



Compassion and the Heart of Jewish Spirituality

R. Shai Held - held@hadar.org

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1. דברים י"ב-י"ג

¹²ועתה ישראל מה יקוק אלהיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את יי אלהיך וללכת בכל דרכיו ולא הבה אתו ולעבד את יקוק אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך: ¹³לשמר את מצוות יקוק ואת חקתיו אשר אנכי מצוה היום לטוב לך:

1. Deuteronomy 10:12-13

¹²And now, O Israel, what does the Lord demand of you? Only this: to fear/awe the Lord your God, to walk only in God's ways, to love God, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, ¹³keeping the Lord's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good.

2. ספרי דברים, פרשת עקב, פסקא מט

ללכת בכל דרכיו, אלו הן דרכי מקום (שמות לד ו) ה' אל רחום וחנן ואומר (יואל ג ה) והיה כל אשר יקרא בשם ה' ימלט וכי היאך איפשר לו לאדם לקרא בשמו של מקום אלא נקרא המקום רחום אף אתה היה רחום הקדוש ברוך הוא נקרא חנן אף אתה היה חנן שנאמר (תהלים קמה ח) חנון ורחום ה' וגו' ועשה מתנות חנם, נקרא המקום צדיק שנאמר (תהלים יא ז) כי צדיק ה' צדקות אהב אף אתה היה צדיק נקרא המקום חסיד שנאמר (ירמיה ג יב) כי חסיד אני נאם ה' אף אתה היה חסיד לכך נאמר (יואל ג ה) והיה כל אשר יקרא בשם ה' ימלט ואומר (ישעיה מג ז) כל הנקרא בשמי וגו' ואומר (משלי טז ד) כל פעל ה' למענהו.

2. Sifrei Devarim, Parashat Eikev, #49

"To walk in all God's ways" (Deuteronomy 11:22). These are the ways of "the Lord, God, merciful and gracious" (Exodus 34:6). Scripture says, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall [be] call[ed] by the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 3:5). How is it possible for a person to be called by the name of the Lord?! Rather, as God is called merciful (*Rahum*), so should you be merciful; as the Blessed Holy One is called gracious, so should you be gracious, as it is said, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion" (Psalm 145:8), and grants free gifts. As God is called righteous... so you too should be righteous. As God is called merciful (*Hasid*), so too should you be merciful...



3. תלמוד בבלי סוטה יד.

אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב: גאחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו? וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר: כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא! אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה, מה הוא מלביש ערומים, דכתיב: ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם, אף אתה הלבש ערומים; הקב"ה ביקר חולים, דכתיב: וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא, אף אתה בקר חולים; הקב"ה ניחם אבלים, דכתיב: ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו, אף אתה נחם אבלים; הקב"ה קבר מתים, דכתיב: ויקבר אותו בגיא, אף אתה קבור מתים.

3. Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a

R. Hama son of R. Hanina said: What means the text, "You shall walk after the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 13:5)? Is it then possible for a human being to walk after the *Shekhinah* (divine presence); for has it not been said, "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24)?! But the meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Blessed Holy One. As God clothes the naked, so you, too, clothe the naked. The Blessed Holy One visited the sick, so you, too, visit the sick. The Blessed Holy One comforted mourners, so you, too, comfort the mourners. The Blessed Holy One buried the dead, so you, too, bury the dead.

4. תלמוד בבלי סוטה יד.

דרש ר' שמלאי: תורה - תחלתה גמילות חסדים וסופה גמילות חסדים; תחילתה גמילות חסדים, דכתיב: ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם; וסופה גמילות חסדים, דכתיב: ויקבר אותו בגיא.

4. Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a

R. Simlai expounded: The Torah begins with an act of lovingkindness (*hesed*) and ends with an act of lovingkindness. It begins with an act of lovingkindness, for it is written: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them," and it ends with an act of lovingkindness, for it is written: "And He buried him [Moses] in the valley."

5. ספרי דברים, פרשת עקב, פיסקא מט

דורשי הגדות אומרים רצונך להכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם למוד הגדה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם ומדבק בדרכיו.

5. Sifrei Devarim, Parashat Eikev #49

Expounders of narrative (*aggadah*) say: Is it your desire to know the One who spoke and the world came into being? Study narrative (*haggadah*), for through doing so, you will come to know the One who spoke and the world came into being, and will cleave to His ways.

6. בראשית רבה לג:

טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו. רבי יהושע דסכנין בשם ר' לוי אמר טוב ה' לכל ומרחמיו הוא נותן לבריותיו.



6. Genesis Rabbah 33:3

“The Lord is good to all, and [God’s] mercy is upon all [God’s] works.” R. Joshua of Sikhnin says in the name of R. Levi: The Lord is good to all, and God gives of God’s mercy to God’s creatures.

7. אור יחזקאל, כרך ד, דף 155

”כי האדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ד' וליהנות מזיו שכינתו” (מסילת ישרים א) כל תכלית האדם רק כדי ליהנות מזיו השכינה, אמנם ההנאה מזיו השכינה אינה רק בעולם הבא, צדיקים זוכים ליהנות מזיו השכינה אף בעולם הזה, שבשעה שזוכים הצדיקים למדת החסד בשלימותה שהיא מדה ממידותיו של הקב”ה. הרי הם נהנים מזיו השכינה בעולם הזה. בזה שזוכים למדותיו של הקב”ה.

