

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM PRESENTS:
THE ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 42

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The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson

42

Selichos: Getting Close to Hashem Again

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

An integral part of *Selichos* is the prayer of *The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* (*Yud Gimmel Middos Harachamim*). This unique prayer originated when *Moshe Rabbeinu* was told by *Hashem* to go up *Har Sinai* (Mt. Sinai) where *Hashem* revealed Himself to *Moshe Rabbeinu*, in His Magnificence and His Glory, personally teaching him the method of atonement through the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. This occurred after the Sin of the Golden Calf (*Chet Ha'Eigel Hazahav*) on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, the third set of 40 days that *Moshe Rabbeinu* spent atop the mountain. It was at this time that *Moshe Rabbeinu* received the second set of *Luchos* (Tablets) and achieved atonement for the Children of Israel's (*Bnei Yisrael's*) sin.

Rebbe Yochanan said: Had the verse not been written in the Torah, we would have been unable to speak of such a notion. The verse teaches how the Holy One Blessed be He (*Hakadosh Baruch Hu*) appeared to *Moshe Rabbeinu* as a *Shali'ach Tzibbur* (*Chazzan*, congregational leader) wrapped up in a *Tallis* (Prayer Garment²) and began reciting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.

G-d told *Moshe Rabbeinu* that when the *Bnei Yisrael* follow this prayer formula, they are assured that their prayers will not return empty.

These prayers have specific *Halachic* parameters that need to be followed which will be discussed further into this lesson.

¹ *Rosh Hashanah daf*17b

² It is a large four-cornered garment with *Tzitzitz* (eight stringed fringes) on each corner

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy³

The thirteen attributes that we recite are⁴:

1. *Hashem*
2. *Hashem*
3. *Keil*
4. *Rachum*
5. *Chanun*
6. *Erech Apayim*
7. *Rav Chesed*
8. *Emmes*
9. *Notzeir Chesed*
10. *Nosei Arone*
11. *Over al Pesha*
12. *Chata'ah*
13. *Nakkei*

Each of the above expressions refers to a specific attribute of *Hashem* with which *Hashem* relates and interacts with His nation. None of the thirteen attributes mentioned refer to G-d's essence in this context; rather they refer to how *Hashem* interacts and relates to us according to our level in the Service of G-d (*Avodas Hashem*). Even the first two attributes which use the Name of *Hashem*, which generally are considered to be the most direct reference to *Hashem's* existence and

³ According to the opinion of *Tosefos Rosh Hashanah daf 17b*

⁴ *Shemos* 34:6, 7

essence, are used in this context as terminologies in the way *Hashem* operates with us⁵.

The Key to Understanding the Unique Format of Selichos

In the list of attributes listed for the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, the first two are the same. The *Tetragrammaton* is used twice in the list of attributes of Mercy; something that begs interpretation. First of all how does G-d's ineffable Name relate to the attributes of Mercy and secondly, what does it mean having it twice? In an essay devoted to this topic, *Raw Yitzchok Hutner זצ"ל* prefaces the discussion with an observation about the format in which we recite the *Selichos* during the days leading up to *Rosh Hashanah* and beyond. We begin the *Selichos* prayers with the prayer of *Ashrei* followed by *Kaddish*. Then we follow with the texts of *Selichos* prayers and *Nefillas Apayim* (the *Tachanun* prayer) followed by *Kaddish Tiskabel*, which is unique to *Selichos* and not by any other prayer. This also begs interpretation.

The World of Teshuvah: A New World of Opportunity

The *Maharal* writes that the second mention of the *Tetragrammaton* and the final attribute of *Ve'Nakkei* are both referring to *Hashem's* attribute of forgiving; except that the *Tetragrammaton* refers to a situation where one performs a complete *Teshuvah* while the attribute of *Ve'Nakkei* refers to forgiveness to one who repents only on specific matters but not on all matters.

To further clarify the *Maharal's*⁸ approach, *Raw Hutner* explains that originally at the time of Creation when Adam sinned, there was really no capacity for Mankind's existence as a sinner in *Hashem's* newly created world. The name of *Hashem* used is the *Tetragrammaton* represents G-d's existence and His will for the world to exist. However, there was no world created for sinners to exist; thereby necessitating that Adam die on the day he eats from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (*Eitz Hadas*).

⁵ According to *Tosefos* above. See *Ramban's* commentary to *Shemos* 34: 6-8 for another interpretation according to *Kabbalah*.

