

## Fear of God at the Nexus of Divine and Human Kingship II

### From Fear to Liberation

#### 1. Benedict Spinoza, *The Theological-Political Tractate* (1670), Preface

If men were always able to regulate their affairs with sure judgment, or if fortune always smiled upon them, they would not get caught up in any superstition. But **since people are often reduced to such desperate straits that they cannot arrive at any solid judgment and as the good things of fortune for which they have a boundless desire are quite uncertain, they fluctuate wretchedly between hope and fear.** This is why most people are quite ready to believe anything. When the mind is in a state of doubt, the slightest impulse can easily steer it in any direction, and all the more readily when it is hovering between hope and fear, though it may be confident, pompous and proud enough at other times...

[We] see at once that it is especially those who have a boundless desire for things that are uncertain who are the most prone to superstition of every kind and especially that all humans when they find themselves in danger and are unable to support themselves implore divine assistance with pleas and womanish tears. They swear that reason is blind and human wisdom fruitless because it cannot show them a sure way of acquiring the empty things they want. On the other hand, they believe that the delirious wanderings of the imagination, dreams and all sorts of childish nonsense are divine replies, that God is adverse to the wise and that rather than inscribe his laws in the mind, he writes them in the intestines of animals, and that fools, madmen and birds reveal them by divine inspiration and impulse. It is dread that makes men so irrational. Hence, **fear is the root from which superstition is born, maintained and nourished... people are swayed by credulity only so long as they are afraid; that all the things they have ever worshiped under the influence of false religion are nothing but the fancies and fantasies of despondent and fearful minds...**

It may indeed be the highest secret of **monarchical government** and utterly essential to it, to **keep men deceived, and to disguise the fear** that sways them with the specious name of religion, so that they will fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance, and will not think it humiliating but supremely glorious to spill their blood and sacrifice their lives for the glorification of a single man. But **in a free republic**, on the other hand, nothing that can be devised or attempted will be less successful. For **it is completely contrary to the common liberty to shackle the free judgment of the individual with prejudices or constraints of any kind...** I conclude that everyone should be allowed the liberty of their own judgment and authority to interpret the fundamentals of faith according to their own minds; and that the piety or impiety of each person's faith should be judged by their works

alone. In this way everyone will be able to obey God in a spirit of sincerity and freedom, and only justice and charity will be esteemed by everyone...

## 2. Benedict Spinoza, *The Theological-Political Tractate* (1670), Ch. 16

If we also reflect that without mutual help, and the cultivation of reason, human beings necessarily live in great misery... **we shall realize very clearly that it was necessary for people to combine together in order to live in security and prosperity.** Accordingly, they had to ensure that they would collectively have the right to all things that each individual had from nature and that this right would no longer be determined by the force and appetite of each individual but by the power and will of all of them together. They would, however, have had no hope of achieving this had they concerned themselves only to the promptings of desire for, by the laws of appetite, everyone is drawn in different directions. Thus, they had to make a firm decision, and reach agreement, to decide everything by the sole dictate of reason (which no one dares contradict openly for fear of appearing perfectly mindless). **They had to curb their appetites so far as their desires suggested things which would hurt someone else, and refrain from doing anything to anyone they did not want done to themselves.** Finally, they were obliged to defend other people's rights as their own...

We conclude from this that any agreement can have force only if it is in our interest, and when it is not in our interest, the agreement fails and remains void. For this reason, **we also conclude that it is foolish to call for someone else to keep faith with oneself, in perpetuity, if at the same time one does not try to ensure that violating the agreement will result in greater loss than gain for the violator. This principle should play the most important role in the formation of a state...** it is far from being the case that everyone can easily be led by the sole guidance of reason. For everyone is guided by their own pleasure, and the mind is very often so preoccupied with greed, glory, jealousy, anger, etc., that there is no room for reason. Accordingly, even if people promise and agree to keep faith by offering sure signs of sincerity, no one can be certain of another person's good faith, unless something is added to the promise... that the sovereign right over all men belongs to him who has sovereign power, wherewith he can compel men by force, or restrain them by threats of the universally feared punishment of death; such sovereign right he will retain only so long as he can maintain his power of enforcing his will; otherwise he will totter on his throne, and no one who is stronger than he will be bound unwillingly to obey him...

A body politic of this kind is called a Democracy, which may be defined as a society which wields all its power as a whole. The sovereign power is not restrained by any laws, but everyone is bound to obey it in all things; such is the state of things implied when men either tacitly or expressly handed over to it all their power of self-defence, or in other words, all their right... therefore, having acted (as we have shown) as reason and necessity demanded, they are obliged to fulfil the commands of the sovereign power, however absurd these may be, else they

will be public enemies, and will act against reason, which urges the preservation of the state as a primary duty. For reason bids us choose the least of two evils...

