

13

Attributes of Mercy



Thirteen Powerful Tools for
Self-Transformation

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בס"ד

"Kindness is the best medicine"

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13 Attributes of Mercy

With Commentary Based on the

Ramak's Tomer D'vora (Palm Tree of Devorah)

According to Jewish tradition, people are made in the “image” of *HaShem*. Mystically speaking, this means that our personal spiritual attributes mirror those of *HaShem*.

In the first chapter of *Tomer D'vora*, **R. Moshe Cordavero**, the *Ramak*, *ztkl*, describes the 13 Attributes of Mercy and explains how they should be manifest in a person's thoughts and deeds.

There is a tradition to learn the first chapter of the *Tomer D'vora* from *Ellul* through to *Yom Kippur*. Learning this chapter is especially helpful during this time because it makes one's *Slichot* and *Yom Kippur* recitations of the 13 Attributes much more meaningful.

Studying the *Remak's* exposition of the 13 Attributes is a powerful means to inspire a person to do *Tshuva* (repentance), because such study can arouse a person's love and appreciation for *HaShem*, and serve to remind a person of their true potential as Torah Jews.

The ultimate goal is for a person to become so familiar with the 13 Attributes' meanings and applications that they can be consciously, regularly, and ultimately reflexively applied in one's life.

1st

Attribute of Mercy

יְדוּד יְדוּד קָל

מִי אֵל כְּמוֹךָ

Who is like you G-d?

Lovingly bear disgrace.

HaShem gives us the very life force that allows us to sin. But even when we use this force “against him” by transgressing, he never withholds this life force from us. This is known as *HaShem*’s “bearing disgrace”.

No matter how disgracefully we treat *HaShem* by using his gifts to violate his will, he continues to bestow us with the gift of life.

So too, if others treat us unkindly and disrespectfully, we should bear their disgrace and continue to treat them with kindness.

2nd

Attribute of Mercy

רחום

נשא עון

Who pardons iniquity

Have patience for wrongdoers.

When a person does an *avera* (sin) they create a punishing angel. This angel seeks sustenance and nourishment from the transgressor who created it. To gain sustenance and nourishment, the angel attempts to harm and punish the transgressor.

HaShem does not allow this angel to punish immediately, but rather HaShem himself provides nourishment and sustenance to the punishing angel so the transgressor can have time to repent.

So too, if others transgress against us, we should not seek immediate “justice” against them, but rather forbear until the person repents for the wrong they did.

3rd

Attribute of Mercy

וְחָנוּן

וְעָבַר עַל פֶּשַׁע

And overlooks transgression

Repair damage caused by transgressors.

HaShem does not cleanse us through a *shliach* (agent), but rather he does it himself. He himself pours the water on us and cleans away the “foul stench” of our transgressions.

So too, a person should not say, “Why should I bother to fix up the bad thing *Ploni* did?” Instead, a person should try to repair the damage caused by others’ transgressions.

Also, a person should be ashamed to transgress again, insofar as *HaShem* himself cleansed him the first time, and now he is forcing *HaShem* to do it again.

Attribute of Mercy

ארך

לשארית נחלתו

*For the remnant of his heritage.**See every Jew as deeply connected to us, and hope they receive blessings.*

The Jewish people are “close relatives” and the “flesh” of *HaShem*. We are called his daughter, his sister, and his mother. We are the “*am k’rovo*”, his relatives.

Thus, when we suffer, so does *HaShem*. Consequently, he actively and constantly seeks to alleviate our suffering.

So too, a person should feel the suffering of their fellow Jew, and seek to alleviate that suffering by good deeds and heartfelt prayers on their behalf.

5th

Attribute of Mercy

אפים

לא החזיק לעד אפו

*Who has not retained His wrath
eternally,*

***Do not harshly rebuke, but rather bring close
with love.***

Even if a person continually sins, *HaShem* does not become continuously angry with them. Instead, *HaShem* nullifies his anger and waits for the person to repent.

