

# REVIEW OF THE SHOLOSH ESRAI MIDDOS OF RACHAMIM, THE 13 ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY OF HASHEM

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We are now in Elul, leading up to Rosh Hashano. Elul is a period of time where, **אני לדודי ודודי לי**, 'Ani l'dodi v' dodi li.' Hashem is looking to strengthen his connection with us. He is reaching out to us, and it is a time that we are to do introspection into our lives-see what we accomplished in the past year, where we can improve. It is written, "Dirshu Hashem V'himozoi" seek out Hashem at a time when he can be find. This is speaking about the Aseres Yimai Teshuva-the 2 days of Rosh Hashona and the following days till Yom Kippur. We are looking forward to these days, when it is easier to find Hashem. Hashem makes himself more accessible to us and Hashem is more willing to accept our teshuva.

We will be beginning Selichos this Motzei Shabbos. A very important component of Selichos, of the Rosh Hashona davening, of the Yom Kippur davening is the sholosh esrai middos of rachamim of Hashem-13 attributes of mercy. It is important to understand what they mean so we say them with kavana.

Soro Baila reviewed the words of Rabbeinu Bichaya. When were we given these 13 attributes of mercy of Hashem? After the cheit ha'egel and Moshe Rabbeinu threw down the luchos and Hashem wanted to destroy the Jewish nation and begin a new nation under Moshe Rabbeinu and Moshe Rabbeinu absolutely refused this offer, he davened and davened and davened that Hashem not destroy us and he developed an intimate relationship with Hashem. Hashem said to him, "Moshe, it is time that I teach you the sholosh esrai middos of rachamim. And Rabbeinu Bichaya says these middos are a tefila, so to speak. And they are a **'special key'** that are so powerful. Most of us do not fathom the immense power this tefila contains. We should realize it, and we should say it with kavana with the right intent.

Rabbeinu Bichaya says that Hashem promised Moshe Rabbeinu that even if Bnei Yisroel sin, if they come before me and say these sholosh esrai middos (with the right kavana) then I will for sure forgive them of their sins.

This is a 'bris caruso' this is a covenant that CANNOT BE BROKEN. Hashem gave us a promise, if we say these 13 attributes, **אֵינָם חֹזְרוֹת רֵיקָם** they will not return empty handed.

So we say how powerful this tefila is, how this is such a tremendous key that Hashem has given us. So if we couple this tremendous tefila, with these powerful times-the end of Elul, the Aseres Yima Teshuva, we cannot even fathom where this can lead us.

The end of the posuk: **אני לדודי ודודי לי**

Ani l'dodi v'dodi li, finishes with the words: **הרואה בשושנים**

'Who gazes among the roses'? Roses are comprised of 13 petals-this is a hint to the thirteen attributes of Hashem. Ani l'dodi v' dodi li-which is speaking about Elul (the first letters of these words make up the word Elul) Hashem is running the world more using these 13 attributes. And so we too can utilize this power and opportunity that we now have using the kedusha of this tefila.

When Hashem taught Moshe these 13 attributes, Hashem also said, **יעשו לפני**

Hashem gave Moshe Rabbeinu a directive, to us as to how we are to conduct ourselves, how we are to emulate Hashem, **יעשו לפני**

They should act according to these 13 directives, Hashem told Moshe. And we know that how we act towards others is how Hashem acts towards us-so this directive becomes even more powerful.

Soro Baila went on to list all 13 attributes.

In the Yom Kippur davening, before we read the Sholosh Esrai Middos, we say,

**ויעבר ד' על פניו ויקרא**

And Hashem passed before Moshe Rabbeinu and called out to him (the 13 attributes)

If the posuk would not speak in such 'human' terms we could never say this about Hashem, but because the Torah tells it to us in such human terms we are allowed to say it. As much as we strive to know and understand Hashem, we cannot know Hashem. And even when we speak of these attributes of Hashem, we still can't understand Hashem, but the Torah is allowing us to put it into 'human terms'.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> attribute of Hashem is **קל** which is an attribute of mercy, and with this attribute there is a concept of 'strength' involved. The Torah says, that sometimes for a person to have mercy on someone else, he must conquer his anger. And we see this many times, people annoy us and we have to muster all our strength (koach) to forgive them and be compassionate to them

**ארכ אפים** Slow to anger. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> attribute

**עון, ופשע, וחטאה** These are 3 separate middos

That Hashem bears 3 different sins of ours, and he withholds the judgement from us for these 3 types of sins.