⁶ *Rosh Hashanah Maamar* 33

⁷ *Nesiv Hatefilla* 12

⁸ *Maharal M' Prague - R' Yehudah Loew Ben Betzalel of Prague - Born: Posen, Poland, c. 1525. Died: Prague, Bohemia, 1609. Talmudist and halachic scholar, Kabbalist and religious philosopher. Rabbi of Moravia, Prague and Posen. He is known to have greatly opposed the efforts of Halachic codification. Author of Gur Aryeh, a commentary on Rashi on the Torah, Nesivos Olam, on the basic values of Judaism, Derech HaChayim, on Avos, Netzach Yisrael, a commentary on the Aggadic parts on the Talmud as well as Chidushei Aggadot. The Maharal was associated with the legend of the creation of the Golem. Among his students was R' Yom Tov Heller.*

It was only because of the second attribute which is the second mention of the *Tetragrammaton*, which created a new reality with the capacity for a sinner to exist in the very same world of the first *Tetragrammaton*. This new opportunity created by the second *Tetragrammaton* is a *new world* where the sinner could now exist with the possibility of doing a complete *Teshuvah*; bringing one back to the previous existence of a world that's governed by the very same name of *Hashem*. In order for one to continue such an existence one must repent totally and perfectly on all of one's sins.

The final attribute of *Ve'Nakkei*, is a cleansing of one's sins even when one only repents on specific sins or only on specific aspects of one's sins. This level of *Teshuvah* doesn't bring one back to the previous level as if one never sinned; rather it is a specific attribute that *Hashem* has mercy for any level of repentance.

A Stained Garment

*Rabbeinu Yonah*⁹ compares the *Teshuvah* process to the cleansing of a stained garment. Although the stain is not necessarily removed completely through the initial attempt at washing the stain out of the garment, each additional washing achieves a reduction in the intensity of the stain. *Ki Le'chol Teshuvah Timtza Selicha*; because for every measure of repentance there is a level of forgiveness. This is the level of *Ve'Nakkei* (and cleanses).

According to this, we can explain the unique prayer-format that is given to the *Selichos* prayers. In the world of the first attribute of the *Tetragrammaton*, there was no existence for sinners. Likewise, in the world of regular prayer there's also no place for a sinner. Only through *Hashem* devising a new method of prayer, reciting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, like a *Shali'ach Tzibbur* leading the congregation, is there now a way for prayer to bring about the desired level of *Teshuvah*. In order for such a prayer to exist, *Hashem* had to create a *new world* of prayer for *Teshuvah*, by *Hashem* appearing to *Moshe Rabbeinu* like a *Shali'ach Tzibbur*.

Therefore, *Selichos* has the specific format of a fully self-contained prayer, with *Ashrei* at its beginning and *Kaddish Tiskabal* at its end, since the prayer of the *Ba'al Teshuvah*¹⁰ is a unique prayer created specifically for this purpose.

⁹ *Rabbeinu Yonah* – R' Yonah Ben Avraham Gerondi - Born: Gerona, Spain, c. 1180. Died: Toledo, Spain, 1263. Talmudic and Halachic scholar as well as a great pietist. Cousin of the Rambam and student of R' Shlomo ben Avraham of Montpellier. He engaged in great polemics against the Rambam, banning the Moreh Neuchim. After the burning of 24 wagonloads of Seforim in 1242 he regretted his earlier zeal and wrote *Shaarei Teshuva/Gates of Repentance*, a work on ethics and repentance. Author of a commentary on the Rif. His students put together a collection of commentaries on the Talmud under the name *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah* among his students is the *Rasbba*.

¹⁰ One who repents from his previous sins and commits himself to this end

This special prayer arrangement is also designed to demonstrate that one must pray to *Hashem* to readily accept our *Teshuvah*, as mentioned by *Rabbeinu Yonah*¹¹ in his list of things that are necessary for the *Teshuvah* process.