So too, a person should not act angrily or indignantly when they see another Jew transgress. Instead, a person should nullify their anger and bring that person close with love.

6th

Attribute of Mercy

ורב חסד

כי הפץ חסד הוא

For He desires kindness!

Amplify the tiniest bit of good in others.

There are angels that receive the good deeds Jews do in this world. And when the attribute of justice prosecutes against us, these angels bring up our good deeds before *HaShem* and he has mercy on us.

So too, when a person feels like pronouncing a harsh judgment against another Jew, they should seek a redeeming feature in that Jew. Perhaps they learn Torah, give charity, or perform some other good deed. A person should say to themselves, “It’s enough for me that this Jew does such and such a *mitzvah*.”

7th

Attribute of Mercy

ואמת

ישוב ירחמנו

He will again be merciful to us,

Forgive transgressors and love them more.

HaShem is not like flesh and blood. When a person gets angry with his fellow and is then appeased, the love does not return as before, but is diminished. This is not so for *HaShem*.

In fact, *HaShem* loves the repentant sinner *more* than before. This is the secret of the concept, “In the place where the *baalei t’shuva* stand the complete *tzaddikim* cannot stand.”

So too, when a person seeks forgiveness from us, we should love them more, and treat them more mercifully, than we did before they hurt us.

8th

Attribute of Mercy

נצח חסד

יכבש עונותינו

He will suppress our iniquities,

Turn our eyes away from others' evil deeds.

HaShem allows our *mitzvot* to ascend before him, but he suppresses and prevents our *averot* (sins) from ascending before him to prosecute; *HaShem*, so to speak, turns his eyes from them.

So too, a person should elevate another Jew's good deeds before them, and turn his eyes from that person's evil deeds as much as they possibly can.

9th

Attribute of Mercy

לאלפים

ותשליך במצלות ים כל חטאתם

*And cast into the depths of the sea all
their sins.*

***Rescue transgressors from those who seek to
do them harm.***

On *Yom Kippur*, *HaShem* provides us with the *mitzvah* of confessing and placing our sins on the “Goat for Sending”. We are thus cleansed of our transgressions. Simultaneously, *HaShem* renders judgment and rescues us, destroying the negative spiritual forces that entice us to sin and seek to do us harm.

So too, even if a person sees a *rasha* suffering for his evil, we should bring this Jewish person close and rescue him from those punishing agents who seek to do him harm.

10th

Attribute of Mercy

נִשְׂא עוֹן

תתן אמת ליעקב

Grant truth to Jacob,

Judge others mercifully.

Even when *HaShem* administers justice, he does so mercifully by considering mitigating factors and circumstances. This mercy in judgment is known as the straight and true way (*tz'ad yosher v'emet*).

So too, a person should show mercy and straightness in judging others, considering all mitigating factors to arrive at a true judgment.

11th

Attribute of Mercy

ופשע

חסד לאברהם

Kindness to Avraham,

Judge others with kindness (beyond the letter of the law - l'fnim shurat ha'din).

HaShem administers justice in a way that goes beyond the letter of the law (*l'fnim shurat ha'din*). This means that he shows us favor in judgment above and beyond what is warranted by mitigating factors and circumstances.

So too, a person should judge their fellow Jew above and beyond the letter of the law (*l'fnim shurat ha'din*).

12th

Attribute of Mercy

וְחָטָא

אשר נשבעת לאבותינו

As You swore to our forefathers,

***Remember every Jew is the child of Avraham,
Yitzhak, and Yaakov.***

HaShem shows mercy on transgressors as a “free gift” as a result of the oaths he swore to our forefathers.

So too, if a person is accosted by Jewish evildoers, he should not act cruelly towards them but bear the disgrace quietly and have mercy on them because, “in the end, they are children of *Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov*.”

13th

Attribute of Mercy

וּנְקָא

מִימֵי קֶדֶם

From ancient times.

View transgressors as innocent and pure young toddlers.

