical supremacy over us. In truth, much of the time, he and his ilk may not have the power over us that he, or we, ascribe to him, and even if he does, we can, with God's help, overcome. Because members of an anxious community are especially prone to measure their happiness by the weather inside our heads, progress in *yir'at Shamayim* depends on our success, as individuals and as a community, in ridding ourselves of the bully's shadow, the snob's vulgar sneer, and the desire to be liked by the charming social manipulator. And that success, in turn, is measured

by the degree to which we are able to place God and His service at the center of our existence: "The haughtiness of man will be prostrate, and the loftiness of man abased; and God alone will be exalted on that day. And the idols will pass away completely" (Isaiah 2:17-18).

VII. "YOUR HEART WILL FEAR AND EXPAND"

At the inauguration of the Hebrew University in 1925, R. Kook quoted Isaiah 60:5: "Then you shall see and brighten, and your heart will fear (*pahad)* and expand." Why fear at the moment of eschatological glory? Because novelty is not always an unmixed blessing. The same events may rightly cause shock and a contraction of the heart for some, even when a sense of expansion and satisfaction are also appropriate. The most realistic response for many new developments is not uncritical optimism but a fear that is nevertheless ready to ripen into joy.[57] Fear, the subject of this essay, is an inherently disturbing experience. Much of our discussion has compounded the unease by elaborating upon the difficulty attendant upon the acquisition of fear of God as a virtue, the danger of the wrong kind of fear, the perennial and contemporary obstacles to fear of God. Yet the very difficulties we have confronted may also yield distinctively modern ways of fulfilling the commandment to fear God. In the spirit of the heart contracting and expanding, let us examine new practical, experiential, and intellectual directions arising from our analysis.

Hazal, of course, recommended a number of practices as conducive to *yir'at Shamayim*: Torah study, respect for elders, and worship in Jerusalem during the Temple period.[58] R. Hutner, in particular, called our attention to the difficulty contemporary people, even those with a yearning to do good, experience in turning away from evil. In the light of his insight it would appear that by concentrating on those mitsvot that integrate love and fear, psychological expansion with psychological contraction, we could take advantage of the positive impulses and overcome the crippling defects. These include the observance of Shabbat (the paradigmatic *zakhor ve-shamor*), prayer, and the culture of the Synagogue. Educators indeed devote attention to these areas and successfully nurtured students show the results.

All the same, the most trying challenges of renunciation often take place in private. One reason that turning away from evil is so difficult is that our community is so fixated on moral reinforcement through public display that we are untrained in private struggle. None of our institu-

tions confer honors on people who make the best of an intolerable job or make a blessing of an unmanageable family situation. There is no *Keter Perishut* award for homosexuals who remain celibate or for the insulted and injured who bury their anger and grief. These are quintessential scenes of *yir'at ha-Shem*.

What motivates us to succeed in these tasks? Fear alone? Sometimes. But fear is not sufficient, especially not for our generation. Maharal taught that *imitatio Dei* cannot apply to fear of God, and that fear therefore may not facilitate closeness to God. But *gevura*, in the sense of restraint and self-control, *is* a divine attribute.[59] The individual who renounces his or her imperious desires and embraces the yoke of obedience and self-negation can imitate his Creator in that way. Whenever the lonely individual fulfills the commandment of fearing God through the gesture of heroic renunciation, he or she forges a bond of love with God as well. Maharal's *Netivot Olam* does not contain a treatise on *gevura*; the 21st century version must provide one.

Some of you may have felt that I devoted too much attention to Biblical descriptions of human beings overwhelmed and virtually annihilated by the numinous presence of God. Many members in good standing of religious institutions know nothing of such experiences. For the rest of us, such experiences are mostly associated more with a religious awareness of sin and guilt rather than with the religious *per se* (though in the light of our analysis this distinction may be factitious). In any event, such moments are rarely as intense as those portrayed in the Bible, and they are not frequent or prolonged. Whatever their value for phenomenology of religion, it is unclear how they translate into the world of our everyday life.

