

The God Of Judaism Is a God of Love

R. Shai Held – held@hadar.org

On Love — Summer Lecture Series 2018

I. What Makes God God?

1. ישעיה נה:ו-ח

דַּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קְרֹאֵהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב: יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דַּרְכּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶנוּן מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ יוֹשֵׁב אֶל־יְקוֹק וִירְחֲמֵהוּ
וְאֶל־אֱלֹקֵינוּ כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסֻלּוֹם: כִּי לֹא מִחֲשַׁבּוֹתַי מִחֲשַׁבּוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דַּרְכֵי נְאֻם יְהוָה:

1. Isaiah 55:6-8

Seek the Lord while He can be found, Call to Him while He is near. Let the wicked give up his ways, The sinful man his plans; Let him turn back to the Lord, And He will pardon him; To our God, For he freely forgives. For My plans are not your plans, Nor are My ways your ways —declares the Lord.

2. אבן עזרא שם

טעמו כי חשבתם שאגמול לכם רע אף על פי שתשובו אלי, על כן לא מחשבתי כמחשבותיכם, כי במחשבתי להטיב לכם, וככה לא דרככם דרכי, כי דרכי הם ישרים, גם מפורש בספר יחזקאל "הדרכי לא יתכנו" (יחזקאל יח:כט):

2. Ibn Ezra, ad loc

Its reason: For you thought that I would punish you even though you return to Me, therefore "My thoughts are not like your thoughts", since my intention is to do good to you. And similarly "Your ways are not My ways," for My ways are righteous. This is also made explicit in the book of Ezekiel, "Are my ways unfair?!" (Ezekiel 18:29).

3. רד"ק שם

כי אם חטא אדם לחברו ינקם ממנו ולא ימחול לו ואף על פי שימחול לו בנראה, ישמור לו בלבבו, והנראה יקרא דרך, כמו שפירשנו והנסתר מחשבה, הנה אני מרבה לסלוח לא ככם וכאשר אני מוחל אני מוחל באמת ולא ישאר אצלי מהעון דבר.



3. Radak, ad loc.

For if a person sins against his fellow, he will take revenge upon him and will not forgive him. And even if he appears to forgive him, he will keep it in his heart. That which is seen is called “way”... and that which is hidden is “thought.” I am greatly forgiving—unlike you—and when I forgive truly, and nothing of the sin remains with me.

4. תהלים קג:ח-יא

חַוּם וְתַנּוּן יִקְוֶה אֶרֶץ אֲפִים וְרַב־חֶסֶד: לֹא־לִנְצַח יִרְיֵב וְלֹא לְעוֹלָם יִטּוֹר: לֹא כְחֶטְאֵינוּ עָשָׂה לָנוּ וְלֹא כְעוֹנֵתֵינוּ גָּמַל עָלֵינוּ: כִּי כַגְבָּה שָׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ גָּבַר חֶסְדּוֹ עַל־יִרְאָיו:

4. Psalm 103:8-11

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. He will not contend forever, or nurse His anger for all time. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has He requited us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.

5. שמות כ:ה-ו

לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָדָשׁ וְעוֹן אֲבֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רַבָּעִים לִשְׁנָא יִוָּעַשׂ חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי:

5. Exodus 20:5-6

You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

6. שמות לד:ו-ז

וַיַּעֲבֹר יְקֹוֹק אֶל־פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְקֹוֹק אֶל־יְקֹוֹק קֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרֶץ אֲפִים וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים נָשָׂא עוֹן וּפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְהָה לֹא יִנָּקֶה פֶּקֶד אֶעֱוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רַבָּעִים:

6. Exodus 34:6-7

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed: “The Lord! the Lord! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet he does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

7. תהלים קמה:ח

תַּנּוּן וְרַחוּם יִקְוֶה אֶרֶץ אֲפִים וְגָד־לִחֶסֶד:

7. Psalm 145:8

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.