**עון** What we do on purpose, knowingly

**פשע** Rebelliously, done specifically to anger Hashem

**חטאה** Not knowingly

For these 3 types of sin, Hashem uses this power that he bears our sins and doesn't punish us right away. This is something we can try to emulate when we feel people wronged us.

When Rav Chaim Kanievesky shlita was sitting shiva for his Rebbetzin, he told his children, "If people will ask you, what was so special about your mother? Answer, it was her midda of 'savlonus' patience. Rebbetzin Batsehva Kanievesky had many wonderful attributes, but her husband made a point of mentioning this important midda and from this we can learn a lot. Rav Chaim shlita brought down a Gemara to explain to his children, that when one has the midda of 'savlonus' in actuality they are portraying the midda of 'anava' of humility. They go hand in hand. The Gemara is explaining that a person needs a developed middah of 'anava' of humility in order to be able to have this tremendous middah of 'savlonus' of patience. It may be difficult to understand at first, but the concept is, we need to humble ourselves in order to understand other human beings.

Of course all these 13 attributes of mercy are difficult traits to master, but Soro Baila says, any small victory is in reality a HUGE victory and is counted as such by Hashem.

Soro Baila also explained that when we do a 'chesed' for another person, we are not only impacting that person, but we are impacting ourselves for generations to come. And we are beneficiaries today of kindnesses that our ancestors did for others years ago. This is the opposite of when we do a cheit chas v'shalom. There only we suffer, Hashem does not count our sins against our children. Only for chassodim is there preservation **יוצר חסד לאלפים**

**ורב חסד ואמת** Hashem has an abundance of chesed and truth. These are 2 separate attributes of Hashem

The Torah begins and ends with chesed. The beginning, when after Adom and Chava ate from the Eitz Hadaas-the one mitzvah they were given and they broke, none the less, Hashem wasn't angry with them, and he clothed them, not even in regular clothes, but in leather garments. And the Torah ends with chesed, when Hashem buries Moshe Rabbeinu.

This chesed that Hashem did for Adom and Chava is something that we need to emulate. For Hashem to clothe them at that time, shows Hashem's great mercy.

Soro Baila went on to explain more of the 13 attributes of mercy. This time period we are in now is a wonderful opportunity for us to do teshuva. Even a tsaddik falls and rises, so Hashem will forgive us.

Now at selichos, and at Tashlich and the yomim naarim davening, when we repeat these 13 attributes of mercy again and again, we are asking Hashem to deal with us through these 13 powerful attributes so we can be cleansed and forgiven. And when we strive to emulate Hashem with these 13 attributes, then Hashem will come to us. Hashem wants to do chesed with us, he is not looking to do 'din' judgement with us. Through our improvement in our middos, this allows Hashem to act with mercy to us.

**יִחַד וְאֵמֶת נִפְגְּשׁוּ צְדָק וְשְׁלוֹם נִשְׁקוּ.** perek 85. 'Kindness and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed.' When we act with kindness and truth-when they meet within us, then Hashem will bestow his mercy on us-peace will kiss us. Hashem will bestow his chesed on us. When we act and speak with emes, with truth, then Hashem can bestow his chesed on us. When we act with 'tzedek' then Hashem will grant us 'sholom' peace-all these components are dependent on each other.

Especially in this time period of Elul, with each baby step we take on improving ourselves, Hashem can bring down his 'chesed' and the wondrous 'tov' good that he wants to bestow on us

A kisiva v'chasima tova