What can we learn from Isaiah 2, for example, beyond the excoriation of pride and other vices? The depiction of lowly man vainly attempting to flee from God, seeking out cracks and caves in which to hide, while mountains crash around him probably reflects the great earthquake during the reign of Uzziah.[60] Yet running away from God, in the literal sense, is impossible. Appealing to such language easily becomes a cliché.[61] How can imagining the attempt enrich our grasp of what it means to fear God?

Appropriating the message of this prophecy identifies several elements that speak to all of us, and not only to those whose religious imagery is especially vivid. First, the desire to flee from God's presence, however absurd, is part of our experience. This is obviously true where we feel guilt and moral shame, as is the case in Isaiah 2. It is no less true

when we are overwhelmed by an encounter that is too much for us, even in the aesthetic realm. And as we have seen, the experience of God's grandeur intrinsically communicates a sense of our unworthiness and finitude. Second, the realization that flight is impossible. The inability to escape God is an essential component of the experience of fear, whether it arises primarily from moral or ontological inadequacy. The awareness that God is with us, no matter how far we fly, is often a source of overwhelming comfort, as magnificently expressed in Psalm 139. Sometimes it gives comfort even when God's presence and solicitude is the occasion of reproach, as in Jonah 2. In Isaiah 2, however, the impossibility of not being in His presence is depicted exclusively as the cause of terror.

Lastly, and most important from the point of view of spiritual education, there is the one verse that moves from the descriptive to the prescriptive. It happens to be the verse from this chapter quoted by R. Soloveitchik in *Worship of the Heart*: "Enter into the rock and hide there in the dust for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty" (2:10).[62] On one way of interpreting the verse, the speakers are panicky sinners futilely seeking to elude divine detection (see Ibn Ezra, Radak and Metsuddot). I believe the imperative form here is not accidental: the speaker is the prophet; he is saying that the proper response in the face of the *mysterium tremendum* is humility. The proud human being is to lower himself, and the physical expression of this is hiding in the cleft of the rock, making oneself less prominent, taking up less space.[63] "The reward of humility is the fear of God" (Proverbs 22:3). "Humility leads to fear of God" (*Avoda Zara* 20b). Shame (in the sense of modesty, though not necessarily sexual) is likewise the mark of the person who is afraid of sin; so the Talmud (*Nedarim* 20a) identifies the "fear of God on your faces" (Exodus 20:17) that follows the revelation at Sinai.

One reason that humility is a virtue especially appropriate to our generation is that it is manifested not only in how we walk before God, but also in our relations with other human beings. All of us succeed in deceiving ourselves, much of the time, about our standing before God, in particular regarding the intrinsically private aspects. Many are tone deaf when it comes to the kind of religious life that has occupied so much of this essay. The arrogant and vulgar can, of course, succeed in remaining oblivious to their impact on other human beings; when they are powerful or charming enough, the victims often connive to cover up the truth. Yet even the swaggering individual who has no shame before God may nonetheless be appalled by moments of insight when he or she realizes how they are perceived by others and how their behavior and

attitudes debase their human environment. Democratic, anti-hierarchic trends in our society make it harder for us to cultivate honor, respect, and awe towards our superiors, but provide better opportunities to detect arrogance in our treatment of those dependent on our good will. As religious individuals and as members of observant communities, we ought to make the most of the advantages our age offers, as we seek to minimize the obstacles it places before us.[54]

We began our discussion by puzzling over the difficulties that many modern people think they have achieving fear of God. We have discovered that the problems may be different than is commonly assumed. We have explored the variety of experiences subsumed under the fear and love of God, and the ways they are, and should be, inextricably intertwined. That our soul draws back from God's invitation is fear, born of dust and sin, finitude and guilt; yet it is a fear inseparable from love.