Keil Erech Apayim/ Keil Melech Yoshev

The general order for all *Selichos* is to preface the first time we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* with the *Keil Erech Apayim* (O' G-d Almighty, You are slow to anger) prayer. After the *Bnei Yisrael's* (Children of Israel's) sin with the *Eigel Hazzahav* (Golden Calf), *Hashem* made it a point to show *Moshe Rabbeinu* that even when He is angry at the *Bnei Yisrael* (the Children of Israel), to the point that He is willing to destroy them, He still awaits their prayer for forgiveness. For this reason, *Hashem* personally taught *Moshe Rabbeinu* the special prayer of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, assuring *Moshe* of its efficacy in time of need. Since *Hashem* taught us this method of stilling His anger against us, we preface this prayer with the *Keil Erech Apayim* (O' Almighty G-d - You are slow to anger) prayer, to acknowledge that *Hashem's* anger is our own fault, not His; since *Hashem* is slow to anger and even then, He is ready to accept our special prayers and forgive us our sins. In all subsequent times we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* we say the *Keil Melech Yoshev al Kisei Rachamim* (O' G-d Almighty, Who sits on the Throne of Mercy) prayer.

According to *Nusach Sephard* (the Sephardic version), even the first time we mention the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* we preface it with the *Keil Melech Yoshev al Kisei Rachamim* (O' G-d Almighty, Who sits on the Throne of Mercy) prayer. In Spanish-Portuguese *Nusach*, *Keil Erech Apayim* is used before the last time the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* is recited. Another interesting note is that in the *Yom Kippur Katan*¹² *Selichos* we find the very same thing; each time we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* we preface it with *Keil Melech Yoshev* except for the last one which is prefaced by *Keil Erech Apayim*.

The Secret of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

The *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah*¹³ brings from *Rebbe Yochanan* that *Hashem* promises that whenever *Bnei Yisrael* perform the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, *Hashem* will forgive their sins.

¹¹ *Shaarei Teshuvah* in the 15th requisite of *Teshuvah*

¹² This is a series of *Selichos* that is recited by a number of people in many communities on *Erev Rosh Chodesh* (Eve of the Festival of the New Moon) of most months

¹³ *Daf* 17b

What is the secret behind the success of saying this special prayer? Is there a mysterious nature inherent in this *kabbalistic-type* of incantation that these specific words represent?

The answer to this lays in the wording of the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* quoted above. The *Gemara* doesn't merely say that *Bnei Yisrael* should recite these words and then all their sins will be forgiven; rather it stresses that we must **perform** these Attributes to attain G-d's mercy. The commentaries explain this according to the concept that we must emulate *Hashem* and live our lives according to the principles derived from the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. By performing the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* we train ourselves to be G-dly people who deserve to be given another chance so that we can emulate G-d's ways and bring good to the world¹⁴. *Tomer Devorah*¹⁵ devotes an entire volume to explain this concept how it is derived from the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.

The *Maharah*¹⁶ explains that *Hashem* wrapping Himself in a *Tallis* signifies that one is pulling the *Tallis* over oneself in order to insulate oneself from external influences. This way one can focus on connecting with *Hashem* by emulating *Hashem's* attributes. We can add that since the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* are only recited with a *Minyan* present, it signifies our unified effort to attain a level of perfection. The *Ma'or Vashamesh* writes that these Divine attributes are only recited in a *Minyan* since it is difficult for any one individual to embody and apply all of these attributes in his personal life. However, among a congregation, all of the attributes can be found.

The *Brisker Rav*, *Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik זצ"ל* explains that at the time *Hashem*, so to speak, acted out the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* by revealing Himself like a *Shali'ach Tzibbur*, He actually put the Attributes of Mercy into action¹⁷. Since *Hashem* told *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses our teacher) before showing him this procedure that He will put forth all *His Goodness (Kol Tuvi)* before him, this meant that when *Hashem* passed before him reciting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* He created all the mercy that will be needed for *Bnei Yisrael* throughout the generations until the coming of

¹⁴ *Sefer Reishis Chochna Shaar Ha'anavah* 1:14; author *Rav Elyahu Vidash* student of *Rav Moshe Kordevaro* author of *Tomer Devorah*.

¹⁵ A Jewish Book on Ethical behavior based on the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* written by *Rav Moshe Cordovero*. *Ramak* – R' Moshe Ben Yaakov Cordovero - Born: Cordoba, Spain, c. 1522. Died: Safed, Israel, 1570. Kabbalist, studied with his brother-in-law R' Shlomo Alkabetz; One of the fathers of the Kabbalistic movement, he is the author of the classical *Pardes Rimonim*, *Tamar Devorah*, and *Pelach HaRimon*.

¹⁶ *Be'er Hagolah* 4:[12], pages 488-491 *Machon Yerushalayim* edition, 5763 (2002)

¹⁷ This point was made by the *Maharal* Ibid. (footnote 6)

the Messiah (*Mashi'ach*). All we have to do is tap into the reservoir of mercy which *Hashem* has prepared ahead of time¹⁸.

