

Repentance and the 13 Attributes of God's Mercy

The theme of repentance runs throughout the Bible. When Israel made the golden calf to worship, Moses pleaded to God to forgive them. God revealed to Moses His 13 attributes of mercy. Mercy and repentance go together, for there is no mercy without repentance of sin. What are the 13 attributes of God's mercy?

William F. Dankenbring

The name of the month "Elul" (spelled [Alef-Lamed-Vav-Lamed](#)) is said to be an acronym of "Ani l'dodi v'dodi li," which translates, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine," a quote from Song of Solomon 6:3. The word "Elul" means "search," which is fitting, because this is a time of year when we should search our hearts and seek the Lord with great fervency and desire.

According to ancient midrashes and commentaries, the month of Elul is the time that [Moses](#) spent on Mount Sinai preparing the second set of tablets after the incident of the golden calf (Exo.32; 34:27-28). He ascended Mount Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Elul and descended on the 10th of Tishri, at the end of Yom Kippur, when repentance was complete. Elul is the beginning of a period of 40 days that Moses prayed for G-d to forgive the people after the Golden Calf incident, after which the commandment to prepare the second set of tablets was given.

Elul is also a time to begin the process of asking forgiveness for wrongs done to other people. According to the Scriptures, God will not forgive us for our sins committed against another person until we have first apologized to that person and tried to obtain forgiveness from the person we have wronged – as much as possible..

As the month of Elul draws to a close, the mood of repentance becomes more urgent. During this time, religious Jews recite special prayers called *selichot* from the Sunday before [Rosh Hashanah](#) until [Yom Kippur](#). If Rosh Hashanah begins on a Monday or Tuesday, selichot begins on the Sunday of the week before Rosh Hashanah, to make sure that there are at least 3 days of Selichot.

A fundamental part of the selichot service is the repeated recitation of the "Thirteen Attributes," a list of [God's](#) thirteen attributes of mercy that were revealed to [Moses](#) after the sin of the golden calf (Ex 34:6-7): "YHVH [1], YHVH [2], El Shaddai [3], merciful [4], and gracious [5], long-suffering [6], abundant in goodness [7] and truth [8], keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation [9], forgiving iniquity [10] and transgression [11] and sin [12], who cleanses [13]."

Why is "YHVH" listed twice as an attribute? And why are three of these "attributes" [names of God](#)? Different names of God connote different characteristics of God. The four-letter Name of God, "YHVH" is the Name used when God is exhibiting characteristics of mercy as the Covenant

God dealing with mankind. The **Talmudic** Rabbis explain that this dual usage indicates that God is merciful before a person sins, but is also merciful after a person sins. The third attribute is a different Name of God that is used when God acts in His capacity as the almighty ruler of nature and the universe.

Elul – Month of Preparation to Meet God

If you had an important court date scheduled — one that would determine your financial future, or even your very life — you'd be sure to prepare for weeks beforehand. Right? You would do your best to be PREPARED!

So it is that Elul precedes the month of Tishri, the holiest month of the year with four annual Holy Days. On Rosh Hashana, or Tom Teruah, we begin a period of judgment before the throne of God. Yom Teruah pictures God as our Creator and Ruler, before whom we must appear. Each individual will be judged on the merit of his deeds and depth of his repentance from sinful deeds.

Elul — the month preceding Rosh Hashana — therefore begins a period of intensive introspection, of clarifying our life's real goals, and of our drawing closer to God in heartfelt repentance and earnest Bible study, prayer, and meditation. It is a time for realizing our real purpose in life — rather than our just perfunctorily going through the “motions” of religious church attendance, making money and seeking pleasure and personal gratification. Elul should be a time when we step back and look at ourselves critically and honestly. As the apostle Paul put it, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ (Yeshua Ha Moshiach) is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified [margin, “do not stand the test”]” (II Cor.13:5).

Indeed, God says to His people: “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” (Amos 4:12).

The Golden Calf Incident

Let's go back in history to Mount Sinai. God had freed His people from Egyptian bondage. He brought them to Mount Sinai, in freedom and liberty and gave them His Ten Commandments.