7. R. Yehezkel Levenstein, *Or Yehezkel*, vol. 4, pp. 155

“The human being was created only to find delight in the Lord and to bask in the radiance of God’s presence” (*Messilat Yesharim*, chapter 1). The whole purpose of the human being is only to delight in the divine presence. Indeed, basking in the divine presence is not limited to the next world; the righteous merit basking in the divine presence even in this world. When the righteous merit the attribute of *hesed*—an attribute that is one of God’s own attributes—in its wholeness, then they are basking in the divine presence in this world, in that they merit God’s own attributes.

8. R. Norman Lamm, “Notes on the Concept of *Imitatio Dei*,” pp. 219-220, 222

Upon reflection, it will be seen that there are two supplementary notions, or moments, in this concept [of *Tzelem Elohim*]. The first connotes an irreducible, ontically real, and finished quality: man’s worth and dignity, and separateness from the rest of creation derive from his spiritual nature... which in turn derives from the divine Source of all spirituality. The value-generating image is *character indelibilis* in man; it is irrevocable and uniform and cannot be manipulated by the utilitarian calculus. All men, without distinction, are created in this image...

The second moment is the capacity for spiritual growth, the infinite potential of man for self-transcendence and moral improvement. The first is indicative; it speaks of a gift; the second is imperative and speaks not only of a divine gift but of a human duty: God is not only a prototype from whence I derive, but that to which I am bound to go, the model to which I must conform. We may distinguish between the two by referring to the first element at *zellelem*, “Image,” and to the second as *demut*, “Likeness.” Image is ontological, Likeness is teleological. Unlike Image, which is constant and indelible, Likeness is fluid and dynamic and can, therefore, be consciously denied fulfillment and subverted... How is the Likeness to be fulfilled and its frustration or abortion avoided? By “walking in God’s ways,” the Imitation of God.



9. R. Eliezer Berkovits, *Prayer* (1962), pp. 80-81

...A statement in the Sifrei. It is done by an interpretive elaboration on the words of the prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Eternal One shall be delivered." Because of the importance of the passage, we shall quote it in full: "Is it possible for a human being to be called by the name of God? Meant is, therefore: God is called gracious, as it is written, 'The Eternal One is gracious and full of compassion,' so thou too act graciously and with compassion toward others. God is called righteous, as it is written, 'For the Eternal One is righteous, He loveth righteousness,' so be thou righteous. God is called merciful, as it is written, 'For I am merciful, saith the Eternal One,' so be thou too merciful. Because of this does the prophet say, 'Whosoever shall call the name of the Eternal One shall be delivered.'"

The idea expressed in these words is, of course, the familiar concept of the *imitatio dei*, man's responsibility of imitating God in behavior and action. Surprising, however, is the apparent departure from the masoretic punctuation of the word which seems to be the basis of the comment. The masoretic reading of the key word in question is *Yikra*, which is in the active; the Midrash reads it in the passive as, *Yikarei*. Instead of "whosoever shall call the name of the Eternal One...", we get "whosoever shall be called by the name of the Eternal One...". In our rendering of the Sifrei in English, we have retained the masoretic version of the active form, because we believe that the point the Sifrei wishes to make is completely missed if we assume that it is based on another reading of the text. In our opinion, it is not merely the concept of the imitatio dei which is enjoined on us here. The fuller significance of the passage lies in its originality of connecting imitatio dei with prayer. When we call God in prayer, we are able to approach Him only because of the attributes which He activates in His dealings with His creation. We may pray to Him only because He is called *Rahum v'Hanun*, gracious and compassionate, and *Tsadiq v'Hassid*, righteous and abounding in loving-kindness. But how dare one plead with God without embracing, in the moment of prayer, as guides for one's own life those attributes of God without which prayer would not be possible. Appealing to God's mercy and lovingkindness, we ourselves must believe in mercy and lovingkindness, otherwise, there is no ground left for us on which to stand in order to confront God. One can only pray to God, if one is willing to follow in one's own life the example of the divine attributes of mercy, which alone make prayer possible. The Sifrei draws our attention to this inherent logic of all prayer by pretending to read *Yikarei* instead of *Yikra*. In prayer, the two indeed become identical. Only he may call the name of God who himself is striving to be called by the attributes of God.



10. שני לוחות הברית

"חסד אל כל היום" (תהלים נב:ג). ראוי לאדם שכל ימי חייו יראה, שלא יהיה שום יום שלא יעשה בו גמילות חסדים או בגופו או בממונו.

10. R. Isaiah Horowitz, Shelah (*Shenei Luhot Ha-Berit*)

"God's *hesed* the entire day" (Psalm 52:3). A person should see to it that there is never a day on which she does not perform an act of *hesed*, either with her body or with her money.

11. ספרא קדשים פרשת א

אבא שאול אומר פמליא למלך, ומה עליה להיות מחכה למלך.
נ"א מחקה

11. Sifra, Parashat Kedoshim, #1

Abba Saul says: The king has a retinue. What should it do? Wait for the king.

Another version: Abba Saul says: The king has a retinue. What should it do? Imitate the king.