8. מיכה ז:יח-כ

מִי־קֵל כְּמוֹךָ נִשְׂא עוֹן וְעִבֵּר עַל־פְּשָׁע לְשֹׂאֲרֵית נִחְלָתוֹ לֹא־הִחְזִיק לְעַד אֲפֹן כִּי־חִפֵּץ חֶסֶד הוּא: יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנֵתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בַּמַּצְלוֹת יָם כָּל־חַטָּאוֹתֵם: תִּתֵּן אֶמֶת לִיעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּרֵנוּ מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם:

8. Micah 7:18-20

Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression; who has not maintained His wrath forever against the remnant of His own people, because He loves graciousness! He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty to Abraham, as You promised on oath to our fathers in days gone by.

9. שמות טו:יא

מִי־כְמֹכָה בָּאֵלִם יְקֹוֹק מִי כְמֹכָה נָאֲדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלָּת עֲשֵׂה פְלָא:

9. Exodus 15:11

Who is like You, O Lord, among the celestials; Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in splendor, working wonders!

10. תהילים פט:ו-ח

וַיֹּדוּ שְׁמַיִם פְּלֹאֲךָ יְקֹוֹק אֶף־אֶמּוֹנֶתְךָ בִּקְהֵל קִדְּשִׁים כִּי מִי בְשִׁחַק יַעֲרֶךְ לִיקוּק יִדְמָה לִיקוּק בִּבְגֵי אֱלִים: אֵל גִּעָרָץ בְּסוֹד־קִדְּשִׁים רַבָּה וְנוֹרָא עַל־כָּל־סִבִּיבָיו:

10. Psalm 89:6-8

Your wonders, O Lord, are praised by the heavens, Your faithfulness, too, in the assembly of holy beings. For who in the skies can equal the Lord, can compare with the Lord among the divine beings, a God greatly dreaded in the council of holy beings, held in awe by all around Him?

11. תהילים לה:י

כָּל עֲצָמוֹתַי | תִּאמְרַנָּה יְקֹוֹק מִי כְמוֹךָ מַצִּיל עַנִּי מִחֲזָק מִמֶּנּוּ וְעַנִּי וְאֶבְיוֹן מִגָּזְלוֹ:

11. Psalm 35:10

All my bones shall say, "Lord, who is like You? You save the poor from one stronger than he, the poor and needy from his despoiler."

12. הושע יא:ח-ט

אֵיךְ אֶתְנֶנָּה אֶפְרַיִם אֲמַנְגָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵיךְ אֶתְנֶנָּה כְּאִדְמָה אֲשִׁימָה כְּצִבְאִים נְהַפֵּךְ עָלַי לִבִּי יִחַד נִכְמְרוּ נְחוּמִי: לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה חֲרוֹן אָפִי לֹא אָשׁוּב לְשִׁחַת אֶפְרַיִם כִּי אֵל אֲנִכִּי וְלֹא־אִישׁ בְּקִרְבִּי קִדּוּשׁ וְלֹא אֲבֹא בְעִיר:

12. Hosea 11:8-9

How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah, Render you like Zeboim? I have had a change of heart, all My tenderness is stirred. I will not act on My wrath, will not turn to destroy Ephraim. For I am God, not man, the Holy One in your midst: I will not come in fury.

13. תלמוד ירושלמי מכות ב:ו (וילנא)

שאלו לחכמה: חוטא, מהו עונשו? אמרו להם: "חטאים תרדף רעה" (משלי יג:כא). שאלו לנבואה: חוטא, מהו עונשו? אמרה להן: "הנפש החוטאת היא תמות" (יחזקאל יח:ד, כ). שאלו לקודשא בריך הוא: חוטא, מהו עונשו? אמר להן: יעשו תשובה ויתכפר לו.

13. Palestinian Talmud Makkot 2:6 (Vilna)

They asked wisdom: 'What should be the punishment of a sinner?' And wisdom said: 'Misfortune pursues sinners' (Proverbs 13:21). They asked prophecy: 'What should be the punishment of a sinner?' And prophecy said: 'The person that sins shall die' (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). They asked The Blessed Holy One: 'What should be the punishment of a sinner?' And God said: 'Let him repent and he will be atoned for.'

II. God's Love Is Deeper Than God's Anger

14. תהילים קג:ט, טז-יח

לֹא-לִנְצַח יִרְיֵב וְלֹא לְעוֹלָם יִטּוֹר:...

