

### **Thirteen Attributes of Mercy:**

1. After the grave sin of the golden calf, Moses ascended Mt. Sinai and pleaded with G-d to forgive the Jewish people. After his supplications were accepted, Moses felt it was an auspicious moment to ask G-d to give the Jewish people a way to obtain mercy should they fall again in the future.
2. G-d agreed with Moses, and told him to wait on a mountain where G-d would show him His glory. Then G-d passed before Moses and proclaimed the verses that are known as the 13 Attributes of Mercy (Middos Harachamim):
3. **Shemos 33,13:** "Make your ways known to me."
4. **Shemos 34,10:** And He said, "Behold! I seal a covenant: Before your entire people, I shall make wondrous distinctions as were never created in the entire world."
5. **Question:** What was so wonderful about the thirteen attributes that Hashem calls them "wondrous distinctions"?
6. **Answer: Drashas Haran 4:** All other miracles that Hashem performed were done *according to His will*; but the thirteen attributes were, as it were, *according to our will*.
7. **Shmos 34, 6-7:** "The L-rd passed before him and proclaimed: "L-rd, L-rd, benevolent G-d, Who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, preserving lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin, and He pardons..."
8. The thirteen attributes of mercy were able to bring atonement for the Jews even after they did the worst possible sin.
9. **Talmud Rosh Hashanah 17b:** a covenant was established regarding the 13 Attributes of Mercy that they will ***never be returned empty-handed***... "G-d passed before him and proclaimed" ... Rabbi Yochanan said: "Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing; this verse teaches us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wrapped Himself (in a prayer shawl) ***like a prayer leader*** and showed Moses the "***seder Hatefila***" - structure of the order of the prayer. He said to him: Whenever the Jewish people sin, let them ***act*** before Me in accordance with this order. (Let the prayer leader wrap himself in a prayer shawl and publicly recite the thirteen attributes of mercy), and I will forgive them.
10. **Vilna Gaon:** From Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur, when Moshe davened for the Shechinah to return to the Jews, all he prayed were the thirteen attributes . No other prayer could accomplish what this prayer did !
11. This formula is the focal point of all our Selichos prayers during the High Holiday season.
12. **Question #1:** How was Hashem the "prayer leader?" Who was the tzibbur that Hashem was representing ? To whom was He davening? To whom can He possibly be davening?
13. **Question #2:** It seems that the Thirteen Attributes can only be performed, for eternity, with Hashem as the "prayer leader." Why ?
14. **Question #3:** How are the Thirteen Attributes the "Seder Hatefila?"
15. **Question #4:** We see that many times this prayer is left empty-handed?
16. **Rabbeinu Bechaya:** Today we are in galus; we don't have a Beis Hakmikdash or the Mizbe'ach. All we have is our Tefilos and the Thirteen Attributes. And ***from these Thirteen attributes we learn how to daven*** and beseech for mercy from the master of everything.
17. **Point:** The Thirteen Attributes is not merely a prayer, it is the Seder Tefilah. It was ***the*** blueprint that the rabbis used to establish our prayers.

18. 13 requests in the Amida parallel the 13 attributes.
19. Kaddish Tiskabel is said after Selichos , just like it is said after the Amida.
20. **Fundamental difference:** Amida is in the form of requests; while the 13 Attributes are in the form of praise.
21. **Question:** Why do they take different approaches ?
22. **Rashi:** A poor man who asks at the door is embarrassed to ask for a large donation. He may ask for a small donation, but he won't make a large request.
23. **Amida:** We are not quite standing "face-to-face" with Hashem. So we are not embarrassed to make large requests.
24. **13 Attributes:** We are like pauper face-to-face with the rich man. We can barely utter our request...we just sing hashem's praises.
25. **R' Shimshon Pincus Moshol** of the poor man in tattered clothes knocking on the rich man's door.....
26. **POINT:** When a poor man stands before rich man singing his praises, it is a form of request.
27. Although no request is actually articulated, Hashem gives it expression. Our request is based on His understanding of our needs.
28. We are the congregation and Hashem is the "prayer leader." He is praying Himself - to... Himself ! He is articulating our needs.
29. Every time we say the thirteen attributes, as it were, Hashem is leading the service from the Amud! He is the one giving expression to our prayers. It is the greatest prayer possible.
30. **QUESTION:** Why is the Amida not set up this way ?
31. **Rabbeinu Bechayei:** "Whoever understands the Thirteen Attributes, *knows its meaning, its root, and its depths, and prays with concentration*, his prayers will not return unanswered."
32. **POINT:** The covenant does not apply if someone just says the words.
33. **Maharal:** The purpose of placing a Talis over one's head is in order to become completely focused on the task at hand - in this case, when saying the Thirteen Attributes.
34. In the Amida, except for the first blessing, you don't have to understand what you are saying.
35. If one does not concentrate while saying the thirteen attributes, it is not the prayer that Hashem gave Moshe.
36. **QUESTION:** Why is understanding and concentration so vital when saying the thirteen attributes ?
37. Back to the Moshol: What if the poor man just sends a letter praising the rich man ....
38. **POINT:** The thirteen attributes work without a specific request because we are standing face-to-face with Hashem !
39. **QUESTION:** How does one reach the level of standing in front of Hashem ? Why must we also understand the depths of the thirteen attributes ?
40. **Yirmiyahu 9,23:** "For only this may one glorify himself - contemplate and know Me."
41. **Question:** How does one know Hashem ?
42. **Answer:** By knowing His attributes.
43. **POINT:** Knowing Hashem's attributes is the connection a person can have with Hashem.
44. Putting it all together:



