

The Thirteen Attributes of *Adonai Eloheinu*

The number 13 has been shunned for centuries and we have been led to believe that it is taboo. Friday the 13th is considered the unluckiest day of the month. It's considered unlucky to have 13 guests at a table, and many architects even omit the number 13 from office buildings and elevators to this very day. Yes, in our culture the number 13 has been demonized. We do not have to fear this year, 2013.

An attribute is the inherent character of a person – the way that a person acts or conducts himself. When we take a closer look at the 13 attributes of God, we then can get a better understanding of the character of God Himself. The number 13 in the Bible is very significant. It represents Sin, rebellion, and depravity from man's point of view. However, it also refers to the ability of God to transcend time, space, and circumstances. Transcendence enables one to infuse spirituality within our material world; it brings God into the mix.

Twelve is the number of maximal differentiation. It is the number of lines that border a cube. To connect all the twelve into the center you need the thirteenth line, which defines the center. You can see this principle many times in the Word of God. There were 12 tribes of Israel with, Jacob, their father, being the 13th. There were 12 disciples and *Yeshua*, The Messiah, was the 13th. The word "love" in Hebrew has a numerical value of 13 [AHAVA]. Hence, the love chapter being 1 Corinthians 13 is not an accident. The word "one" in Hebrew has a numerical value of 13 [ECHAD]. If you add these two together, love and one, you get the number 26, which is the exact numerical value of the Jewish name for *Adonai*, [YHVH].

This week's *parashah*, *Ki Tisa*, contains a familiar story: Moses has left the Israelites encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai and has ascended to the top of the mountain. There, God speaks with Moses at length about things concerning the *mishkan*, preparing incense and anointing oil, and keeping the Sabbath. Finally God gives Moses two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God – The Ten Commandments.

Meanwhile the Israelites at the base of the mountain have become restless and anxious about their leader's absence. "He said that he was going up there to talk with an invisible God," they argue. "What we really need is a God that we can see, here with us. And why has he been away so long, 40 days? What if he made God angry and He did away with him? What will happen to us now? We had better take matters into our own hands." "Hurry down," says God to Moses, "for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely. They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I enjoined upon them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it and sacrificed to it, saying: 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt!'" Moses hurries down the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the Covenant. As soon as he comes near the camp and sees the people dancing around the golden calf, he becomes enraged. He hurls the tablets to the ground and shatters them. Then Moses takes the calf, burns it, grinds it to powder, throws the powdered gold upon the water, and makes the people drink it. Some days later, after God has exacted additional punishments on the Israelites, Moses speaks again with God in the Tent of Meeting. God tells Moses to carve two new stone tablets and carry them up the mountain. Moses does so and spends another 40 days communing with God on the top of the mountain. God speaks, re-establishes the covenant with Israel, and Moses carves the words into stone. Finally Moses descends the mountain, bringing with him the two new tablets of the Covenant.

This is a well-known story. What may not be as well known is that some very familiar passages in our *sidurim* come directly from this *Ki Tisa*. One of these, the *Veshamru*, is sung or recited at every Shabbat service. Another is the *Shelosh Esrei Middot*, the 13 Attributes of God, which are recited or sung on *Yom Kippur* and during the readings on *Yom Teruah*, *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot*. "Adonai, Adonai, Eil Rachum Vechanun..."

The thirteen attributes are in fact thirteen principles that govern all Jewish beliefs. Reading in Exodus Chapter 33, verses 13-14, the Bible states: "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, That I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.'"

In this text Moses asked God, ‘*Show me now thy way,*’ and God did just that in Exodus Chapter 34, verses 5-7. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed: “*The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping Mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*” In these scriptures we find the Lord gave Moses 13 attributes Himself, revealing His true character. Every time you see the word, LORD capitalized, it refers to YHVH. Whenever it is repeated twice in the same text, it always refers to His dual nature of mercy.

1. The first of the 13 attributes is YHVH [Lord]. This means that He Himself is a covenant keeping God. By nature He is a forgiving God and is merciful even before a man sins. God’s forgiving nature did not develop in reaction to man’s sin. He was merciful before man ever sinned.
2. YHVH [Lord] is then repeated in the text. This repetition emphasizes God’s unchanging character. The Lord is merciful after a person has sinned and repented. Man’s sin does not alter the nature of God.
3. God [EL] is mentioned next. This lets us know that He is the creator and as Creator He has the right to show mercy. He is all-powerful and does not need to prove that aspect by being cruel. He shows His true power through His mercy to provide to all creatures according to their need.
4. He is merciful [RACHUM]. He is so compassionate that He even loves a child in the womb. So loving is God that He doesn’t even want you to be distressed.
5. He is gracious [CHANAN]. God showers the undeserving with favor and grace. If you are already in distress, He, in his mercy, will alleviate your distress.
6. He is longsuffering [EREK APAYIM]. God is slow to anger; He waits patiently for you to repent.
7. He is abundant in goodness [RAV CHESED]. God is good to the righteous, kind to all believers, and is plentiful and abundant beyond all measure.
8. He is abundant in truth [EMET]. God is good even after He has scrutinized your life; He already knows exactly how to fix what is wrong. He is fair to all, and He is equitable.
9. He keeps mercy for thousands [NOTZEIR CHESED L’ALFIM]. God’s kindness will extend to your children and to all generations. His devotion to your salvation is boundless. It is not just for one; it is for all of us.
10. He forgives iniquity [NOSEI AVON]. God forgives intentional sins; he forgives sins that are committed willfully.
11. He forgives transgression [NOSEI PESHA]. He forgives rebellious sins committed in defiance to his will. He forgives sins of self-will.
12. He forgives sin [NOSEI CHATAH]. He forgives sins of ignorance that were committed inadvertently, or without knowing.
13. He clears [NAKEH]. He cleanses, and acquits only the repentant sinner; He pardons but only those who repent. He will not clear the guilty or the unrepentant sinner.

The 13 attributes of God all relate to mercy and forgiveness. We should pray and thank Him for the mercy and forgiveness He shows us, and pray that He will help us show these same attributes to people in our lives. The important thing about these attributes of God is that they only work for us if we give them away. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. When you give the attribute to someone else, it comes back to you. If you forgive, then you shall be forgiven. So take these 13 attributes and begin to live by them; give them to those you come in contact with. Share them, and you will see these same attributes manifested in your own walk with Him. “*Kein y’hi ratzon*” – may this be His will.