Following the revelation, Moses went up Mount Sinai to learn more details of the Torah directly from God. At the end of 40 days, God handed Moses two sapphire tablets of identical shape and size — upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved.

On the 16th of Tammuz, when Moses had not yet returned from the mountain, the Jewish people began to panic. They sought a new “leader” and built the Golden Calf. Immediately, the Clouds of Glory — the divine protection of God — departed. On the 17th of Tammuz, Moses came down from the mountain, smashed the Tablets, destroyed the Calf, and punished the transgressors.

On the 19th of Tammuz, Moses ascended Mount Sinai again to plead for the lives of the Jewish people. He prayed with great intensity, and after 40 days, God agreed to spare the Jewish people in the merit of their forefathers. On the last day of Av, Moses returned to the people. Their lives were spared, but the sin was not yet forgiven.

For a third time, Moses ascended Mount Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Elul and stayed in the heavenly camp for 40 days (bringing the total number of days spent there to 120). Henceforth, the month of Elul became a special time for drawing close to God. At the end of the 40 days — on the

10th of Tishrei — God agreed to mete out the punishment for the Golden Calf over many generations. He then gave Moses a new, second set of Tablets.

Moses came down from the mountain with good news for the people: The reunification was complete, and the relationship restored. Thereafter, the 10th of Tishrei was designated as a day of forgiveness for all future generations: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Why is the number 40 repeated three times? Forty is a number of cleansing and purification — of trial and testing. Noah's Flood rains lasted 40 days, and the mikveh — the ritual purification bath — contains 40 measures of water. Elijah fasted forty days without food or water. Christ also fasted for 40 days before He began His ministry. “Three,” is the number of God’s signature — and the number of “decision.” Paul prayed three times to have a “thorn in the flesh” removed.

Blowing the Shofar

Beginning the second day of Rosh Chodesh Elul, it is the Ashkenazi Jewish custom to blow the shofar every morning after prayers, in order to awaken us for the coming Day of Judgement. The shofar's wailing sound inspires us to use the opportunity of Elul to its fullest.

Also beginning in Elul, religious Jews say Psalm 27 in the morning and evening services. In this Psalm, King David exclaims: “One thing I ask . . . is to dwell in the house of God all the days of my life.” During this month we focus on our relationship with God, our Father, and the Messiah, and strive to increase our connection to Almighty God through prayer, Bible Study, meditation, and repentance.

Elul presents an enormous opportunity to draw close to God.

After Israel’s sin of the Golden Calf, during Moses’ first 40 days on top of Mount Sinai, Moses asked God to explain His system for relating with the world. God's answer, known as the “13 Attributes of Mercy,” forms the essence of special prayers. The “13 Attributes” speak of “God's patience” and “mercifulness” and “kindness.” The same God Who created us with a clean slate and a world of opportunity, gives us many opportunities to “get it right,” if we screw up the first time, or even many times, due to weakness, influences of others, or plain old “attitude.” God is very patient, and one of the chief lessons we must learn in life is also “patience” — even “extreme patience.” Aren’t you thankful that God is patient and forgiving and is willing to forget our mistakes, if and when we come to Him in heartfelt repentance and sincere contrition and humility?

The 13 Attributes of Mercy

Says the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, “The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy or Shelosh-'Esreh Middot enumerated in [Exodus 34:6-7](#) are the attributes with which, according to Jewish tradition, God governs the world. According to the explanation of [Maimonides](#) these attributes must not be regarded as qualities inherent in God, but merely as the method of His activity, by which the divine governance appears to the human observer to be controlled. In the [Sifre](#), however, these attributes are not called “middot,” which may mean “quality” as well as “rule” and “measure”, but “derakim” (ways), since they are the ways of God which Moses prayed to know and which God proclaimed to him.

“The number thirteen is adopted from Talmudic and rabbinic tradition. There are divergent opinions as to which word they begin and with which they conclude. According to some the thirteen

attributes begin with the first “Adonai,” in verse 6, and end with the word “ve-nakeh” in verse 7. The single attributes are contained in the verses as follows:

1. *Adonai* — compassion before a person sins;
2. *Adonai* — compassion after a person has sinned;
3. *El* — mighty in compassion to give all creatures according to their need;
4. *Rachum* — merciful, that humankind may not be distressed;
5. *Chanun* — gracious if humankind is already in distress;
6. *Erech appayim* — slow to anger;
7. *Rav chesed* — plenteous in mercy;
8. *Emet* — truth;
9. *Notzer chesed laalafim* — keeping mercy unto thousands;
10. *Noseh avon* — forgiving iniquity;
11. *Noseh peshah* — forgiving transgression;
12. *Noseh chatah* — forgiving sin;
13. *Venakeh* — and pardoning.

Says Ronald L. Eisenberg, in “The 13 Attributes of Mercy,” “The core of the *Selichot* prayers is the 13 Attributes of Mercy, the very words that God taught Moses for the people to use whenever they needed to beg for divine compassion.”

He continues, “The 13 Attributes of Mercy are found after the incident of the Golden calf, “when God threatened to destroy the people of Israel rather than forgive them (Exod. 32:10). According to the Talmud, Moses felt that Israel's sin was so serious that there was no possibility of intercession on their behalf (Rosh Hashanah 17b).

“At this point, God appeared to Moses and taught him the Thirteen Attributes, saying: ‘Whenever Israel sins, let them recite this [the Thirteen Attributes] in its proper order and I will forgive them.’ Thus this appeal to God's mercy reassures us that repentance is always possible and that God always awaits our return.”

The 13 Attributes of Mercy are based on *Exodus* 34:6-7: “The Lord! The Lord! God, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth, Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of iniquity, willful sin, and error, and Who Cleanses (but does not cleanse completely, recalling the iniquity of parents upon children and grandchildren, to the third and fourth generations)” (34:6-7).

What are the 13 Attributes?

The 13 Attributes of Mercy are as follows:

The Lord! (Adonai)--God is merciful before a person sins! Even though aware that future evil lies dormant within him.

The Lord! (Adonai)--God is merciful after the sinner has gone astray.

God (El)--a name that denotes power as ruler over nature and humankind, indicating that God's mercy sometimes surpasses even the degree indicated by this name.

Compassionate (*rahum*)--God is filled with loving sympathy for human frailty does not put people

into situations of extreme temptation, and eases the punishment of the guilty.

Gracious (*v'hanun*)--God shows mercy even to those who do not deserve it consoling the afflicted and raising up the oppressed.

Slow to anger (*ereh apayim*)--God gives the sinner ample time to reflect, improve, and repent.

Abundant in Kindness (*v'rav hesed*)--God is kind toward those who lack personal merits, providing more gifts and blessings than they deserve; if one's personal behavior is evenly balanced between virtue and sin, God tips the scales of justice toward the good.

Truth (*v'emet*)--God never reneges on His word to reward those who serve Him.

Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations (*notzeir hesed la-alafim*)--God remembers the deeds of the righteous for the benefit of their less virtuous generations of offspring (thus we constantly invoke the merit of the Patriarchs).

Forgiver of iniquity (*nosei avon*)--God forgives intentional sin resulting from an evil disposition, as long as the sinner repents.

Forgiver of willful sin (*pesha*)--God allows even those who commit a sin with the malicious intent of rebelling against and angering Him the opportunity to repent.

Forgiver of error (*v'hata'ah*)--God forgives a sin committed out of carelessness, thoughtlessness, or apathy.

Who cleanses (*v'nakeh*)--God is merciful, gracious, and forgiving, wiping away the sins of those who truly repent; however, if one does not repent, God does not cleanse.

The 13 Attributes and YOU

Since God made man in His own image and likeness, it is God's intention that we also must develop and exemplify the 13 attributes of mercy in our character, and in our relationship with others who sin against us, and who hurt, harm, or injure us in some way. We must learn to be forgiving, even as He is forgiving.

In the "Lord's Prayer," the Messiah told us how to pray in an outline format. He declared, among the other essentials, that we should pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt.6:12). When Peter came to Christ and asked Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Yeshua answered him: "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt.18:21-22).

Seventy sevens = 490 – a symbolic statement that means essentially "till the end of the age" – or till the Kingdom of God comes! Daniel pictures 70 X 7 "weeks" as the period of time till all iniquity is purged, the Messiah is anointed "king," and the Messianic Kingdom is established (Daniel 9:24-27). In other words, we should always be forgiving of others, as God Himself is, setting us the example!

Christ illustrated this truth with an example of a man who owed a great debt but was unable to pay. He begged for patience and said he would pay all. His master had compassion on him and forgave the huge debt entirely. But that servant was owed a paltry sum by another man, who begged his forgiveness and patience as well, but he refused and threw him into prison.

When his own master heard about this, he was outraged, and thundered, “ ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matt.18:23-35).

Learning the 13 Attributes of God’s Mercy is a powerful means to inspire a person to do *Teshuva [repentance]*, because such study can arouse a person’s love and appreciation for Almighty God, and serve to remind a person of their true potential as children of the Almighty God. The ultimate goal is for a person to become so familiar with the 13 Attributes’ meanings and applications that they can be consciously and regularly applied in one’s life. Let’s proceed to do this.

Careful Investigation of God’s 13 Attributes of Mercy

1. *Who, O God, is like You?*

Lovingly bear disgrace.

God 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 *God’s* “bearing disgrace”. No matter how disgracefully we treat *God* 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. *Who pardons iniquity.*

Have patience for wrongdoers.

God himself provides time for a person to repent and does not punish immediately. He gives the transgressor time to repent. As Peter wrote, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

So too, if others transgress against us, we should not seek immediate “justice” against them, but rather forbear until the person repents of the wrong they did.

3. *And overlooks transgression.*

Repair damage caused by transgressors.

God does not cleanse us through a *shliach*, 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 *So-and-so* did?” Instead, a person should try to repair the damage caused by others’ transgressions. Also, a person should be ashamed to transgress

4. *For the remnant of His heritage*

See each brother as deeply connected with us, and hope they receive blessings.

The people of God are “close relatives” and the “flesh” of *God*. We are called his daughter, his sister, and his mother. Thus, when we suffer, so does *God*. Consequently, he actively and constantly seeks to alleviate our suffering.

So too, a person should feel the suffering of their fellow brothers and sisters, and seek to alleviate that suffering by good deeds and heartfelt prayers on their behalf.

5. *Who has not retained His wrath eternally*

Do not harshly rebuke, but rather bring close with love.

Even if a person continually sins, *God* does not become continuously angry with them. Instead, He 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. *For He desires kindness!*

Amplify the tiniest bit of good in others.

There are angels that receive the good deeds we do in this world. And when the attribute of justice prosecutes against us, these angels bring up our good deeds before *God* and he has mercy on us. Our great Intercessor, our High Priest who defends us, is Yeshua the Messiah. As Paul wrote, “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come BOLDLY to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb.4:14-16).

So too, when a person feels like pronouncing a harsh judgment against another person, they should seek a redeeming feature in that person. Perhaps they study the Scriptures, give to charity, or perform some other good deed. A person should say to themselves, “It’s enough for me that this person does such and such a *mitzvah* or good deed,” and not sit in judgment of him. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ [margin, God]” (Rom.14:10). “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way . . . Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify [build up] another” (vs.12-19).

7. *He will again be merciful to us*

Forgive transgressors and love them more.

God 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 *God*. In fact, *God* loves the

repentant sinner *more* than before. This is the secret of “In the place where the *baalei t’shuva* [“the ones who masters repentance] stand the complete *tzaddikim* [righteous ones] cannot stand.” The one who sins and utterly repents from the heart is stronger, because he has been tested, and overcame – just as a broken bone, when it is healed, is stronger than the original bone before the break.

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. *He will suppress our iniquities*
Turn our eyes away from others’ evil deeds.

God allows our *mitzvot* to ascend before him, but He suppresses and prevents our *averot* from ascending before him to prosecute; *God*, so to speak, turns his eyes from them.

So too, a person should elevate another person’s good deeds before them, and turn his eyes from that person’s evil deeds as much as they possibly can.

9. *And cast into the depths of the sea all their sins*
Rescue transgressors from those who seek to do them harm.

On *Yom Kippur*, *God* provides us with the *mitzvah* of confessing and placing our sins on the “Goat for Sending”. We are thus cleansed of our transgressions. Simultaneously, *God* 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* [evil person] suffering for his evil, we should bring this person close and try to rescue him from those punishing agents seeking to do him harm. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (II Tim.2:24-26). As Jude also puts it, “And on some have compassion, making a distinction [who are doubting, or making distinctions], but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh” (Jude 22-23).

10. *Grant truth to Jacob*
Judge others mercifully.

Even when *God* 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’emet*).

So too, a person should show mercy and straightness in judging others, considering all mitigating factors to arrive at a true judgment.

11. *Kindness to Abraham*
Judge others with kindness.

God 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. *As You swore to our forefathers*

Remember, every true Jew, Israelite and Christian is a child of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and every human being is made in the image of God.

God 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 Christian, Israelite, or 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 also children of *Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov*.” If we are accosted by Gentile evildoers, we should do as Christ said and “turn the other cheek,” and not retaliate, giving evil for evil.

Rather, no matter who our accoster or accuser is, we should “Repay no one evil for evil. Mave regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom.12:17-20).

Jesus Christ, Yeshua, summarized this principle thus: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you ay be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt.5:44-45).

13. *From ancient times*

View transgressors as innocent and pure young toddlers.

When the merits of our forefathers are exhausted, Almighty God “remembers the kindness of [our] youth.” That is, *God* remembers the love He had for us when the Israelite 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 brethren as if they were toddlers who still nurse from their mothers. In this way, a person will see every person as fit to receive goodness, and consequently be aroused to pray for their peace, and to have mercy on them.

Summarized, then, these are the Thirteen Attributes:

1. *Lord—I am He Who is compassionate before man sins, although I know that he will sin in the end.*
2. *Lord— And I am He Who is compassionate after man sins and repents.*
3. *God— This too is an attribute of mercy, as it is said, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" And one cannot say to the attribute of stem justice: "Why have You forsaken me?"*
4. *Who is Merciful— He has mercy upon the poor;*

5. *and Gracious—He is gracious unto the wealthy;*

6. *Long-suffering—He is patient and is not quick to exact retribution, in the hope that the guilty will repent;*

7. *Abundant in lovingkindness—He acts with lovingkindness toward those who lack merit;*

8. *Truthful— He rewards those who fulfill His will;*

9. *Guards lovingkindness unto the thousandth generation—He guards the lovingkindness which a person does before Him, unto the thousandth and even two thousandth generation;*

10. *Forbears transgression—He is forbearing over transgressions which men commit willfully;*

11. *and Iniquity—He bears the iniquities which a person commits in a spirit of rebelliousness;*

12. *and Misdeeds—He bears sins which are committed unintentionally;*

13. *and He will not hold clear of guilt—He will clear those who repent, but will not clear those who fail to repent.*

Repentance Is An Act of Divine Lovingkindness

From the beginning, God prepared a way by which men can rise up from the pitfall of their actions, to flee the trap of their iniquities, to save their souls from destruction; and to turn back God's anger.

Says Eliyahu Kitov, in *The Book of Our Heritage*, "And even if they have been greatly iniquitous and have rebelled against God, He did not close the doors of repentance to them. Israel was therefore admonished to repent from however far they had turned away. And it was thus also affirmed that repentance is accepted even if the sinner repents because of great distress. As the verse (Devarim 4:30) says: 'In your distress when all these things will come upon you in the End of Days, you shall return to the Lord your God, and you shall hearken unto His voice!' All the more is this so, if one repents for fear and love of God."

