

Mishpatim**Judgments****Generational Jurisprudence****Torah:**

Ex. 21:1-24:18

- (1) 21:15 (no elder abuse)
- (2) 21:17 (no euthanasia)
- (3) 21:22-25 (no abortion)
- (4) 22:2 (no favoritism) 23:12 (total Shabbat); 23:18, 19 (no paganism); 23:29, 30 (gradual victory); 24:9, 10 (communal intimacy); 24:18 (lengthy lingering in the presence is awesome)

Haftarah:

Jer. 34:8-22; 33:25, 26

- (5) 34:17 (reap what you sow)
- (6) 33:25, 26 (a generation may blow it, G-d's love is unfailing – see sermon)

Brit Chadashah:

Matt. 17:1-11

- (7) 17:9 (second spirituality isn't good enough)

Shabbat Shekalim

Ex. 30:11-16; 2 Kings 11:17-12:17

Jewish Hero: John Sinclair

As we come to Purim and to Passover, in an increasingly secular, pluralistic society where the variety of religious options keeps on expanding, it is important for believers who accept the G-d of the Bible and His Messiah to be able to explain to people we encounter and share with what the G-d of the Bible is like.

You see, we face a two pronged spiritual attack as we wander through this world on our pilgrimage to our Father's Home in Glory. The first is theological where people will challenge both what we believe and the basis from which we take our beliefs (the Bible), and I will talk a little about that this morning.

The next prong is moral, where what we believe is right and wrong is constantly challenged and today's Torah portion dealt with our obligation and privilege to set up His commandments as the parameters which define our conduct and to design moral and ethical responses based on the stipulations of His Word.

Let's deal with what the Scriptures say G-d is like. Historical theology among Jews and Christians (and even among Muslims) describes His fourfold nature: omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and immutable (changeless), but these characteristics do not clearly define His personality and character.

(I use He, not because the male gender is any closer to G-d than the female gender, but for the sake of simplicity so we do not get stuck in an endless He or She or Him and Her proposition).

When I was speaking with a friend this week about the sacred name (YHVH), we went to the passage which is traditionally called the thirteen attributes in Judaism: Exodus 34:5-7:

“The L-RD descended in a cloud and stood next to him and proclaimed the name of YHVH. YHVH passed in front of Him and cried out: YHVH, YHVH, merciful and compassionate G-d slow to anger and rich in goodness and faithfulness and who keeps steadfast love to a thousand generations and forgives iniquity, rebellion and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation (of those who hate Me – Ex. 20:5)”

When Moses arrived with the House of Israel at the foot of the Holy Mountain and survived the horror of the golden calf, amidst the almost constant grumbling of the newly liberated former slaves, he began to see firsthand how big a job it was that he was being asked to undertake and he panicked a little.

Before Moses proceeded to the next stage, he wanted to get to know G-d better and understand who He really was in order to better lead the people. The same would apply today, because the better you get to know who G-d is and what He is like, the better you can serve Him and explain Him to a lost and dying (and perverting and hungry) secular world.

The passage we have read outlines twelve characteristics of G-d – called thirteen by the rabbis because the sacred name is repeated. I would like to take you through this description and we will begin with the sacred name.

(1) **YHVH, YHVH**. This name is derived from the Hebrew verb: to be and is in a form which means eternally existent (I was and I am and I forever will be the same – unchangeable). Some sources say the original pronunciation was lost, since it was only pronounced once a year in the temple and became considered so holy that many rabbis feel it is wrong to pronounce it. They say ***Ha Shem*** or ***ado-shem*** or even just ***Adonai*** when it appears in the Bible – as is done in the Shema.

It should read: Shema Israel, YHVH, Elohaynu, YHVH echad and we may consider using the original pronunciation in the future, but the question remains as to whether the Scriptures forbid the pronouncing of the name – which they do not.

The disciple’s prayer begins with: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed by your name and we say in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but it actually means with the authority of the trinity of G-d. The entire passage where the thirteen attributes are outlined should be considered His name, in that frequently a Jewish name described the person who bore it and YHVH is the best way to begin a description of G-d.

It is said twice for emphasis, like: I am the One who is – but to say it twice every time we use it would be redundant, except when we are describing Him as the great I am. You see He is not a G-d who is developing or growing and He does not replace previous gods (like Saturn replaced Uranus, only to be supplanted by Jupiter or Zeus), nor will He be replaced by subsequent gods.