Let us return to the earlier insight we mentioned: that fear, in our culture, primarily takes the form of anxiety. We first made this observation when we listed some of the reasons that the apprehension of hell is no longer a powerful spur to religious obedience and awe, even among those who practice traditional religion. "We are afraid of pain but more afraid of silence," wrote W. H. Auden over sixty years ago.[55] Fear, in its traditional import, is identical with the desire to avoid or annihilate a threat. Anxiety, at one level, is an antipathetic experience. Yet to be anxious is to desire. Thus, a fear informed by anxiety is a fear informed by love. It is a fear that even people who find it easier to summon up the effort to do something good than to refrain from an improper act (to recall R. Hutner's diagnosis) can aspire to.

John Donne, after reviewing the speculations of his time about literal interpretations of hell—fire, brimstone, the undying worm, and so forth, concludes: "when all is done, the hell of hells, the torment of torments is the everlasting absence of God, and the everlasting impossibility of returning to his presence. . . . Yet there was a case, in which David found an ease, to fall into the hands of God, to escape the hands of men . . . ; but to fall out of the hands of the living God, is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination."[66] David's wish (II Samuel 24) to be chastised directly by God, rather than fall into the hands of men, is familiar to us as the opening verse of the daily *tahanun*. Perhaps, for the reasons just adduced, Donne's evocation of the incident speaks to us today even more directly than it did four centuries ago. Our hell is the hell of silence and anxiety, not that of high tech tortures and gnashing of teeth. The greatest terror is not that God watches over us, counting our

sins, and ordering our penalties, but that, responding to our estrangement from Him, He will leave us to our ultimately meaningless devices.[67]

After the death of his wife C. S. Lewis was surprised to realize that grief feels like fear. We find that fear, at least in the shape that most beleaguers and challenges us today, very much resembles grief.

NOTES

1. *Iggerot u-Ketavim* (Brooklyn, 1991), 346.
2. *Morgen Journal* 1/20/1954.
3. George Herbert, "Love (III)."
4. C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, 1963) 1.
5. *Or Yehezkel* (Benei Berak, 1996) volume 6, 12.
6. Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, "On the Pensees of M. Pascal" (tr. E. Dilworth, NY 1961), 124. Cf. R. Kook, *Olat Reiyah* (Jerusalem 1962), II 122: "*Yir'at Het* (fear of sin) should be integrated with life. There are people who have *yir'at Het* but it is not strong in them; therefore, when they distance themselves from the clamor (*hamon*) of life and its tumult they fear sin, but when they connect themselves to life, in activities and business, *yir'at Het* withdraws from them." For R. Kook it is the distractions of life, not its pleasures, which bring oblivion.
7. *Iggeret ha-Musar*, in M. Pachter, ed. *Kitvei R. Yisrael Salanter* (Jerusalem, 1972), 114ff.
8. Leviticus 19:14, 31; 25: 17, 36, 43. Rashi derives his interpretations from *Safra* and *Kiddushin* 32b; at 25:36 he explains that usury requires the reminder because the avarice involved is hard to control. For additional sources, see *Encyclopedia Talmudit* , *s.v. yir'at ha-Shem*, volume 25:89-91.
9. See Deuteronomy 6:2, 13, 24; 8:6; 28:58. Rambam *Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:1 and *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, *Aseh* 4.
10. *Derashot ha-Ran* #10.
11. Augustine, *City of God* 14:9. If this explanation is unacceptable, he goes on to suggest that the verse is not referring to the experience of fear at all, but instead to the everlasting character traits acquired through fear of God; (cf. R. S.R. Hirsch's commentary *ad. loc*). For a more extended sermonic commentary by Augustine, see James O'Donnell, *Augustine: a New Biography* (New York, 2005) 157-159. It is worth noting that Radak interprets the verse as anti-Christian: the Torah's commandments are eternally binding.
12. See Malbim *ad. loc.*
13. R. Kook (*Olat Reiyah* II 122) distinguishes fear of sin from fear of Heaven: "Fear of sin is sorrow and shame and incompleteness, when one gazes upon the majesty of supreme wisdom with downcast face, and sees that he cannot attach himself to it because he is defective, and he is mournful, so the defect of soul is sin, and the fear to beware of it is fear of sin. Fear because of the distance of the divine light from him, and the shamefacedness and sorrow, is fear of Heaven."