In addition, there is [the democratic state's] foundation and purpose which is precisely, as we have also shown, to avoid the follies of appetite and as much as possible to bring men within the limits of reason, so that they may dwell in peace and harmony... anyone who is guided by their own pleasure... and cannot see or do what is good for them, is him or herself very much a slave. The only [genuinely] free person is one who lives with his entire mind guided solely by reason... A **slave** is someone obliged to obey commands from a master which look only to the advantage of the master; a **child** is one who at the command of a parent does what is advantageous for himself; and a **subject** is one who does by command of the sovereign what is useful for the community and consequently also for himself...

3. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III, The Psychoses, 1955–56*, trans. Russell Grigg (Norton, 1993), 266–67

This famous fear of God completes the sleight of hand that transforms from one minute to the next, all fears into perfect courage. All fears—I have no other fear—are exchanged for what is called the fear of God, which, however constraining it may be, is the opposite of fear.

### *Yirat Hashem as a Force for Radicality*

4. Shemot 1:15–17

טו ויאמר מלך מצרים למיילדות העברית אשר שם האחת שפֶרָה ושם השניית פועה: טז ויאמר בנלדכן את־העבריות וראיתן על־האִבְנִים אִם־בן הוא וְהַמֶּתֶן אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הוּא וְחָי יוֹ וְתִירָאֵן הַמִּיִלְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵיךָ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְתַסְיִין אֶת־הַיִּלְדִּים:

15 The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 saying, “When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” 17 **The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them;** they let the boys live.

5. Devarim 1:15–18

טו וְאַקַח אֶת־רְאִישֵׁי שְׁבֵטֵיכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְיָדָעִים וְאַתֵּן אוֹתָם רְאִישִׁים עֲלֵיכֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת וְשֹׁטְרִים לְשֵׁבֵטֵיכֶם: טז וְאַצְנֶה אֶת־שֹׁפְטֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר שְׁמַע בֵּין־אֲחֵיכֶם וְשֹׁפְטֶתֶם צְדָק בֵּין־אִישׁ וּבֵין־אָחִיו וּבֵין גֵּר: יז לֹא־תִכְרֹוּ פָנִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט כַּקָּטָן כַּגָּדֹל תִּשְׁמָעוּן לֹא תִגְוְרוּ מִפְּנֵי־אִישׁ כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לְאֱלֹהִים הוּא וְהִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם תִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּיו: יח וְאַצְנֶה אֶתְכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן:

15 So I took your tribal leaders, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you: chiefs of thousands, chiefs of hundreds, chiefs of fifties, and chiefs of tens, and officials for your tribes. 16 I charged your magistrates at that time as follows, “Hear out your fellow men, and decide justly between any man and a fellow Israelite or a stranger. 17 **You shall not be partial in judgment: hear out low and high alike. Fear no man, for judgment is God’s.** And any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I will hear it.” 18 Thus I instructed you, at that time, about the various things that you should do.

6. Bereshit 20:8–14

ח וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל־עַבְדָּיו וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים מְאֹד: ט וַיִּקְרָא אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַה־עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ וּמַה־חִטָּאתִי לָךְ כִּי־הִבַּאתָ עָלַי וְעַל־מִמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה מְעֻשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יַעֲשׂוּ עַמְדִּי: י וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם מַה רָאִיתָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה: יא וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אָמַרְתִּי רַק אִי־יִרְאֶת אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְהִרְגוּנִי עַל־דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי: יב וְגַם־אָמְנָה אַחֹתִי בַת־אָבִי הוּא אֵף לֹא בַת־אָמִי וְתַהֲיִלִּי לְאִשָּׁה: יג וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעַו אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי וְאָמַר לָהּ זֶה חֲסֻדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עַמְדִּי אֵל כָּל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָבֹוא שָׁמָּה אֶמְרִי־לִי אָחִי הוּא: יד וַיִּקַּח אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וְעַבְדִּים וְשֹׁפָחֹת וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשָׁב לוֹ אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

8 Early next morning, Abimelech called his servants and told them all that had happened; and the men were greatly frightened. 9 Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.” 10 “What, then,” Abimelech demanded of Abraham, “was your purpose in doing this thing?” 11 **“I thought,”** said Abraham, **“surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.** 12 And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father’s daughter though not my mother’s; and she became my wife. 13 So when God made me wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother.’” 14 Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him.

## 7. Rabbein Bahya Ibn Paquda, *Hovot Halevavot* X:6

The second type of fear is awe inspired by His glory, exaltedness, and almighty power. This awe never parts from a man for all the days of his life. It is the highest of the levels of the G-d fearing, which are mentioned in the books which deal with this topic. It is the introductory path to pure love, and the painful yearning.

**Whoever reaches this level of fear of G-d, will not be frightened by anything nor fear anything besides the Creator, as one of the pious would tell over on a G-d fearing man which he found sleeping in the wilderness. He asked the man: "are you not afraid of lions, that you sleep in a place like this?". The man answered: "I would be ashamed before G-d, if He saw me afraid of other than Him".**

Another sign is that in fulfilling G-d's will, it is equal in his eyes, if people praise him or scorn him when, to please the Creator, he bids them on doing good or refraining from evil.

