

High Holyday Prayer Focus: the 13 Attributes of Compassion

Class 2

With Rabbi Josh Jacobs-Velde

1)

ללכת בכל דרכיו - אלו דרכי הקב"ה, שנ' (שמות לד) ה' ה' אל רחום וחנון, ארץ אפים ורב חסד ואמת, נוצר חסד לאלפים, נושא עון ופשע וחתאה ונקה... וכי היאך אפשר לו לאדם להיקרא בשמו של הקב"ה? אלא מה המקום נקרא רחום וחנון - אף אתה הוי רחום וחנון ועשה מתנת חנם לכל. מה הקב"ה נקרא צדיק, שנ' (תהלים קמה) צדיק ה' בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו - אף אתה הוי צדיק. הקב"ה נקרא חסיד, שנאמ' וחסיד בכל מעשיו - אף אתה הוי חסיד...

(Devarim 11:22) "to walk in God's ways": What are the ways of the Holy Blessed One? (Shemot 34:6-7) "YHVH, YHVH, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in love and truth, extending lovingkindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving transgression, offense, and sin, and cleansing This means that just as *HaMakom* (the Omnipresent, the Place) is called "compassionate and gracious," you, too, be compassionate and gracious, and give freely to all. Just as the Blessed Holy One is called righteous/just (*tzadik*) as it says "righteous in all God's ways" (*Ashrey/Ps. 145:17*) so you too must be righteous. Just as the Blessed Holy One is loving, as it says "loving in all God's actions" (*ibid.*) you too must be loving. (*Midrash Sifre, Deuteronomy 49, 3rd century CE, Israel/Babylonia*)

2)

Rashi on Genesis 1:1:3

ELOHIM CREATED ברא אלהים — It does not state "YHVH created," because at first God intended to create it (the world) to be placed under the attribute (rule) of Judgment (*midat ha'din*), but God realized that the world could not thus endure and

רש"י על בראשית א':א':ג'

(ג) ברא אלהים ולא נאמר ברא ה', שבתחלה עלה במחשבה לבראתו במדת הדין, ראה שאין העולם מתקיים, הקדים מדת רחמים ושתפּה למה"ד, והיינו דכתיב ביום עשות ה' אלהים ארץ ושמים:

therefore gave precedence to the midah of Compassion/Mercy (*midat rachamim*) allying it with the Midah of Judgment. It is to this that what is written in (Genesis 2:4) alludes — “In the day that YHVH ELOHIM made earth and heaven”.

3)

Bereishit Rabbah 12:15

YHVH ELOHIM - (Likened to a) King that had empty cups. Said the king: If I pour hot (liquid) into them - they will break. Cold water - they will collapse. What did the king do? Mixed hot and cold, poured into them and they survived. In the same manner the Blessed Holy One said: If I create the world with the midah of compassion/mercy - their sins will be too big. (If I create the world) with the midah of judgment - how can it stand?! Rather I will create it in (a mix of) midah of mercy and the midah of din - and may it merit to stand.

בראשית רבה י"ב:ט"ו

(טו) ה' אֱלֹהִים, לְמַלְךְ שֶׁהָיוּ לוֹ כּוֹסוֹת רִיקִים, אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אִם אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לְתוֹכָן חֲמִין, הֵם מִתְבַּקְּעִין. צוֹנָן, הֵם מִקְרִיסִין, וְמָה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ עִרְב חֲמִין בְּצוֹנָן וְנָתַן בָּהֶם וְעָמְדוּ. כִּף אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אִם בּוֹרָא אֲנִי אֶת הָעוֹלָם בְּמִדַּת הַרְחָמִים, הָיָה חֲטִיִּיה סְגִיאִין. בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין, הָאִיף הָעוֹלָם יִכּוֹל לְעָמֵד. אֲלָא הֵרִי אֲנִי בּוֹרָא אוֹתוֹ בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין וּבְמִדַּת הַרְחָמִים, וְהִלּוֹא יֵעָמֵד.

4) In order to become a conduit for the flow of divine compassion, many of the Hasidic masters made compassionate awareness the central focus of their spiritual healing practice. They taught that each day of our lives, we have many opportunities to view things either from the perspective of judgment — *din*— or compassion — *rachamim*. When we view reality from the perspective of *din*, our vision may be objectively correct from an absolute perspective, but we are often missing the point of it all, which is that all of life needs healing and fixing, and we

are part of the process. When we see life through the lens of rachamim, with eyes filled with love and compassion, we become healers, and we have the ability to shape reality in a positive way. Ultimately our compassion and love have the power to bring healing.

Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness*, p. 185.

5)

Rosh Hashanah 17b

The verse states: **“And the YHVH passed by before him, and proclaimed”** (Exodus 34:6). **Rabbi Yoḥanan said:** Were it not explicitly written in the verse, it would be impossible to say this, as it would be insulting to God’s honor. The verse teaches that the **Holy Blessed One, wrapped Godself in a prayer shawl like a prayer leader and showed Moses the structure of the order of the prayer. God said to him: Whenever the Jewish people sin, let them act before Me in accordance with this order.** Let the prayer leader wrap themselves in a prayer shawl and publicly recite the thirteen attributes of mercy, **and I will forgive them.**

ראש השנה י"ז ב

ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא א"ר
יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר
לאומרו מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה
כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר
תפלה אמר לו כל זמן שישראל
הוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני
מוחל להם.