14. See also R. Soloveitchik, *Shiurim l'Zekher Avi Mori*, (Jerusalem 1983) Vol. 2 179ff on God's "aweful" Name (*nora*). His illuminating comments on the *Hil. Berakhot* 1:4 passage are not yet published.
15. See also R. Hutner, *Pahad Yitzhak* on Yom Kippur (Brooklyn 1978), chapter 18.
16. *Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:2 and *Sefer ha-Mitsvot*, *Aseh* 4.
17. R. Joseph Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart* (ed. S. Carmy, Hoboken, 2003), 71. Of course, Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is part of the background of the Rav's discussion and my comments on it.
18. See, for example, Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York, 1996).
19. See, for example, Robert Gordon, "Fear" (*Philosophical Review* 89, 560-578).
20. See Malbim to Isaiah 51:13, Micah 7:17 and Psalm 27:1 *inter alia*, stressing the imminent quality of *pahad*. Gra (Proverbs 3:25) argues for the element of suddenness, a view criticized (without mentioning his name) by Netsiv to Deuteronomy.
21. *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, in *Ish ha-Halakha, Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979) 174. See 173 n. 13 on the negative and positive connotations of *pahad*.
22. See, *inter alia*, Aristotle, *De Anima* 3:9.
23. Netsiv to Exodus 4:3 (and see further his comments in Numbers and *Emek ha-Netsiv* to the verse in Numbers) maintains that Moses' flight from the rod that had turned into a snake was purely instinctive. He further argues that this reaction was improper, despite the fact that it was not under his control, and that the fear God inflicted upon him in Numbers 12 is a kind of punishment for that flight. Although Netsiv does not link his approach here to his rejection of suddenness as an ingredient in *pahad*, I believe that he may have stressed the difference between fear, which is potentially a valuable religious experience, and being startled, which is not. Verses like Proverbs 3:25 or Job 22:10, which refer to sudden fear, therefore are not describing a good experience. See also Netsiv to Genesis 22:1.
24. A similar theme is sounded in Terry Eagleton's recent *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (London, 2003). To Aristotle's ancient question, why tragedy, dealing with misfortune and horror, provides pleasure, Eagleton responds, if I may simplify his lengthy analysis, that people appreciate and enjoy tragedy owing to a fundamental desire for truth, willing to confront the worst in order to comprehend the world as it is. Reviewers have observed that this orientation shares more with Eagleton's erstwhile Catholicism than with his present neo-Marxist affiliation.
25. Commentary to Deuteronomy 6:5; cf. his remarks on 6:13 and 11:1 where Ramban says that the commandment of love ought to be, and is, commonly followed by the commandment to fear.
26. R. Abraham Yitzhak Kook, *Meorot ha-Reiyah, Yerah ha-Eitanim* (Jerusalem 1995), 89.
27. *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, 135ff.
28. See *Worship of the Heart* and S. Carmy, "Destiny, Freedom and the Logic of Petition" (*Tradition* 24:2, Winter 1990) 17-37 and "Without Intelligence, Whence Prayer?" in *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law*, ed. A. Mintz and L. Schiffman (New York, 2005) 455-488.

