

Sat 7 April 2007

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Congregation Adat Reyim

Torah Discussion, Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pessah [Ex. 33:12-34:26; Num. 28:19-25]

The Attributes of God

Thirteen Attributes of Mercy (shelosh esreh middot harahamim) (shloshe asar middaya)

Exodus 34:6-7. And the Lord passed by before [Moses], and proclaimed:

*Adonai! Adonai! El rahum v'hannun, erech appayim v'rav hesed ve-emet.
Notzer hesed la-alafim, nose avon vafesha v'hata-a v'nakke
(lo yenakkeh poked, avon avot al banim ve'al b'nai vanim al-sheloshim ve'al
rebeim.)*

Interpretations by Rabbeinu Tam, France 1000-1071, Tosaphot Rosh HaShanah 17b):

- 1 The Lord, (The Lord is merciful before a person sins)
- 2 The Lord (The Lord is merciful after a person has sinned and repented)
- 3 God, (He is all-powerful)
- 4 merciful and (He is compassionate)
- 5 gracious,
- 6 slow to anger,
- 7 abundant in kindness
- 8 and truth, (even after His scrutiny of our conduct)
- 9 Keeping mercy for thousands, (of future generations)
- 10 forgiving iniquity, (He forgives sins committed willfully)
- 11 transgression and (He forgives sins committed in defiance of His will)
- 12 sin, (He forgives sins committed unwittingly)
- 13 and cleansing
(yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation.)

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- Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 17b):

“And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed. Rabbi Johanan said: If it had not been written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing [?]. This verse teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, drew his robe around Him like the reader of a congregation, and showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sin, let them carry out this service before Me [ya'asu kaseder hazeh], and I will forgive them.

'A God merciful and gracious'. Rab Yehudah said: A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes, that [Israel] will not be turned away empty-handed [when they recite them]."

→ **passage repeated many times in Yom Kippur liturgy**

So we can commit terrible crimes, but to gain God's forgiveness all we need do is recite a formula?

Rabbi Yitzchak Et-shalom, Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles, offers:

God says, "Whenever Israel sin before me, they should perform this order (yaasu kaseder hazeh) and I will forgive them." God does not say "SAY" these words and I will forgive you, (in which case, it would have read Yomru kaseder hazeh); but "FULFILL" (Ya'asu) these words and I will forgive you, i.e.

→ **If you want God's forgiveness, become more forgiving yourself**

Concept of "Imitation of God" (imitation dei): Emulate the Thirteen Attributes.

- Rashi on Ps22:1: El refers to the consoling aspect of God: Eli Eli ("My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?"), is a call of pain to a God of mercy rather than to a God of justice

YHVH = Adonai = Attribute of mercy; Elohim = attribute of justice

With the attribute of justice alone, sinner punished on the spot. We survive because God is merciful and gives us a chance.

- Rahum v'hanun: In the Ten Commandments (Ex20:5-6) the order is reversed -- judgment before kindness. Why? *Context of Ten Commandments is justice?*

Ex. 20:5. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

6. And showing mercy to thousands of those who love me, and keep my commandments.

- Hesed v'emet often come together in the Torah – hesed involves a legal obligation while emet involves dependability and faithfulness. (Humash Etz Hayim on Shemot 34:6.)
- Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 17b): 'The Lord, the Lord'. Repetition means: I am the Eternal before a man sins and the same after a man sins and repents.
God is the same regardless of our actions and it is our actions that change us not God. It is us who move closer and farther from God; but God's love is constant.
- Ex34: 7 concludes with 'but who will be no means clear the guilty; punishing the iniquity down to the third and the fourth generation.'
 - Why is that section excluded from prayers?

- To emphasize mercy over judgment; Hope that all would be forgiven!
 - Punishment may be automatic, built into the fabric of the world, not individually decreed (children have to live with consequences of parents' transgressions, sometimes even following parents' footsteps)
- The infinity attributes of God: Omniscience, omnipotent, ubiquity, eternal, etc. Greek philosophy, not Judaism. Implies paradoxes (can God make a boulder so large he can't lift it? Can God make a thing and its opposite true at the same time?). Rambam: Can talk about what God does (13 attributes), not what he is.