He continues: "There are many levels in repentance, and man draws near to God in accord with his repentance. There is indeed forgiveness for any degree of repentance, but the soul is regarded as totally purified only if its earlier transgressions are as wiped out by repentance as if they had never been committed. The matter may be compared to a heavily soiled garment. A light washing will not avail to remove all its stains and spots and it will become white only to the extent to which it is washed. Likewise is the soul cleansed of transgression to the extent to which the heart is purified" (vol.3, page 1044).

He goes on: "There are three fundamental components of repentance: forsaking the sin one has committed, regret and confession. What is meant by 'forsaking sin'? The sinner has to desist from committing the sin, to remove the sin from his thoughts, and resolve not to repeat the action.

"What is meant by 'regret'? One must understand wholeheartedly that the abandonment of God is bitter and evil. He must take to heart that sin' brings punishment and retribution and he must therefore regret what he did.

“What is meant by ‘confession’? One must verbally admit what he has done, saying: ‘I have sinned by doing such-and-such. I regret what I have done and am ashamed and shall never do this again.’

“We are taught that repentance is efficacious only for sins between man and God. Sins between man and his fellowman such as stealing, causing injury, or cursing, are not forgiven until one makes restitution. And if one compensates his fellow, he must still placate him and ask for forgiveness.

“One is forbidden to be hardhearted and refuse to be reconciled with a person who has wronged him. Rather, one should be quick to forgive and slow to anger. When asked for forgiveness by one who has done him wrong, he should wholeheartedly and willingly forgive him. Even if that person has caused him much distress and greatly wronged him, he should not be vengeful or bear resentment” (page 1045).

God's Love

God's mercy toward us is expressed in His divine love through His Son. The penalty of sin is death (Rom.6:33). As Paul put it, “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission [of sin]” (Heb.9:22). Animal sacrifices were offered to atone for sins. But that was merely a “type.” The real sacrifice God gave for sin was the life of His Son, the Messiah! As Paul said, “but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. . . So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb.9:26-28).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Paul declared of God's love, “What then shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom.8:31-32). Paul adds, “Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is ever at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom.8:34).

Christ paid the penalty for our sins. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them . . . For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us [that is, an offering for our sins, paying the incurred penalty for all of us, in full], that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor.5:19-21).

But God's love is conditional. It is based on our repentance of sin, and turning from our sinful life, with His divine help and the assistance of His Holy Spirit, through Christ, so that as Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal.2:20). It is through Christ that our sins can be wiped away, nullified, and forgiven, by the extended mercy of Almighty God!

Paul also wrote, “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified [made right] by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath

through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom.5:5-10).

God’s mercy toward us is revealed in and through His Son!

The Days of Awe

The ten days from Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur are known as the “Days of Awe” and the “Days of Repentance.” The month of Elul is the beginning of the special preparation to come before God’s presence on those Holy Days – to appear before Him, and to be judged for our deeds and actions, sins of omission and commission, our words and unbridled tongue, and our degree of repentance – whether it is whole-hearted or not.

This is the time to rouse ourselves to greater repentance, to cry out to God for mercy and forgiveness, to spend quiet time in Bible Study and prayer. As Isaiah said, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isa.59:1-2).

God declares, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isa.1:18-20).

The apostle Paul exhorts, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly [decently], as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom.13:11-14).

And as Paul also admonished: “Wake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph.5:14-16).

We should be arousing ourselves to repent. The Day of Judgment is soon coming on this battered, wicked, deceitful world, and its governments, populations, and inhabitants. Soon all the world’s inhabitants will, in effect, pass before God. One should be exceedingly careful not to sin against one’s fellowman, and one should concentrate on thoughts of repentance.

As Eliyahu Kitov writes, “One should consider that if a person were to stand in judgment before a mortal king, he would be filled with great trepidation. It would not occur to him to be concerned with anything except pleading to the king for mercy and forgiveness. All the more is this true when one is about to be brought before the King of all kings, the Holy One blessed is He, who knows what is in man’s heart.”