Another sign, that **he is willing to give up his life, body, money, and children to do the will of the Creator**, as written "For Your sake are we slain all the day long;" (Tehillim 44:23).

## 8. Ramak, *Tomer Devorah*, Ch. 9

**ליראה את השם:** עוד ממדת המלכות מדה חשובה מאד, שער העבודה כלה, והיא ליראה את ה' הנכבד והנורא. והנה היראה מסכנת מאד לפגם ולהכנס בה החצונים שהרי אם הוא ירא מן היסורים או מן המיתה או מגיהנם, הרי זו יראת החצונים, שכל פעולות אלו מן החצונים, אמנם היראה העקרית ליראה את ה'. והוא שישחשב בשלשה דברים:

**האחד** - להיות גדלתו של יוצר הפל על כל נמצא והרי האדם ירא מן הארי, מן הדב, מן האנס, מן האש, מן ה מפלת, ואלו הם שלוחים קטנים, ולמה לא יירא מן המלך הגדול ויהנה פחדו על פניו מגדלתו, ויאמר היאך יחטא האדם הנבזה לאדון רב כזה והרי אלו הנה דב יאכלהו, ואלו הקדוש ברוך הוא סובל עלבון, מפני זה לא יירא מפחדו וגדלתו.

**השני** - כאשר ידמה השגחתו תמיד שהוא צופה ומביט בו והרי העבד ירא מרבו תמיד בהיותו לפניו, והאדם תמיד לפני הבורא ועינו פקוקה על כל דרכיו, יירא ויפחד היאך יראנו מבטל מצותיו....

**Yirat Hashem:** There is another very important trait from the trait of *malchut* which is the gateway to all avodah, and that is to revere Hashem who is glorious and awe inspiring. Yirah [fear, awe, reverence] is very much in danger of being harmed and adulterated by things external to its true nature. If one fears from afflictions, from death or even from Gehinom know that this is not true Yirah, since all of these are external to it. **The essential yirah is to fear God alone** - and that is that one think about three things:

**The first:** That the greatness of the Creator of all is over all that exists. A person fears from a lion, from a bear, from a violent person, from fire, from a falling building and yet they are minor emissaries- why would one not fear from the great King, with reverential face before such greatness? And one should say, "How can a contemptible person do wrong to such a great Master? Is it that if Hashem were a bear one might be eaten, whereas the Holy One of Being tolerates the insult, so that one does not revere Hashem's awe and greatness?"

**The second:** When one envisions Hashem's constant supervision and how Hashem watches and observes everything. A servant always fears a present master. Yet a person is always in front of the Creator, whose eye is open upon everything one does! One should have reverence and fear when one considers how Hashem can see one belittle the mitzvot...

### 9. Shulhan Arukh, *Orah Hayyim* §1:1, Rema's Gloss

**הגה** שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד הוא כלל גדול בתורה ובמעלות הצדיקים אשר הולכים לפני האלהים כי אין ישיבת האדם ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לבדו בביתו כשיבתו ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לפני מלך גדול ולא דבורו והרחבת פיו כרצונו והוא עם אנשי ביתו וקרוביו כדבורו במושב המלך כ"ש כשישים האדם אל לבו שהמלך הגדול הקב"ה אשר מלא כל הארץ כבודו עומד עליו ורואה במעשיו כמו שנאמר אם יסתר איש במסתרים ואני לא אראנו נאום ה' מיד יגיע אליו הירא' וההכנעה בפחד הש"י ובושתו ממנו תמיד (מורה נבוכים ח"ג פ' כ"ב) ולא יתבייש מפני בני אדם המלעיגים עליו בעבודת הש"י גם בהצנע לכת ובשכבו על משכבו ידע לפני מי הוא שוכב ומיד כשיעור משנתו יקום בזריזות לעבודת בוראו יתברך ויתעלה (טור):

**Rem"a:** "I have set the Lord before me constantly" (Psalms 16:8); this is a major principle in the Torah and amongst the virtues of the righteous who walk before God. For a person's way of sitting, his movements and his dealings while he is alone in his house are not like his way of sitting, his movements and his dealings when he is before a great king; nor are his speech and free expression as much as he wants when he is with his household members and his relatives like his speech when in a royal audience. All the more so when one takes to heart that the Great King, the Holy One, Blessed Is He, Whose glory fills the earth, is standing over him and watching his actions, as it is stated: "'Will a man hide in concealment and I will not see him?' - the word of God" (Jeremiah 23:24), he immediately acquires fear and submission in dread of God, May He Be Blessed, and is ashamed of Him constantly (Guide for the Perplexed III 52). And one should not be ashamed because of people who mock him in his service of God, and should also go modestly. And when he lies on his bed he should know before Whom he lies, and as soon as he wakes up from sleep he should rise eagerly to the service of his Creator, May He Be Blessed and Exalted (Tur).