

## Parshat Ki Tisa 5779

In this week's sedra we see that after the grave sin of the golden calf, Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai and pleaded with G-d to forgive the Jewish people. After his supplications were accepted, Moshe considered it an auspicious moment to ask G-d to give the Jewish people a way of being granted mercy should they fall again in the future. In chapter 33 v 18 he says, "Please, show me Your glory."

Rashi explains this was a time of favourable disposition and that his words were being accepted. That is why Moshe requested a vision of glory. Rashi explains that G-d would "call out the name of Hashem to teach you the procedure of requesting mercy" so that Israel will be answered (Rosh Hashonah 17b). G-d had made a covenant with the Jewish people so that when the 13 attributes are invoked in prayer, they would not return empty handed. Rabbi Yehuda explains that the covenant will guarantee the effectiveness of the 13 attributes forever. The Brisker Rav explains that all the mercy that the Jewish people would require until the final redemption was, as it were, deposited into an account at that time, to be withdrawn when necessary. Rabbeinu Bachaye writes that today we are bereft of all the things that will aid us in atoning our sins such as the Holy temple, the high priest and the offerings. All that is left is the ability to invoke the 13 attributes of divine mercy in our prayers as they still remain the key with which to open the gates of mercy in every generation for both the community and the individual.

Rav Zev Leff writes that there are two basic opinions as to how the 13 attributes work. The Alscich and the Reishis chochmah state that mere recitation of these attributes is not enough. One must accompany their recitation with action by emulating these attributes in his relationships with his fellow man. This is the reason why they are only recited in a minyan as it is difficult for one individual to embody all these attributes, but amongst a congregation they can be found. Rav Joel Finklestein of Anshei sephard congregation states that In Ashkenazi congregations they are said only during Selichot and Yom Kippur but in some sephardi congregations they are said every day. Rav Leff continues, "The prophetic vision of G-d wrapped in a Tallit relates to this need to emulate His attributes by reminding us of our obligation to perform all the Mitzvot. The Tallit hints to the fact that one must clothe himself in these attributes and not merely recite them."

The second opinion (Bnei Yissachar) discussed by Rav Leff is that recitation is in itself enough to be effective. How can this be? The Maharal explains that to be so they must be said with concentration, intention and understanding without action. The recitation of these attributes can create a period of Divine favour and grace brought about by recitation of the Divine Attributes (Malbim)

Let us now look more closely at the idea of mercy. We all can show mercy to another, yet there are always restraints and calculations as to how much mercy will be shown. In giving Tzadokoh we will calculate an amount based on our own personal financial situation and the degree of need. However, the number 13 signifies the infinite. The number 12 signifies constraint and order, e.g. the zodiac signs and the months of the year. But above this, the number 13 connotes boundlessness and immeasurability. The fact that there are 13 attributes of mercy, shows us that when G-d shows mercy he does so without limits. This is further demonstrated in the word echad (one), which has the numerical value of 13 ( $1=א / 4=ד / 1=א / 8=ח$ ). This signifies G-d's oneness in the world, how He is beyond any measure and limitation.

How are these 13 attributes explained? Firstly, they refer to Hashem being merciful before and after we sin. According to Rabbi Ezra Bick of Yeshivat Har Etzion, the first "Hashem" shows that our recognition of G-d's existence reveals an act of mercy because He tolerates imperfect human beings and still created us. The second "Hashem" shows mercy because we were created and then rebelled. We would not expect mercy from a human king, therefore the fact we have gone against G-d's will means we continue to exist but the fact that we do, shows his mercy. The word "Almighty" shows strength, which Hashem uses to show mercy. Without wishing to generalise, Western culture tries to imply that kindness is weakness (a view Aristotle was said to have held). But we know that kindness is a strength. There is a difference between Rachum (merciful) and Chanun (graceful). Rachum shows that within judgment there is room for mercy e.g. mitigating circumstances. Chanun means calling out such that if a person screams out to G-d, He will listen and answer with Grace taking account of the level of desperation. May we all merit to receive the mercy of Hashem.