### Explanation of the Prayer:

- **“The Lord, the Lord,”** and it should be understood as follows: I am He before a person sins, and I am He after a person sins and performs repentance, as God does not recall for him his first sins, since He is always “God, merciful and gracious” (Exodus 34:6).
  - POINT - Hashem treats exactly the same even after we have sinned.
  - Question: Why do you need mercy BEFORE you sin ?
  - Even though Hashem knows beforehand that the person will sin, He still shows him compassion, based on the state he is in before he sins.
  - Thinking to worship idols is the only exception to the rule , and Hashem considers it as a sin itself - yet He still shows compassion.
  - We always need mercy from Hashem at all times, as we have an evil inclination from birth. We are imperfect from our beginning - so we always need compassion.
  - **Talmud Kiddushin 30b:** The Evil inclination renews its efforts daily and threatens to overwhelm man. Without Divine assistance, no man could withstand its assault. Thus, Hashem dispenses mercy before the sin by providing man with the moral fortitude which enables him to resist temptation.
1. **אֱלֹהִים / G-d — mighty in compassion to give all creatures according to their need;** This name of Hashem denotes Hashem as a powerful king who rules with kindness, but on a level of intensity which far surpasses the mercy designated by the name *Hashem*.
    - This powerful degree of mercy is *reserved exclusively for the very righteous* who err without intending to flout God’s will, and do Teshuva immediately.
    - Therefore, Hashem will exert Himself to assure their survival. G-d’s mercy for them is so powerful that He will even perform miracles for their salvation.
  2. **רַחוּם / rachum — merciful, that humankind may not be distressed;** Hashem is merciful on everyone - *even the wicked*. He is merciful on animals, insects, birds, fish, on the mountains, etc. As it says, “And His mercy is on *all* of his creations.”
    - This is exercised on behalf of those who are found guilty in God’s judgment. They will be punished, but if they call out to God for mercy, he will erase the intensity of their suffering.
  3. **וְחַנוּן / ve’chanun — and gracious if humankind is already in distress;** from an expression of giving a free gift. He is compassionate *even on those who may not deserve compassion*. Even on the wealthy who have no reason to brazenly sin, He will respond to their requests for mercy.
    - If they make a sincere request, God responds although they lack the merit with which to ‘pay’ for His kindness.
  4. **אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם / erech apayim — slow to anger; (once, to the wicked)** Even though they continue to add to their sinful behaviour, while exploiting God’s patience.
  5. **אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם / erech apayim — slow to anger; (repeated again for the righteous)** Even when the righteous are suffering, it too is only mercy. Hashem collects any debts the righteous may have in this world, so that they may immediately enter Olam Haba with a clean slate.
    - “erech” means long / slow. “apaim” means face. Hashem has two faces:
    - To the wicked man He displays a benign, smiling face and showers him with prosperity. He displays this face for a long time until the wicked man dies without repentance and suffers eternal damnation.