When the merits of our forefathers are exhausted, *HaShem* “remembers the kindness of [our] youth.” That is, *HaShem* remembers the love he had for us when the Jewish people were “young”, and when we served him in innocence and purity. This memory causes him to have tremendous mercy on us.

**This attribute contains all of the
other 12 attributes within it.**

So too, a person can fix up his relations with others by viewing transgressing Jews as if they were toddlers who still nurse from their mothers. In this way, a person will see every Jew as fit to receive goodness, and consequently be aroused to pray for their peace, and to have mercy on them.

Application of the 13 Attributes

- Use the Thirteen Attributes chart (**next page**) during your *Slichot* and *Yom Kippur* recitations of the 13 attributes. Also, use them any other time you recite the 13 attributes.
- As you recite each attribute, cycle through the attribute principle in your mind. As you cycle through the attribute, feel and connect to the principle. For example:
 - o If somebody in your life treated you disrespectfully and you still can't forgive them, as you recite the 1st attribute (or meditate upon it), in your mind apply the principle of “Lovingly bear disgrace” to that situation.
 - o If you are feeling annoyed or frustrated with somebody or a group of people in *shul* that day, as you recite or meditate upon the 13th principle, view those persons as if they are innocent and pure young toddlers.
 - o If you judge yourself harshly, and the evil inclination is telling you that G-d doesn't love you, or that you are unworthy, apply the 13 attributes to yourself – this will help you rise from the darkness of self-persecution and strengthen your faith and repentance.
- Over time, these principles will become memorized and a part of your personal self-transformation tool box. Ultimately, by imitating HaShem's attributes we actualize our full human potential and manifest our “Image of G-d.”

- It is important to note that the use of these principles in one's daily life is a core Torah methodology to fix and improve blemished personality characteristics (*middot*).

13 Attributes Of Mercy

(Prayer and Meditation Chart)

1	ידוד ידוד אל מי אל כמוך	<i>Lovingly bear disgrace.</i>
2	רחום נשא עון	<i>Have patience for wrongdoers.</i>
3	יחנון ועבר על פשע	<i>Repair damage caused by transgressors.</i>
4	ארך לשארית נחלתו	<i>See every Jew as deeply connected to us, and hope they receive blessings.</i>
5	אפים לא החזיק לעד אפו	<i>Do not harshly rebuke, but rather bring close with love.</i>
6	ורב חסד כי חפץ חסד הוא	<i>Amplify the tiniest bit of good in others.</i>
7	ואמת ישוב ירחמנו	<i>Forgive transgressors and love them more.</i>

13 Attributes Of Mercy

(Prayer and Meditation Chart)

8	נצר חסד יכבש עונתינו	<i>Turn our eyes away from others' evil deeds.</i>
9	לאלפים ותשליך במצלות ים כל חטאתם	<i>Rescue transgressors from those who seek to do them harm.</i>
10	נשא עון תתן אמת ליעקב	<i>Judge others mercifully.</i>
11	ופשע חסד לאברהם	<i>Judge others with kindness (l'fnim shurat ha'din).</i>
12	והטאה אשר נשבעת לאבותינו	<i>Remember every Jew is the child of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov.</i>
13	ונקא מימי קדם	

		<i>View transgressors as innocent and pure young toddlers.</i>
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13 Attributes of Mercy is a practical, easy-to-understand guide that teaches how to use the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy as a tool for personal transformation and spiritual growth.

This guide enables people of all levels of Jewish learning and observance to access one of the deepest and most important Kabbalistic texts, the **Palm Tree of Devorah** (*Tomer Devorah*), written by Rabbi Moshe Cordevero (the *Ramak*), *z'tkl*.

There is a centuries-old tradition to learn the Palm Tree of Devorah in the weeks leading up to Rosh HaShana (in *Ellul*) through Yom Kippur. Learning about and implementing the **13 Attributes of Mercy** is a highly effective way to reconnect and return to *HaShem*.