The point is that when we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* we are not merely reciting words about *Hashem's* attributes as a method of prayer; rather it is something for us to study and to learn to emulate as we will explain.

The above explanation adds another dimension to reciting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. However, it is important to bear in mind that there is a great deal of emphasis in the actual recital of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* which according to many commentaries is itself a powerful tool that G-d gave us to tap into *Hashem's* attribute of mercy. An example of this approach is in the commentary of *Rabbeinu Bachaye*. He writes that today that we are without the Holy Temple (*Beis Hamikdash*), without a High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*), and without the sacrifices to aid in atoning for our sins, all that is left is the ability to invoke these Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy in our prayers. Though we do not understand the true nature of these terms, and we lack the perception of how they affect the Heavenly realms, still they remain the key with which to open the gates of mercy in every generation for both the community and the individual.

A Deeper Look into the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

In order to understand what it means to emulate *Hashem's* ways by following the principles derived from the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, it would be helpful give a brief synopsis of their meaning and applicability to us¹⁹.

1. *Hashem* (Tetragrammaton) - This name of G-d represents the attribute of mercy. Specifically, this refers to *Hashem* sustaining a person before sinning even when He knows that the person is on the verge of transgressing His will. From a practical point of view, it is extremely difficult for a person to emulate this attribute. One needs tremendous strength of character to support someone knowing in advance that this person will turn against him.
2. *Hashem* (Tetragrammaton) - This is the same name of *Hashem* that represents mercy except that here it refers to the mercy *Hashem* shows after

¹⁸ This could be another aspect that our Sages teach that *Hashem* prepares the "Cure" before the "Hit" (*Refu'ah Kodem Le'makal*). This means that mercy is attainable even to the sinner, as *Hashem* awaits even the sinner to repent and deserve a life of goodness and kindness.

¹⁹ The following commentary is based primarily on *Rashi's* explanation with emphasis added. It is by no means even an attempt of defining the deep meanings of these attributes that take up volumes upon volumes of some of the most sublime concepts in Jewish Torah thought. Rather, it is just a sampling of some thoughts that are helpful in our discussion of these attributes.

one transgresses His will. This teaches people the need to show concern and love even to one who has already turned against him.

3. *Keil* (Almighty) - This name of G-d denotes Power. This teaches us that although *Hashem* doesn't want people to sin, He still looks beyond the sin and affords the sinner new strength which one is free to use even against *Hashem*, if one so wishes.

4. *Rachum* (Compassionate) - *Hashem* is compassionate when He metes out punishment of those who do not repent. We too should show compassion to our enemies and refrain from overreacting to their wrongdoings.

5. *Chanun* (Gracious) - *Hashem* gives grace even to those who are undeserving. So too, we must go out of our way to bring peace and harmony in our midst.

6. *Erech Apayim* (Slow to anger) - *Hashem* gives a sinner time to reflect and reconsider his ways before *Hashem* metes out His retribution upon him. We too need to perfect ourselves to have patience with those who anger us. One method of accomplishing this is to understand that all that happens to us is willed by *Hashem* to happen for a reason. We find this concept when *Shimi* cursed and threw stones at *Dovid Hamelech* (King David). Although *Avishai* the son of *Tzeruyah*, the king's officer, wanted to execute *Shimi* for disgracing the king, *Dovid Hamelech* (King David) prevented him from doing so, saying that had *Hashem* not willed that *Shimi* do this to him, it would not have happened.

(שמואל ב פרק טז, י) ויאמר המלך מה לי ולכם בני צריה כי כה יקלל וכי כי השם אמר לו קלל את דוד ומי יאמר מדוע עשיתה כן:

And the king said, "What is it between me and you, sons of Tzeruyah? So let him curse, because *Hashem* has [surely] said to him, 'Curse David'; who then shall [have the right to] say, 'Why have you done so?'"

(Rashi) Because Hashem said to him Is it possible that a man like him who is the head of the Sanhedrin would curse the king had he not been commanded by the Holy One Blessed be He?

7. *Rav Chesed* (Abundant kindness) - *Hashem* bestows kindness upon those who lack merit, by removing one's accountability for one's initial shortcomings. This follows His attribute of *Maavir Rishon* (Removes sins one

by one). According to the opinion of the *Rif*²⁰, *Hashem* removes one's initial succumbing in each particular area of transgression as long as it hasn't become habitual. This way, one whose number of sins are equal to number of his merits, will have his judgment tilted towards merit. A person can adopt an attitude that every Jew is like his own brother or son. Even when they act out against him, one has the tendency to overlook the act and treat them kindly because of their close relationship.

