

**Parshat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim**  
**The Imperative of vi-Yareita mei-Elokecha**  
**Rina Krautwirth - Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Track**

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This week's parsha contains a cryptic phrase, "וַיִּרְאֵת מִאֲלֹהֵיךָ אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק" -- "you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" -- that perplexingly only appears after certain commandments:

1. You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (Vayikra 19:14).
2. You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (Vayikra 19:32).

What does this phrase mean and what ties it to these specific commandments of treating the deaf, blind, and elderly with respect? Why do we receive the charge to fear God with regard to these particular issues--shouldn't we always fear God?

This question brings me back to my eighth grade Chumash class, when our teacher challenged us with this question. When the underlying pattern to these commandments did not jump out at us, she provided the answer. This answer has since stayed with me, as it points to a fundamental aspect of our relationship to God and to other people.

Each of the above commandments speaks to our treatment of vulnerable people. Since these three types of people might have a limited perception of their surroundings, if one were to neglect to adhere to the above admonitions, the involved party might not even realize. One could later "play dumb" and claim: "I did not notice that blind person walking past me" or "I had no idea that an elderly person was standing nearby," while no one would be the wiser. וַיִּרְאֵת מִאֲלֹהֵיךָ reminds us that while we can try to fool others, God always can see our internal thoughts and knows our true intentions. Regarding those actions about which we most easily could create a pretense, we are charged to remember that God always watches over us.

The gemara (Bava Kamma 79b) provides a similar perspective on the importance of intent. A ganav (thief), who steals in the night, is treated differently than a gazlan (robber), who steals in broad daylight, both discussed in this week's parsha (Vayikra 19:11-13). Here the gemara explains why the ganav receives a harsher punishment:

His students asked Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai: For what reason was the Torah stricter with a thief than with a robber? [He] said to them This one equated the honor of the servant to the honor of his Master, and that one did not equate the honor of the servant to the honor of his Master.

The gemara explains that the thief who steals in the night is worse, because they fear other people more than they fear God, whereas the thief who steals during the day fears neither God nor other people but at least does not prioritize fear of other people over fear of God. Our inner intent matters, so much so that the thief receives a harsher punishment because of it.

In contrast, intent does not have a legal effect for monetary matters between people. Regarding the case of someone who sells their property on the condition that they will move to Israel but does not verbalize this condition, the gemara (Kiddushin 49b) states, “ודברים שבליב אינם דברים”-- “and matters that are in the heart are not matters.” Between people, the words that we say to each other create reality. With respect to God, however, who is בּחַן וְלֵב--who tests the thoughts and the mind (Jeremiah 11:20)--inner intent very much matters.

The gemara (Brachot 28a) creates the category of “תּוֹנוֹ כּוֹבֵד”--someone whose inner self matches their outer self. This gemara states, “As Rabban Gamliel would proclaim and say: Any student whose inside is not like his outside will not enter the study hall.” The Maharsha ascribes this quality to one whose fear of God surpasses his/her Torah knowledge.

The phrase וַיִּרְאֵת מֵאַלְהֵיךָ appears once elsewhere in the Torah:

Do not wrong one another, but fear your God; וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-עַמִּיתוֹ וַיִּרְאֵת מֵאַלְהֵיךָ. כִּי אֲנִי  
for I the Lord am your God. (Vayikra 25:17). יְקַוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: (ויקרא כה:יז)

Just as in the case of vulnerable people, in our treatment of those whom we might have wronged, we should recognize that God knows the reality of what happened. The imperative of וַיִּרְאֵת מֵאַלְהֵיךָ reminds us to avoid pretense in how we treat others, whether or not anyone will know otherwise, because God does know otherwise.



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