29. See *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham passim*. According to the Rav, even *imitatio Dei* is a fundamentally submissive gesture (180f). See further my "On Cleaving as Identification: R. Soloveitchik's Account of *Devekut* in *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*" (*Tradition*, 41:2, Summer 2008).
30. See Mishna *Sota* chapter 5, Bavli 31a, and E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, chapter 14.
31. *Hovot ha-Levavot* 3:4, categories 7 and 8. R. Bahye does not appear to see much difference between the two. He writes that the person who hopes for reward (level 7) lacks any conception of God's exalted nature. Perhaps the one who fears punishment is more advanced in this respect; more likely R. Bahye applies the same criticisms in both cases and simply chose not to repeat the detailed diagnosis.
32. I wonder whether we are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the temporal asymmetry between love and fear. Ancient philosophers like the Stoics contrasted love, not with fear, but with hate. Love and hate are both oriented to the present; hope and fear are attitudes towards the future. Thus the structure of hope and fear, as these terms are commonly used, entails calculation about the future, while love and hate are more easily understood as ends in themselves. The use of these terms in Jewish thought and halakha is not rigidly committed to this convention. While Rambam treats love and fear of God as immediate responses to contemplation and experience, in *Hil. Avodat Kokhavim* 3:10 he makes the conventional temporal differentiation: worshipping idols out of love means enjoying them aesthetically and the like; worshipping out of fear means fear of reprisal by idolaters for failure to worship.
33. Ramban to Exodus 20:8. For further discussion see *Hatam Sofer* to *Bava Kama* 9b (Jerusalem, 5743) and notes *ad. loc.* and R. Yosef Engel, *Tsiyyunim la-Torah* section 24. See also R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Woman's Obligation in Levirate Marriage", in E. Daum *et al*, *Maamar Yevamim* (Alon Shevut, 2004) 11-25, and particularly 19ff on a possible distinction between agent-based and act-based clashes between positive and negative mitsvot.
34. R. Yitzchak Hutner, *Iggerot u-Ketavim* 346ff. One could extend this insight about the distinctive nature of positive commandments by pointing to the principle according to which involvement in one *mitsva* (*osek be-mitsva*) exempts one from other *mitsvot*, and the philosophical idea that the ideal observance of one commandment with pure intent can bestow upon the soul eternal life; see Rambam's Commentary to Mishna *Makkot*, end of chapter 3, and R. Yosef Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 3:29 (note that Albo located this chapter within his discussion of Torah rather than in Part 4, where he addresses questions of reward and punishment).
35. Compare the argument in my "Use It or Lose It: On the Moral Imagination of Free Will," in Y. Berger and D. Shatz, eds. *Judaism, Science, and Moral Responsibility* (Lanham, 2006) 104-154, especially 126-133. There I contrasted R. Dessler's idea of freedom, based on triumphant inner struggle, with R. Kook's doctrine, for which freedom is deepest self-expression. Like a good modern, I let R. Kook get the better of the discussion. One important principle of R. Dessler's account survived all critical scrutiny: freedom is possible only when the individual has had the experience of successful self-control, and self-control is normally manifest, not in

creativity, but in the capacity for renunciation.