8. *Emmes* (Truthful²¹) - *Hashem* always fulfills His promise of rewarding those who live according to His will.
9. *Notzeir Chesed Le'alafim* (Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations). One can learn from this show gratitude and favor not only to the individual who performed an act of *Chesed* to him, but also to his children and future generations.
10. *Nossei Avone* (Bearer of iniquity) - *Hashem* forgives even those who willfully sin against Him. This refers to a sinner who transgresses *Hashem's* will for a personal gain.
11. *Pesha* - (And bearer of sin) - Even those who sin rebelliously against *Hashem* with intent to anger are given an opportunity to repent.
12. *Chata'ab* (Error) - *Hashem* forgives those who sin because of carelessness or apathy.
13. *Nakkei* - (Cleanses) - *Hashem* wipes the slate clean when a sinner sincerely repents.

Keil Melech Yoshev al Kisei Rachamim/ Vayikra Besheim Hashem

O' G-d Almighty Who Sits on a Throne of Mercy/ and HE called by the name *Hashem*

At the end of the *Keil Melech Yoshev* prayer we say the words *Vayikra Besheim Hashem* (and HE called by the Name *Hashem*). When reciting this verse, it is proper to pause

²⁰ **Rif** – R' Yitzchak Ben Yaakov HaKohen Alfasi - **Born:** Kila Chamad, Algeria, 1013. **Died:** Lucena, Spain, 1103. **Notes:** Talmudist and first Halachic Codifier. Student of R' Chananel and R' Nissim in Kairouan. Active in Fez, Morocco until age 75, when he fled to Spain.

²¹ According to *Gru* in *Mishlei* (3:3), the word *RAV* (abundant) refers to *Emmes* as well. *Hashem* repays those who are deserving, with abundant reward

between the word *Besheim* and the word *Hashem* because it refers to *Hashem* demonstrating to *Moshe Rabbeinu* how we should call out the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* which start with *Hashem, Hashem*²². However, even if one says the words *Besheim Hashem* together it's not considered wrong since the *Targum* interprets the verse (*pasuk*) that way. *Rashi*²³ in his commentary to *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses) quotes that interpretation as well. In fact, *Likutei Maharich* says that although one should have a *Hefsek* between *Besheim* and *Hashem*, one should bear in mind both interpretations.

Vayaavor Hashem Al Panav Vayikra And *Hashem* passed before him and called out

When reciting the verse (*pasuk*) *Vayaavor Hashem Al Panav Vayikra*, the congregation waits for the *Chazzan* to repeat those words so that everyone can begin saying the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* in unison when the *Chazzan* reaches that point. This is important since this is a *Davar She'bikdusha* (a Matter of Sanctification) which requires a *Minyan* of 10 adult males to say it together.

Sephardim recite the verse of *Vayaavor Hashem Al Panav Vayikra* silently together with the *Chazzan* and then by *Hashem, Hashem etc.* they raise their voices reciting it out loud together with the *Chazzan*.

When reciting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* itself, one must be careful to pause slightly between the first *Hashem* in the verse and the second one. This is because there is a cantillation representing a separation of these 2 words. This is true even according to the interpretation that the 13 attributes begin with the word *Keil*, after the words *Hashem, Hashem*. Although there is a custom amongst some Sephardim to raise their heels when saying *Hashem, Hashem* like when reciting *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh* when reciting *Kedusha*, it is not necessary to do it here. This is in fact the prevalent custom. There also a custom amongst Sephardim bow a little when reciting the words *Hashem, Hashem*²⁴.

Thirteen Ways of Counting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

The *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* is recited during *Selichos* and they are contained in the verse that follows the verse *Vayaavor Hashem al Panav Vayikra* (and *Hashem* passed

²² *Magen Avraham* 565:5

²³ *Rashi* – R' Shlomo Ben Yitzchak Yitzchaki of Troyes - Born: Troyes, France, 1040. Died: Troyes, France, 1105. He is, arguably, the greatest Biblical commentator of all times. Traced his ancestry all the way to King David through Hillel the Elder and other Tanna'im. Rabbeinu Tam, his grandson said, that *Rashi's* commentaries on *Chumash* were nothing short of *Ruach haKodesh*.

