

Let my Master go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people. (34:9)

Hashem revealed to Moshe *Rabbeinu* His *Yud Gimmel middos*, Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which signify that Hashem will forgive us out of a sense of Divine compassion. Understandably, we are not always worthy of His absolution. Thus, these Attributes come into play to guarantee that Hashem will never turn His “back” on us. Following the last of the *middos*, Moshe asks of Hashem, *Yeilech na Hashem b'kirbeinu*, “Let my Master go among us.” Why does this request follow immediately after the Attributes of Mercy? In his inimitable manner, the *Maggid, zl, m'Dubno* explains with a parable.

A peddler who would travel from town to town selling his wares stopped in a large city with the hope that he would do well in the wealthy suburb of the city. His wares consisted of wooden spoons which were used by many in the smaller communities that he serviced. Alas, those communities were home to economically deprived families. Therefore, his prices and consequent profit margin were low. Here, he hoped to make a killing. From the exterior of the homes and fancy gardens, these were people of means. He would surely make a sizable profit. The problem was: In order to make money, one must have customers. After two days of screaming, “Wooden spoons!” and generating no response, he was becoming quite angry. These people had some “nerve” to ignore him.

A wise man noticed the peddler’s anxiety and guessed the reason. He came over and said, “Let me give you a bit of advice. You are in the wrong neighborhood. These are wealthy people who would never eat with wooden spoons. For them, it is either silver or, even, gold. Wood? Unheard of in this neighborhood. If you want to sell wooden spoons, return to the poor neighborhoods. There you will find customers.”

Likewise, Moshe stood before Hashem and argued, “*Ribono shel olam*; what place do Your Thirteen Attributes of Mercy have in the Heavenly sphere? The angels certainly have no use for them, since they have no *yetzer hara*, evil inclination. They are pure and do not sin. Such “wares” have no place in Heaven. If I find favor in Your eyes, if You want to see Your Attributes of Mercy put to good use, where it is vital and will transform lives, come among us, for *Klal Yisrael* is a stiff-necked people who have sinned and will continue to make mistakes. They require the Thirteen Attributes in order to survive. It is only among us that You will find ‘customers’ for Your wares.”

As Moshe implored Hashem to “descend” and “go among us,” Hashem told Moshe that his place was not in Heaven. He had a job to do on earth. When the nation sinned with the Golden Calf, the Almighty said to Moshe, *Lech, reid ki shicheis amcha*; “Go down, for Your people have become corrupt” (Ibid.32:7). *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl* (quoted in *Lev Eliyahu*), explains that Hashem was intimating to Moshe, “Your people need you down there.” The *Talmud (Kiddushin 40b)* states that the world is judged in accordance with the majority of its merits. If the merits outweigh the demerits,

it survives. If, Heaven forbid, the people have a greater number of deficiencies than merits, we are in serious trouble. Thus, the *zchuyos*, merits of the *tzaddikim*, righteous men, of each generation keep us alive. When a *tzaddik* is taken from his generation, it puts the generation into a different balance, because his merits are not present to serve as protection.

In the event that Hashem seeks to punish the generation, and, as a result of the *tzaddik's* merits they are in protective mode, Hashem is compelled to remove the *tzaddik*. The generation requires discipline and, as long as the *tzaddik* is among them, Hashem must refrain from punishment. Thus, Hashem removes the barrier, the protective agent, from among them. When the *tzaddik* is not in this world, his merits cannot protect, leaving the generation open to the "elements."

Hashem looked at the Jewish people who were sinning with the Golden Calf. This was an egregious sin generated by the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, but, like a conflagration burning through a forest of dry trees, it was quickly swallowing up the people whose defenses against sin were still weak. Hashem told Moshe, "You had better get down there. They need you. Without your merits to protect the nation, there might no longer be a nation. Your presence is demanded elsewhere."

There is a time and place for everything. During the sin, Hashem told Moshe, "Your place is on earth." After the sin, Moshe pleaded with Hashem, "We need Your Presence among us."