36. See *Pahad Yitshak* on *Pesah* (Brooklyn, 1970), chapters 50 (pilgrimage to the Temple as a joyous occasion that requires gestures of withdrawal and reverence) and 54 (the delight of Sabbath is rooted in the injunction to abstain from creative work, and the positive imitation of God requires acceptance of His "dark," unknowable and hence not given to imitation, side).
37. See Maharal, *Netivot Olam*, *Netiv ha-Anava*, chapter 1. See also *Gur Aryeh* to Deuteronomy 10:12 and n. 34 in the Hartman edition (Jerusalem, 5754), about the compatibility of closeness to God with fear of God.
38. *Pahad Yitshak* on Pesah, chapter 54.
39. See Rashi and Maharsha *ad loc* and *Hovot ha-Levavot* 10:6. For the sake of conciseness I have conflated different versions of the Talmudic text.
40. *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham* 173.
41. Peter Stearns and Timothy Haggerty, "The Role of Fear: Transitions in American Emotional Standards for Children, 1850-1950" (*American Historical Review* 96, 63-94), 67.
42. R. Avigdor Nebentzal, *Sihot le-Rosh ha-Shana* (Jerusalem, 5748) 67.
43. "On Fear" (*Ha-Pahad*, in *Eder ha-Yekar*, Jerusalem, 1967, 119-121); likewise, "On Literature" in *Maamrei ha-Reiyah* (Jerusalem 1984). 502ff.
44. See *Orot ha-Kodesh* IV, 32-33 (pp. 421-422).
45. *Olat Reiyah* II, 367-368, and *Orot ha-Teshuva* 9:10.
46. See Bonhoeffer, "Costly Grace," in *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, 1963) 35-47.
47. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, June 12, 1784. For background, see Stephen Miller, *Three Deaths and Enlightenment Thought: Hume, Johnson, Marat* (Lewisburg PA, 2001).
48. Zeev Grinvald, *Moreshet Avot, Bereshit* (Jerusalem, 1992) 24.
49. *Minhat Ani* (Jerusalem 1966) to *Vayelekh* (129b). Thanks to my student Ephraim Meth, who thought this sermon would interest me.
50. For rabbinic hell imagery, see Saul Lieberman, "Of Sins and Their Punishment," in *Texts and Studies* (Hoboken, 1974) 29-51.
51. R. Soloveitchik, *Al ha-Teshuva* (Jerusalem, 1975) 140-141.
52. *Hovot ha-Levavot* 10:6. One could moderate the import by suggesting that the saint does not deliberately act recklessly but that, finding himself exposed, his trust in God enables him to sleep serenely. However, the simple sense of the story is that the saint is totally indifferent to worldly danger.
53. *Kad ha-Kemah s.v yir'a,* in *Kitvei Rabbenu Bahye* (Jerusalem, 1970) 192-196, and Commentary to Deuteronomy 20:1.
54. *Sanhedrin* 6b. The commandment "Do not fear any man" Deuteronomy 1:17), addressed to the judge, applies once the judge discerns which party is in the right. For that reason R. Bahye b. Asher does not appeal to this verse, as the halakha would undermine his case. Instead he uses the prohibition of fear in war, despite the obvious rebuttal that fearlessness is forbidden in battle for tactical psychological considerations, not for ethical or theological reasons.
55. I Samuel 16:2. See *Pesahim* 8b.
56. R. Yeruham Leibovitz, *Da'at Hokhma u-Musar* (New York, 1967) 23.
57. *Maamrei ha-Reiyah* 306-308.

58. See *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, volume 25:85-86.
59. For the ethical meaning of *gevura*, see R. Soloveitchik's "Catharsis" (*Tradition* 17:2).
60. See Jacob Milgrom, "Did Isaiah Prophecy During the Reign of Uzziah?" (*Vetus Testamentum* 14, 164-182), 178-182.
61. Francis Thompson's melodramatic confession "The Hound of Heaven," with God pursuing the desperate sinner through the lurid, labyrinthine demimonde streets of late 19th century London, is one instance where the figure of speech comes to life.
62. In *u-Vikkashtem mi-Sham* 158, R. Soloveitchik quotes more extensively from this prophecy.
63. Francine Prose's recent novel, *A Changed Man*, describes the moral rehabilitation of a half-hearted neo-Nazi who drifts away from that way of life without a clear project of repentance and regeneration but ends up growing into a responsible person. Readers of the book may notice how often the hero and other sympathetic characters arrange their bodies so as to take up less room.
64. See Corey Robin, *Fear: the Political History of an Idea* (Oxford, 2004). Robin cites studies to the effect that our late capitalist culture is rife with behavior that systematically humiliates employees. The most dramatic examples involve strictly regulated bathroom breaks in low paying factory jobs and ridiculous techniques used in training middle management executives. I am more familiar, and more concerned about, less drastic and less creative practices.