- To the righteous man, God displays an angry face. He grows angry and punishes his slight sins in This World. He waits a long time before rewarding his good deeds. After having purged the righteous person of sin in This world, God smilingly gives him his eternal reward in the World to Come.
- 6. **וְרַב חֶסֶד / *ve'rav chesed* — and plenteous in kindness;** Hashem gives rewards generously, more than the effort you put into doing the Mitzvah.
  - This also is directed toward those who lack personal merits. God compensates for their deficiency with His abundant store of kindness. If the scales of justice are exactly balanced, God, in His abundant kindness, will tilt the scales in favor of the side of merit.
- 7. **וְאֵמֶת / *ve'emes* — and truth; Question: What kind of praise is it for Hashem do be truthful ? Answer:** This is a continuation of the previous attribute. Hashem's rewards are eternal (i.e. true) ; while the rewards that come to the wicked are temporal (i.e. false) .
  - Arizal says that an angel reminds you of all the Torah you forgot, and you have it with you eternally. That angel will repeat it over to the heavenly tribunal in your favor.
  - Even the Mitzvos that you forgot about, are remembered, and you are rewarded for them.
  - This also signifies that God insures that His promises are fulfilled. He never reneges on His word and can be trusted to reward the deserving.
- 8. **נֹצֵר חֶסֶד / *notzer chesed* — keeping kindness** Hashem remembers the promises he made for the Jewish people at the covenant between the parts.
  - Hashem is the preserver of kindness from one generation to the next, from father to son.
- 9. **לְאַלְפִים / *laalafim* — unto thousands;** Hashem remembers His promises and fulfills them for two thousands generations. (500 times more than remembering iniquity, which is only for four generations.)
- 10. **נֹשֵׂא עוֹן / *noseh avon* — forgiving iniquity;** After a person does Teshuva for sins committed intentionally because of lust or desire, Hashem lifts off the sin from you, against the wishes of the prosecuting angels.
- 11. **וּפָשֵׁט / *vafeshah* — and transgression;** Even if we repeat our sins from last year, Hashem even lifts these sins off as well.
  - With sincere Teshuva, Hashem forgives sins done with the intention of defying and angering Him.
- 12. **וְחִטָּאָה / *vechata'ah* — and sin;** Even if we are not aware of the value of a Mitzvah or the severity of a sin (e.g. a secular Jew who desecrates the Shabbos).Hashem lifts off these sins as well.
  - Hashem forgives sins that are committed carelessly, but unintentionally.
- 13. **וְנָקָה / *venakeh* — and pardoning.** When Hashem washes away our sins, they are completely removed, without any residue!

### The Supreme Attributes:

1. Some commentaries believe that mentioning the Attributes of Mercy in prayer alone has the power to influence G-d to forgive us for our sins. However, most kabbalists and commentaries on the Talmud explain that G-d is asking us to imitate His actions: just as He is merciful, so too should we be merciful; just as He is kind, so too should we be kind. Most opinions seem to follow this explanation; because if G-d meant for the prayer alone to be sufficient, the verse should have read, “Let them carry out this *prayer* before me.”
2. **Moshol of Dubner Maggid:** of the sick man who only read the words of the prescription, but did not actually take the medicine.
3. The sages learn this from the words, “G-d passed before him.” The verb “pass” is used when speaking of a prayer leader, when we ask him to “pass” before the ark to lead the prayers. G-d portrayed Himself in this way to teach us the holiness of these 13 Attributes of Mercy: ***they can be said only when there is a minyan***, a quorum, as per the rule that a holy act may be done only in the presence of a *minyan*.
4. **Ma’or VaShemesh:** No one person is capable of emulating all of Hashem’s attributes of mercy, but they can all be found between everyone in the minyan combined.
5. **The Zohar reveals that there are two series of Divine attributes. Those that were given through Moshe are called the lower ones. The higher level of mercy was pronounced in the prophecy of Micha, who introduced thirteen attributes of Supreme mercy.**
6. Moshe spoke when Israel was being judged severely for the great sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe cast God in the role of the strict judge who can below his verdict and temper harshness with compassion. Micha, however, spoke of God’s mercy in its purest form; the mercy He practices when He is pleased with Israel.
7. At the conclusion of his prophecy, Micha foretells the glorious future of Israel. He says that the sins of Israel initiated their exile. When these sins are forgiven, Israel will return. Then God will activate a measure of compassion which will surpass even the compassion described in Moshe’s Thirteen attributes of mercy.
8. The Thirteen Supreme attributes enumerated by Micha parallel the original, lower ones and loosely corresponds to them.
9. In traditional Machzorim, each of the Thirteen Attributes of Moshe is printed in small type above the corresponding attributes in the Thirteen of Micha. This formula follows ARIZAL’s accounting of the Attributes.
10. These verses from Micha form the very core of the Tashlich service.
11. An interpretation of the Supreme series of attributes is the theme of the classical work Tomer Devorah, by R’ Moshe Kordovero.
12. Since the Thirteen Attributes are meant to be emulated by man - rather than merely recited - Tomer Devorah takes pains to show how man can follow the example set by God in each of the attributes.

**Explanation of the Prayer:**

1. **מִי אֶל כְּמוֹךָ / mee E-l kamocha — Who is a G-d like you (in compassion);**
  - **TOLERATE other people's weakness**
  - **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.
  
