

ענין הי"ג מדות וביאורם ע"ד הפשט

Explanation of Hashem's 13 Attributes of Mercy

Introduction by Rabbeinu Bachaye: Hashem promised Moshe on Sinai, "Any time that [Klal] Yisroel sins, they should perform before me this order [of service - they should recite the 13 middos] and I will forgive them" (*Rosh Hashonah 17b*). Our sages also teach us, "A covenant has been made concerning the 13 middos, that they will never return empty [i.e. without having accomplished]" (*ibid*). Indeed they are a mighty key, both for the individual and for the masses in every generation, with which to beseech [that] the gates of mercy [be opened], and especially in our times when we are in exile and in bondage amongst the nations and do not have a *Kohen Gadol* to atone for our sins, nor an altar on which to bring sacrifices, nor a *Bais Hamikdash* in which to pray, and all that remains with us before Hashem are our prayers and these thirteen attributes. (*Sefer Kad Hakemach-Kipurim 2*)

הוי"ה	Compassionate before one has sinned. Even before a person has sinned he still needs Heavenly compassion, for Hashem owes us nothing; all that we have is only due to His grace and compassion. Also, even when Hashem sees that a person will sin in the future, His compassion for him at present remains, since the person has not yet sinned.
הוי"ה	Compassionate after one has sinned and repented. Even after a person has sinned, immediately after repentance Hashem's compassion is rekindled towards him. This is unlike the behavior of a human being, who will distance himself from a person who has wronged him, and will often never accept him back. Hashem's being, however, is unchanging (as is hinted in the name הוי"ה), and therefore even after a person has sinned (even seriously) His compassion still remains.
א-ל	This too is an attribute of compassion: There are different levels of compassion; this is not the same type of compassion as is denoted in the name הוי"ה. Some explain that א-ל denotes total mercy (see explanation of Gur Aryeh as well).
רחום	Merciful to ease the punishment of sinners when they call out to Him.
וחנון	He acts charitably to those who ask for it, even if they are unworthy.
ארך אפים	He is slow to anger and does not hasten to punish a person for his sins, in the hope that he will repent.
ורב חסד	He is abundant in kindness towards those who need it but do not deserve it by their own merit. He leans towards favor [in judgment].
ואב	He is faithful to generously reward those who do His will.
נוצר חסד לאלפים	He guards the good deeds that a person does for two thousand generations [for the benefit of those descendants].
נשא עון	He forgives deliberate sins.
ופשע	He forgives rebellious sins.
וחטאה	He forgives unintentional sins. (One must repent even on sins committed unintentionally, as soon as he becomes aware of them).
ונקה	He cleanses those who repent of their sins and absolves them of punishment. After repenting and being forgiven by Hashem, if a person would commit the same sin again, only the new sin will be held against him, for the old sin has already been forgiven and wiped away.

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