²⁴ *Otzmit Yosef* Laws of *Selichot* 12

in front of *Moshe Rabbeinu* and called out). *Hashem, Hashem Keil Rachum Ve'chanun etc.* In this verse there are 22 words from *Hashem* until *Venakkei*. The *Rishonim* (Early Talmudic Scholars) have different opinions exactly how to count the 13 attributes in the verse of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. In fact, there are 13 different approaches in explaining this²⁵. We will list just a couple of the more common interpretations.

The View of Rashi, Rabbeinu T'am and Ibn Ezra

1. *Hashem*
2. *Hashem*
3. *Keil*
4. *Rachum*
5. *Chanun*
6. *Erech Apayim*
7. *Rav Chesed*
8. *Emmes*
9. *Notzeir Chesed*
10. *Nossei Avone*
11. *Over al Pesha*
12. *Chata'ab*
13. *Nakkei*

The View of Rabbeinu Nissim

Tosefos in *Rosh Hashbanah* brings the opinion of *Rabbeinu Nissim*²⁶ who starts the count from the second instance of name of *Hashem* in the *Pasuk*. *Arugas Habosem*

²⁵ See introduction *Selichos* with *Be'er Yaakov* commentary, Feldheim Publishers 5755

²⁶ **Ran** – R' *Nissim Ben Reuven* of *Gerona* - **Born:** *Gerona, Spain, c. 1290*. **Died:** *Barcelona, Spain, c. 1380*. Talmudic commentator and *Halachist*. *Royal physician*, lived most of his life in *Barcelona* where he was *Rav, Dayan, and Rosh Yeshiva*. He was recognized as the foremost *Halachic Authority* of his time. He wrote in the traditions of the school of the *Ramban* and the *Rashba*

attributes this opinion to *Raw Hai Gaon*. The reason not to count the first mention of *Hashem* in this *Pasuk* is because there is a *Psik* (A line²⁷ that demarks a separation between the first and second name of *Hashem* in this *pasuk* (verse)).

1. *Hashem* (the second time it's mention in *pasuk*)
2. *Keil*
3. *Rachum*
4. *Chanun*
5. *Erech Apayim*
6. *Raw Chesed*
7. *Emmes*
8. *Notzeir Chesed*
9. *L'Alafim* - For thousands. This connotes that *Hashem's* goodness is greater than His strict judgment by 500 times. By sin it states that *Hashem* punishes four generations and here it states *Hashem* rewards for 2000 thousand (*L'Alafim* - thousands plural). This is a ratio of 2000:4, which is 500:1.
10. *Nassei Avone*
11. *Over al Pesha*
12. *Chata'ah*
13. *Nakkei*

The above way of listing the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* interprets the Torah verse as follows:

Vayaavor Hashem al Panav, Vayikra Hashem (And *Hashem* passed before him and ***Hashem called out***) - *Hashem, Keil Rachum Ve'chanun etc.*

²⁷ This is not a visible line in the sefer Torah. It is a tradition of how to read the *Pasuk* like *Trip* (cantellations)

The *Rosh* has difficulty with²⁸ this way of listing the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* from the common way the congregation recites the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* together with the *Chazzan*. The *Chazzan* recites the verse *Vayaavor Hashem al Panav Vayikera* to which the congregation responds together in unison *Hashem, Hashem, Keil Rachum etc.* From this we see that *Hashem, Hashem* begins the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.

The View of the Ari²⁹ and the Kabbalists; Ramchal³⁰ and Gra³¹

Another view is that of the *Ari ז"ל* that the first two names of *Hashem Hashem* are not part of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. Rather the first attribute begins with the name of *Hashem* which is *Keil* (Almighty). The list and explanation of the attributes are as follows:

1. *Keil* - The Almighty One Who can suppress his attribute of anger
2. *Rachum* - The Merciful One Who has mercy on us when we are in difficult straits
3. *Chanun* - The Gracious One
4. *Erech Apayim* (1) - The One Who is slow to anger against *Tzaddikim* (righteous)
5. *Erech Apayim* (2) (a second aspect of the same attribute) - The One Who is slow to anger against *Resha'im* (sinners)
6. *Rav Chesed* - The Kind One Who gives one more than he deserves
7. *Emmes* - The Truthful One

²⁸ *Rosh* – Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel Born: Germany, c. 1250. Died: Toledo, Spain, 1327. **Notes:** Talmudist and Halachist, one of the most important in Jewish history. He was a descendant of the Meor HaGolah and a leading student of the Maharam M'Rottenberg and his successor as the leader of Germany. Left Germany in 1303 in the aftermath of the Rindfleisch massacres and was welcomed by the Rashba in Barcelona. Became Rav and Av Beis Din of Toledo in 1305 and became the leading authority in Spain after the death of the Rashba.

²⁹ *Ari Zi"l* – Acronym for R' Yitzchak Ben Shlomo Luria Ashkenazi - Born: Jerusalem, Israel, 1534. **Died:** Safed, Israel, 1572. **Notes:** Also known as Ari HaKodesh/Holy Lion. Great Talmudist and Kabbalist. Disciple of R' Betzalel Ashkenazi. One of the fathers of the Kabbalistic movement. Renown for his saintly character and ascetic way of life.

³⁰ Acronym for Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto author of *Mesilas Yesharim* and many other Sefarim (Jewish books)

³¹ R' Eliyahu Ben Shlomo Zalman of Vilna – The Vilna Gaon, **Gaon Rabbeinu Eliyahu/ Gra: Born:** Vilna, Lithuania, 1720. **Died:** Vilna, Lithuania, 1797. **Notes:** Of the greatest Torah scholar of the past two centuries and one of the most marking figures in halachic Judaism since the Beis Yosef he is revered throughout the Jewish world for his vast knowledge and saintly character. He devoted every minute of his life to Torah study never having slept more than two hours a day. He never took any position as a Rav or Rosh Yeshiva. He is the author of countless Sefarim, many recorded and published by his students

8. *Notzeir Chesed* - The One Who guards the merit of the Kindness displayed by the Avos: Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov (Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
9. *L'Alafim* - Hashem remembers the merits of each generation for thousands of generations³².
10. *Nossef Avone*
11. *U'Pesha*
12. *VeChata'ah*
13. *Ve'Nakkei*

A Practical Difference in the way the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are Recited

In the introduction to the *Selichos* with the commentary *Be'er Yaakov*³³ the author suggests that according to the *minbag* (custom) of Eastern European Jewry, the way the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* is recited by the congregation, differs from the custom mentioned by the *Rosh* as being prevalent in his community. According to the *Rosh* the congregation responds to the *Chazzan* by reciting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* from *Hashem Hashem*. In the Eastern European congregation the custom was for the congregation to start in unison from *Vayaavor* straight through until the end of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. This was because they did it according to the *minbag* (custom) of the *Kabbalists* who maintain that the list of *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* begin only by the third word into the verse which is the name of G-d - *Keil* (Almighty G-d). Thus, they already start reciting in unison from the beginning of the verse³⁴, from *Vayaavor Hashem al Panav*.

The *minbag* (custom) of Lithuanian-style *Yeshivos* is to recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* in accordance with the opinion of the *Rosh*. This is despite the fact that the opinion of the *Gra* agrees to the *Kabbalists* who start the list of 13 from the word *Keil*. The reason for this, explains the *Be'er Yaakov*, is because the *Gra*³⁵ adds that

³² Here 8 and 9 are separate attributes. Compare to page 643 attribute 9 that combines these two as one attribute.

³³ Feldheim Publishers 5755

³⁴ *Shemos* 34:6

³⁵ Commentary to *shir Hashirim* 4:13

together with *Hashem, Hashem* there are 15 references of *Rachamim* (mercy). Although the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* begin with the word *Keil; Hashem, Hashem* connotes mercy as it means that *Hashem* is merciful before one sins, and even after one sins. Therefore, the custom according to this is that the congregation starts in unison from *Hashem, Hashem*.

According to *Kabbalah* the verse in *Sefer Michah*³⁶ (the Book of Micah) of *Mi Keil Kamocha etc.* corresponds to the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. The *Zohar* relates to the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* cited in the Torah with *Moshe Rabbeinu* as the lower level of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* while the one's in *Michah* are the higher levels of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. At face value, this means that the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* mentioned in the Torah in the verse *Hashem, Hashem, Keil etc.* correlates to the higher level of the verses of *Mi Keil Kamocha* that are mentioned by *Michah*.

As mentioned earlier, *Sefer Tomer Devorah* focuses on these attributes and how we should emulate them. Although the subject matter is esoteric and deep, we will bring the explanation given by Rav Mattisyahu Soloman *shlit"o*³⁷ that gives us a perspective without getting involved in the intricacies and the deep philosophies of the subject.

He explains that perhaps the *Tomer Devorah* had the following concept in mind. Being that most of the examples of *Hashem's Chesed* (Kindness) that the verses (*Pesukim*) in *Michah* allude to, are very lofty and sublime concepts; matters that we could not fathom through our own insights without being initiated in matters of *Kabbalah*; he wanted us to have a grasp in these matters as well for the following reason. The *Tomer Devorah* understood that as time went on, the nation as whole was further removed from the spiritual and sublime aspects of Judaism and less insightful into the true spiritual world that exists in correlation to the physical world. Therefore, he decided to base the lessons of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* that we should live by in the more sublime and spiritual realms so that when we follow this manner of behavior, we will connect more with the spiritual realms from where these attributes are derived³⁸.

³⁶ Chapter 7:18-20

³⁷ Current *Mashgiach Ruchani* (spiritual mentor) *Beis Medrash Gevoha*, Lakewood, New Jersey

³⁸ An example of the correlation of the spiritual to the physical is explained in the introduction of the *Mishna Berura* to the 3rd volume *Mishna Berura* (Laws of Shabbos). There he discusses the correlation of the 613 *Mitzvos* (248 Positive commands and 365 Negative commands) and the 248 limbs and parts of one's body and 365 sinews.

Questions:

- 1) When and where did *Hashem* teach *Moshe Rabbeinu* the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* and what did He teach him about how to recite this prayer?
- 2) What is unique about the prayer of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* more than any other prayer?
- 3) What is special about the way *Selichos* prayers are arranged?
- 4) How does the *Maharal* explain the attribute of the second time *Hashem* is mentioned and the difference between that and the attribute of *Ve'nakkei*?
- 5) What is *Rav Hutner's* insight into the attribute of the second time *Hashem* is mentioned and why it needed to be repeated?
- 6) What lesson does *Rabbeinu Yonah* teach us about the *Teshuvah* process being like the cleansing of a stained garment?
- 7) How are we to understand the unique nature of the effectiveness of *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*?
- 8) What should one know about reciting the verse *Vayikra Besheim Hashem*?
- 9) What are the three opinions mentioned regarding where to begin counting the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*?
- 10) Why is it necessary for everyone to recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* together from *Hashem* according to the opinion of *Rashi* and *Rabbeinu T'am*?
- 11) Why do *Eastern Europeans* recite them together from *Vayaavor etc.*?
- 12) Why do Lithuanian *Yeshivos* generally start from *Hashem* when according to the opinion of the *Gra* is to count the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* only from the word *Keil*?

Answers:

- 1) At Har Sinai (Mt. Sinai) after the Sin of the Golden Calf, on Rosh Chodesh Elul. Hashem taught Moshe Rabbeinu how the shaliach Tzibbur should wrap himself in a Tallis and say the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* with the congregation.
- 2) This prayer is unique in that *Hashem* guarantees its effectiveness of producing results.
- 3) The arrangement of the *Selichos* prayers is much like an entire prayer, which begins with *Ashrei* and *Kaddish* and closes with *Kaddish Tiskabel* at the end, which a *Kaddish* exclusively recited at the conclusion of *Shemoneh Esrei*.
- 4) The *Maharal* explains that the second mention of *Hashem* is an attribute of accepting the *Teshuvah* (repentance) where one performs a complete *Teshuvah* while the attribute of *Ve'Nakkei* refers to forgiveness to one who repents only on specific matters but not on all matters.
- 5) His insight is that there had to be a special creation to accept the repentance of the *Ba'al Teshuvah* since the world wasn't meant to be a place for sinners.
- 6) *Rabbeinu Yonah* teach us that just as when washing a garment, each washing will clean the stain better, so too, the process of *Teshuvah* is gradual until one effectively cleans himself from the stain of the sin completely.
- 7) The commentaries explain that one must emulate *Hashem's* attributes that are derived from the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* in order to be guaranteed success with these prayers.
- 8) One should pause between the word *Besheim* and *Hashem*, since this word *Hashem* refers to the recital of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* that begin with *Hashem, Hashem*.
- 9) The opinions range from counting *Hashem, Hashem* as 2 attributes; from the second *Hashem* or from the word *Keil*.
- 10) This is because it is a *Davar She'bikdusha* that requires a *Minyan* to say it together.
- 11) Because they want to start saying it together from the beginning of the *Pasuke* so that when they reach the beginning of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* by the word *Keil*, they will all be saying it together.
- 12) This is because although the *Gra* maintains that the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* begin with the word *Keil*, he still wants to include *Hashem, Hashem* together with the 13 since they are Names of *Hashem* representing Mercy.