2. **נֹשֵׂא עוֹן / noseh avon — who bears iniquity;**
  - **GIVE others enough time to change.**
  - **Have patience for wrongdoers.**
  - When a person does an *avera* 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.
  
3. **וְעֵבֶר עַל פְּשָׁע / ve'over al pesha — and overlooks sin;**
  - **REACH OUT to others who regret their mistakes, and help them remove the damage they created.**
  - Repair damage caused by transgressors.
  - *HaShem* does not cleanse us through a messenger, 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.
  
4. **לְשִׂאֵרֵי נַחְלָתוֹ / lishi'eiris nachalaso — For the remnant of his heritage;**
  - **REJOICE with others; and SUFFER with their suffering. SHARE one soul.**
  - 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*." 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.
  
5. **לֹא הֶחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוֹ / lo hechzik le'ad apoh — He does not retain his anger forever;**

- **SOFTEN your anger and help people change.**
  - 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.
6. **כִּי חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא / *ki chafetz chesed hu* — for He desires kindness;**
- **DO NOT PUNISH others or take revenge.**
  - 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*.”
7. **יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ / *yashuv yerachamanu* — He shall again have mercy on us;**
- **GROW CLOSER to someone who is sorry.**
  - 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 “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.
8. **יִכְבֹּשׁ אֲוֹנוֹסֵינוּ / *yichbosh avonoseinu* — and suppresses our iniquities;**
- **Do not allow, POSITIVE ACTIONS, no matter how small, to be cancelled out by negative action, no matter how large.**
  - Turn our eyes away from others’ evil deeds.
  - *HaShem* allows our *mitzvot* to ascend before him, but He suppresses and prevents our *averot* 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.
9. **וְתַשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם כָּל חַטָּאתָם / *vesashlich bimitsulos yam kol chatosam* — casts our sins into the depths of the sea;**
- **Stand By Others Who Are Suffering, Even Though They Brought the Suffering Upon Themselves.**
  - 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.
10. **תַּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב / *titein emes le'Yaakov* – You grant truth to Jacob;**
- **Do the RIGHT thing.**
  - 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'emes*).
  - **So too**, a person should show mercy and straightness in judging others, considering all mitigating factors to arrive at a true judgment.
11. **חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם / *chesed le'Avraham* – kindness to Abraham;**
- **GO BEYOND what others deserve.**
  - Judge others with kindness (*l'fnei m'shurat ha'din*).
  - *HaShem* administers justice in a way that goes beyond the letter of the law (*l'fnei m'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'fnei m'shurat ha'din*).
12. **אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתֵּינוּ / *asher nishba'ata le'avosaynu* – which You previously swore to our forefathers;**
- **Even if someone does evil, FIND A SMALL PLACE in your heart for them.**
  - 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*.”
13. **מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם / *mimei kedem* – from the earliest days.**
- **We do not know what brings a person to do evil. FOCUS on where a person came from, where they are going, and have COMPASSION.**
  - 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.

12 אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ<sup>1</sup>

וחטאה

ונקה:<sup>2</sup>

13 מִיְמֵי קֶדֶם:<sup>1</sup>

” ארץ

1 מִן הַמִּצַּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה

אפים

2 עֲנֵנִי בַמִּרְחֲבִיָּה:

ורב חסד

3 ” לִי<sup>2</sup>

נשא עון

4 לֹא אִירָא

ופשע

5 מֶה יַעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם:

ונקה

6 ” לִי בְּעִזּוֹרֵי

לא ינקה

7 וְאֲנִי אֲרָאָה בְּשִׁנְאֵי:

פקד עון אבות על בנים

8 טוֹב לְחַסּוֹת בְּיַד מִפְּטוֹחַ

בְּאָדָם:

על שלשים ועל רבעים:<sup>4</sup>

9 טוֹב לְחַסּוֹת בְּיַד מִפְּטוֹחַ

בְּגִדֵיבַיִם:<sup>3</sup>

1 מִי אֵל כַּמּוֹד<sup>1</sup>

” אל

רחום

2 נוֹשֵׂא עוֹן

וחנון

3 וְעוֹבֵר עַל פֶּשַׁע

ארץ

4 לְשֵׂאֲרֵי־תֹחַלְתּוֹ

אפים

5 לֹא הֶחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוֹ

ורב חסד

6 כִּי חֶפֶץ חֶסֶד הוּא:

ואמת

7 יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ

נצר חסד

8 יִכְבּוֹשׁ עוֹנוֹתֵינוּ

לאלפים,

9 וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמִצּוּלוֹת יָם

כָּל חַטָּאתָם:

נשא עון

10 תִּתֵּן אֲמֶת לִיעֲקֹב

ופשע

11 חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם