

Ki Sisah - Rabbi Lerner - March 4, 2012

The 13 Midos (Attributes) of Hashem's Mercy

34:4-7: *Moshe carved out 2 tablets of stone like the first ones, he woke up early in the morning and ascended Har Sinai as Hashem had commanded him; he took the two stone tablets in his hands. Hashem descended in a cloud and stood with him there, and He called out with the Name Hashem. Hashem passed before him and proclaimed: **Hashem, Hashem Keil Rachum Vechanun Erech Apayim Verav Chesed Ve'emes Notzair Chesed Lalaphim Nosei Avon Vfeshah Vechata'ah Venakei; Lo Yenakeh Pokaid Avon Avos Al Banim Ve'al Benai Vanim Al Shilaishim Ve'al Rebaiyim.** How do we count the 13 midos of Hashem? The Gemorrah in Rosh Hashanah 17:b says *that had we not seen this pasuk in the Torah, we would never have learned these attributes; from this pasuk we learn that Hashem wraps Himself in a tallis like a baal tefilah and demonstrated to Moshe the order of prayer. Hashem told Moshe that whenever the Jews are in trouble because they sin, **Ya'Asu lefonai kaseder hazeh Va'ani mochel lahem** - they we should do this before Me this sequence and I will forgive them* - somehow that will push the buttons to get me to show mercy, even though they sinned.*

Rav Simon: where does the power lie within these 13 midos? Is it just by saying this formula, these 13 words, that suddenly God will forgive us? **Oznayim LaTorah:** How can we say that whenever the Jews sin, they just have to say these words to get out of danger? Some say that these 13 words are said only when we say Selichos and on fast days; others (the Sefardim) say them every day as part of Tachanun. And yet, how often do we feel that God has answered our prayers immediately after uttering these words? The Gemorrah says that if they sin they **should do** this seder, this order; but it is not just saying the words; it is copying Moshe's actions - Moshe woke early and carried the two stone tablets with him - this was the critical action. If you want to awaken the mercy of Heaven by calling out these 13 words, you have to smash the old tablets, the old sins, and you have to come before God with new luchos - with a new attitude - you have to turn a new page. It is not just about saying words; if you haven't started anew and smashed your old ways, it will not work; there has to be a real act of Teshuvah; then if you pray for Teshuvah, Hashem will forgive you for your sins.

Imray Baruch quoting the **Shlah** and **Alsich:** there is a famous concept of walking in the ways of Hashem - this means imitating His Midos - these 13 traits - God's patience, kindness, slowness to anger, etc.. Just as He is merciful, we should be merciful; just as He is slow to anger, so should we be. Hashem says that if His children will do this, if we walk in God's footsteps and emulate His ways in how we act towards one another, then He will forgive us. It is not just saying these words, it is walking the walk, not just talking the talk. Whenever the Jews sin, the Gemorrah says they must **do** this, not just say this; the words don't forgive by themselves; if we emulate God, then He will forgive us. **Chafetz Chayim:** the best way for God to forgive us is for us to forgive others; the way we act towards others, that is how God will act towards us. God will judge us the way we judge others; if we are compassionate and patient with others, He will reciprocate. If we act in these ways, that will strengthen God's ability to act that way towards us; He will pick up His cue from us.

Rabbeinu Bachya: all who truly, deeply understand these 13 midos of Hashem, and their essence, and then say them with intense concentration - basically davening with tremendous Kavanah - they will be forgiven. There is enormous power in just saying these attributes and you will not be turned away by Hashem, unless there are some major sins blocking forgiveness. In

our current time in exile with no mizbeach and korbanos, and no Kohen Gadol to obtain forgiveness for us, all we have left to lean upon is Tefillah, and especially these 13 Midos of Hashem. We try to storm the gates of prayer on Yom Kippur with the power of Tefillah to obtain Teshuvah; just saying the words with meaning can unlock God's mercy.

34:6: **Hashem Hashem Kel Rachum Vechanun**. There is controversy whether the first two words of Hashem are counted as 1 or 2 attributes. **Rabbeinu Tam**: they are two; otherwise it did not have to be repeated; but then why are they two - there has to be some difference? **Rashi**: it is the midah of rachamim - Hashem is there for us before we sin, and He is there after we sin and repent; the midah of rachamim is there for us if we do Teshuvah; we did not permanently wreck the relationship; He is Hashem before we hurt Him, and He remains that way after we sin.

Sifsei Chachamim: the **Rosh** asks - if Hashem is the attribute of mercy, why do we need mercy before we sin? The **Rosh** answers that we need rachamim beforehand because God knows the future, that we are destined to sin; we humans don't know if someone will hurt us; but God does know this, and since we will sin, He could be angry at us with this foreknowledge; but He has this rachamim for us. **Ohr Hachayim**: but this is difficult to understand: God knows the entire future of how and when we will sin - if we are concerned He will punish us before hand, why did He create us? It is inevitable that humans will all sin; if we are worried that God will punish us for future sins, and He has to squelch this with His mercy, what is the point of the master plan of creating us? We are all destined to sin as part of the original plan; if God needs special mercy to stop Himself from punishing us, there really was no point in creating us? If His way is to punish in advance for our sins, then why bother placing us on this earth? This was an argument between the angels and Hashem when Yishmael and Hagar were dying of thirst; it says that God looked down and saw him *Ba'asher Hu Sham* - as he was there; this means that although the angels said why save him when his future descendants are meant to torment and harm His nation, God judged him as he was at that point - at that time he was pure, even though the angels had a strong case. Likewise, part of Hashem's midos is judging us as we are at that point - He will not be prejudiced based on how much we will sin in the future. The second listing of Hashem is to forgive us after we have sinned.

In the Selichos when we say the 13 midos, we always ends with Venakeh. Most meforshim count the 13 midos this way: 1) Hashem, 2) Hashem, 3) Kel, 4) Rachum, 5) Chanun, 6) Erech Apayim, 7) Rav Chesed, 8) Emes, 9) Notzair Chesed La'Alaphim; 10) Nosei Avon; 11) Vapheshah, 12) Vechata'ah, 13) Venakeh.

Abarbanel counts differently: 1) Hashem, 2) Hashem, 3) Kel, 4) Rachum, 5) Chanun, 6) Erech Apayim, 7) Rav Chesed, 8) Emes, 9) Notzair Chesed La'Alaphim; 10) Nosei Avon Vapheshah Vechata'ah; 11) Venakeh; 12) Lo Yenakeh (he is not cleansing, although this does not sound like a merciful trait); 13) Pokaid Avon Avos al Banim Ve'al Benai Banim al Shelaishim Ve'al Rebaiyim. He does not end the count in the middle of the pasuk as most other meforshim. But how are these last two midos attributes of rachamim? The midah of Venakeh means He is willing to cleanse us. Lo Yenakeh does not mean He does not cleanse us. There is a pasuk in Yirmiyahu that says *He will make Kallah, complete destruction, of the nations, but not the Jews; He will afflict us with judgment, but Venakeh Lo Anakechah* - He will cleanse us - sometimes with yisurim - but not completely destroy us. This is the promise that God will never completely destroy the Jewish nation; we remain the eternal people, because otherwise it will destroy the entire plan of creation. The final attribute of Pokaid Avon al Banim is a midah of mercy - when it comes to those other yisurim, He will not punish us with one knockout blow; he will meet out doses of punishment over time; not only to us, but small amounts to each future

generation so that no one will get the entire severe punishment; it will be doled out slowly to prevent the end of Klal Yisrael; if any of us received the entire deserved punishment, we would not survive; it is given out over many generations; each generation gets a fraction of the deserved punishment; it is truly a midah of rachamim.

Abarbanel: the first Hashem is about God in His own essence; the second for how He treats the world. Kel is the language of power; Hashem is a powerful God, and He uses His power to dole out rachamim; and He wants us to emulate Him, to do an abundance of kindness. Rachum: Hashem is acting on Himself to make Himself a merciful God, in the way He raises His children to flourish; it is the most powerful word for mercy because it is related to the word rechem, the womb; there is no greater mercy than that of a woman for her child. So this midah has nothing to do with sin. Chanun: as in Atah Chonein; it has to do with wisdom; we grow with wisdom in how God reacts to the world; He possesses all knowledge and impart it to us with His great mercy.