

Hashem, Hashem, G-d, Merciful and Compassionate, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth. (34:6)

When *Klal Yisrael* stood at the foot of *Har Sinai*, they pledged their eternal devotion to Hashem with their seminal declaration of *Naaseh v'Nishma*, "We will do and we will listen!" Their obedience to the Almighty and His Torah was affirmed and ratified with these words. Alas, forty days later, they broke their trust by betraying their promise, offering their allegiance instead to a molten calf of their own creation. This marked the nadir of disloyalty. Hashem stated that He would put an end to this recalcitrant people. Such people did not deserve a commutation of Hashem's desired decree. (Nevertheless, Hashem informed Moshe that if he prays for them, He will not destroy them.) However, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* impassioned pleas on their behalf brought about a second chance for his nascent nation. Hashem turned His anger to mercy. The climax of the pardon occurred when Hashem passed before Moshe and revealed to him the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, *Yud Gimel Middos shel Rachamim*.

Chazal describe the scene and ensuing dialogue. The *Talmid Rosh Hashanah* 17a states, "Rabbi Yochanan said: The Torah teaches us that Hashem wrapped Himself in a *Tallis* like a *chazzan* and showed Moshe the order of the prayer. Hashem said to him, 'Whenever *Yisrael* sins, let them perform this order of service and I will forgive them...'" *Chazal* continue with the notion that a covenant has been struck that the Thirteen Attributes are never turned back unanswered.

The *Brisker Rav, zl*, explains the nature of this covenant. He explains that it is as if Hashem had gathered an enormous cache of mercy. Hashem would forever withdraw "mercy" from this treasure trove. Thus, whatever was needed to respond to *Klal Yisrael's* invocation of the Thirteen Attributes would be available for disbursement. Therefore, when a plea for mercy is accompanied with the *Yud Gimel Middos*, it is answered because there is an ample supply of mercy available for those in need.

Obviously, there is more to the meaning of the *Yud Gimel Middos* and their exceptional powers than meets the eye. The *Reishis Chochmah, Shaar Ha'Anavah* observes that Hashem was deliberate in saying *Yaasu lefanai*, "Let them **perform/act** before Me" this order or service. He did not **say** *Yomru lefanai*, "Let them say before Me." Simple recitation of the Thirteen Attributes will not affect Divine pardon. A Jew must **act** in accordance with Hashem's Attributes. He must follow in His ways: *Ma Hu Rachum – af atah ra'chum*, "As He is merciful, so shall you be merciful." In their relationship with their fellowman, they must conduct themselves with a degree of mercy worthy of Hashem's Divine mercy. Thus, the *Yud Gimel Middos* serve as a map, offering directions on how a Jew should emulate the Almighty.

The *Shlah HaKadosh (Shaar HaOsios)* perceives man's fulfillment of the *Yud Gimel Middos* as a cardinal act of faith. He demonstrates how the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy correspond with the Thirteen Attributes of Faith. The individual who melds his entire being in consonance with the

Heavenly model/standard of mercy achieves an unprecedented level of *emunah*, faith, in the Almighty.

Thus, if someone were to degrade, humiliate, or curse him, he should accept this degradation with love. The realization that the offender is nothing more than Hashem's Agent – who is carrying out a mission to cleanse and purify him from past sins – makes this humiliating experience not only palatable, but embracing.

Mah Hu – Af atah, “As He is – so should you be.” Forgiveness takes incredible resolution and strength of character. At times, the reluctance to “bury the hatchet,” so to speak, stems from one's desire to save face, to exact some form of revenge. This is especially true when the damage inflicted is traumatic, emotional, or has humiliated him in such a manner that the pain perseveres. If someone is not forgiving, does it make him a miserable person, an unworthy person? So he is not G-d-like! Is that not why G-d is G-d, and we are but human beings, subject to human frailty?

I came across a story that puts it all into perspective. The dichotomy between man and the Divine is unfathomable. Nevertheless, if one does not make the attempt to close this gap by emulating the Divine, then he should not personally expect treatment that is any different from the one he renders to others.

A *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar of note, was deeply humiliated by a member of the community in which he lived. The hurt was overwhelming, the pain staggering. This was a scholar who was a fine, unassuming individual, but this was an exceptional situation – or so he felt. A few days after the incident, he received a note from the offender expressing his regret, claiming that he had “lost it” and gone too far. Could the scholar find it in his heart to forgive him?

The scholar was too hurt to even continue reading the note. So many things went through his mind, as he remembered the humiliation, the emotional pain that had accompanied him wherever he went. There was no way he could – or would – forgive the offender, regardless of how many notes he would send. This was an infraction that he simply could not ignore. As he was about to tear up the note and place it in its “rightful” place in the wastebasket, his wife interceded. He was blessed with a wise woman who was less emotionally involved in this incident, affording him a different perspective.

“Do not tear up the note!” she said. “Save it and place it between the pages of your *Siddur*. During *Shemoneh Esrai*, when you stand in supplication before Hashem, reciting the blessing of *S'lach la'nu Avinu, ki cha'tanu, m'chal la'nu Malkeinu, ki fa'shanu*. “Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned; Pardon us, our King, for we have sinned willfully,” remove the note and say to Hashem, “*Ribbono Shel Olam*, Master of the world, it is so difficult for me to forgive and forget the emotional distress which someone caused me. I have suffered indescribable pain as a result of his iniquity; yet, I found it in my heart to forgive him *b'lev shaleim*, with a complete heart. I went against my innate nature, because it was the correct thing to do. Therefore, I ask You, Hashem, to likewise

forgive me for my sins and transgressions.”

When someone hurts us, our relationship with Hashem is probably the last thing that comes to our mind. This should not be. Emulating Hashem means just that. We should expect no less from ourselves than that for which we entreat Hashem.