וְחֶסֶד יִקְוֶה אֶמְעוֹלָם וְעַד-עוֹלָם עַל-יִרְאַיוֹ וְצִדְקָתוֹ לִבְנֵי בְנִים: לְשִׁמְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְלִזְכָּרֵי פִקְדּוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:

14. Psalm 103:9, 17-18

He will not contend forever, or nurse His anger for all time...

But the Lord's steadfast love is for all eternity toward those who fear Him, and His beneficence is for the children's children of those who keep His covenant and remember to observe His precepts.

15. ישעיהו נד:ז-ח

בְּרַגְעַ קֵטַן עֲזַבְתִּיךָ וּבְרַחֲמִים גְּדִלִים אֶקְבְּצֶךָ: בְּשִׁצְפִי קָצַפְתִּי כַּנִּי רָגַע מִמֶּךָ וּבְחֶסֶד עוֹלָם רַחֲמִתִּיךָ אָמַר גְּאֻלְךָ יִקְוֶה:

15. Isaiah 54:7-8

For a little while, I forsook you, But with vast love, I will bring you back. In slight anger, for a moment, I hid My face from you; But with kindness everlasting, I will take you back in love —said the Lord your Redeemer.

16. תהילים לו:

כִּי רָגַע אֶבְאֹפֹ חַיִּים בְּרָצוֹנוֹ בְּעֶרְבַּ יְלִין בְּכִי וְלִבְּקֶר רִנָּה:

16. Psalm 30:6

For He is angry but a moment, and when He is pleased there is life. One may lie down weeping at nightfall; but at dawn there are shouts of joy.

III. We Can't Limit God's Love and Mercy

17. יונה ד:א-ב

וַיִּרַע אֶל־יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּחַר לוֹ: וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְקֹזֵק וַיֹּאמֶר אָנָּה יְקֹזֵק הַלְוֹא־זֶה דְּבָרִי עַד־הַיּוֹתֵי עַל־אֲדָמָתִי עַל־כֵּן קִדְמָתִי לְבָרַח תִּרְשָׁשִׁי שָׁה כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה קֶל־חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אֲפִיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנָחָם עַל־הָרָעָה:

17. Jonah 4:1-2

This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. He prayed to the Lord, saying, “O Lord! Isn’t this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment.

IV. Interlude: Christian Repentance?

18. Raymond Ortlund, “Is the God of the Old Testament a God of Love” (2016), p. 49

The New Testament builds upon the Old Testament, obviously. But as far as the love of God is concerned, that canonical development is not from lesser to greater or even from ambiguous to clear... The misrepresentation of the Old Testament as a volume overshadowed with divine gloom, requiring the correction of the New Testament, must be forever set aside.

V. Is Divine Anger A Problem?

19. Julia O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor* (2008), p. 121

Christians must “recognize divine anger not as an Old Testament problem that required a New Testament solution but rather as a powerful claim of divine concern for human suffering... When Christians distance themselves from “an angry God,” they fail to grasp that this image of God has positive potential for causes of justice.

20. שמות כב:כב-כד

אִם־עָנָה תַּעֲנֶה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעֵק יִצְעֵק אֵלַי שְׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקָתוֹ: וְחָרָה אֲפִי וְהִרְגַּתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּחָרֹב וְהָיוּ נַשִּׁיכֶם אֶלְמָנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם יִתְמָיִם: אִם־כָּסַף | תִּלְוֶה אֶת־עַמִּי אֶת־הָעֶבֶר עִמָּךְ לֹא־תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנִשָּׁה לֹא־תִשְׁיָמוּן עָלָיו נָשָׂה:



20. Exodus 22:22-24

If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans. If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them.

21. ישעיהו יא:ד

שָׁפֵט בְּצִדִּיק דְּלִים וְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמִישׁוֹר לְעִנְיֵי-אֶרֶץ וְהִכָּה-אֶרֶץ בְּשִׁבֹּט פִּיו וּבְרִיחַ שְׁפָתָיו יִמִּית רָשָׁע:

21. Isaiah 11:4

Thus, he shall judge the poor with equity and decide with justice for the lowly of the land. He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.

VI. An “Old Testament” Problem?

22. John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.

23. Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

24. Ephesians 5:6

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things, the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.

25. Colossians 3:6

On account of these, the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.

26. Revelation 19:15

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God, the Almighty.