He does not age or wear out and does not need some kind of theological puberty to reach His full potential. He is and was and shall always be what He is and was and shall always be – changeless (as well as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent).

Nothing about Him changes or needs to change and we can see reflections of His infinity in the cosmos and His infinitesimal perfection when we see how the atomic structure of the universe is so precise.

He is limitless, and His love and power are inexhaustible as much as they are inescapable and eventually inevitable. This is both incredibly comforting and definitely very scary and all of His other personality characteristics are founded and upheld by this double declaration of His eternity. He is not made in the image of man (anthropomorphic) – if anything we are made in His image (theomorphic) – we are His idea, he is not a product of our imagination.

(2) **Merciful and Compassionate G-d** is the next way G-d describes Himself and it is a triple comfort. He is not just a force or a pile of active or inert energy – He is G-d, and is a thinking, feeling, acting being with whom a personal relationship can be established. He can be talked to and can talk and wants to build a responsive relationship with us as we muddle through this live on our pilgrimage from conception through the grave to His Home in Glory.

Two of the primary features of His personhood are mercy and compassion and they work in tandem. He realizes we are dust and that we have all the potential to blow it which our first ancestors did and He does not hold our frailty and our moral weakness against us, He factors it in to all the contacts He wants to have with us, without indulging it or pretending it does not exist. His compassion empowers us to rise above our frailty and keep working at it until we get it right because He will never give up on us – which is one of the big reasons I have never given up on Him.

(3) **Slow to Anger and Rich in Goodness**. Are there people in your life who find you annoying or whom you find annoying? I am so glad G-d never finds me annoying and is not easily angered and never bad tempered (which is why the Jewish people are still here and the world has not yet been destroyed).

This does not mean that He never gets angry, but anger is not His first or His primary reaction and does not motivate or drive how He deals with us or with the world. He is quick to love and to forgive and slow to anger and rich in goodness.

Goodness and kindness are related terms – the first deals with how one responds, the other with how one feels and is disposed to act in the future. G-d is rich, not in anger, but in goodness and He wants to both do us good and to wish us good.

The slowness of His anger and the richness of His goodness are two very primary traits of His character and ones that allow our generational pilgrimage not to be derailed by our foolishness, our anger and cruelty, because He is in final control and His mercy and His compassion are enforced by His slow fuse and abundance of goodness.

Also His goodness does not depend on our own and is not a response to something we have done, but is always a response of His changeless character. We serve the very amazing G-d who no one could require to be good or slow to anger – but we are so blessed that this is who He is and not like the angry, lustful, deceitful or cruel gods of the pagans.

(4) **Faithfulness who maintains steadfast love to a thousand generations**. He is more than the G-d of any one generation and He maintains His steadfast (unchanging and unshakeable) love to a thousand generations. One thousand in the Bible is a symbolic number which means that this will last from the

beginning of human history (Adam and Eve) until the last baby is conceived – and will not run out or become obsolete or somehow destroyed or deactivated.

People ask me often when the L-rd will return and I answer that he will return in His good time because He wants as many people as are willing to respond to Him and become caught up and swept away into glory by His steadfast, trustworthy love. He is faithful – which means reliable – He and His love are not going anywhere and cannot be crowded out or drowned out – cause faithfulness is redeemed (or redeeming) stubbornness – He will never give up on you, so don't ever give up on Him.

(5) **forwards iniquity, rebellion and sin.** He is not full of hatred or resentment against this world of sinners who violate His Word and who are in the process of messing up His world. He wants to help us to change and to escape from the snare of sin – He does not want to squish us like so many bugs – and yet there is one more feature of who He is which should give us pause.

(6) **yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation (of those who hate Me – Ex. 20:5)**". I added the portion from the Decalogue, since I believe it is assumed here. Most families exist in three or four generations and the biggest problem with sin is that it is learned behaviour which He makes sure has a limited shelf life – in contrast to His steadfast love which does not have to be refrigerated!

Generational curses and other forms of dysfunctional trauma and psychoses can be broken when the 1,000 gangs up on the 3 or 4. He is 99.96 or 99.97% love and only allows sin to exist one generation at a time as it is passed on during a lifetime, but no further. One of the most frustrating features of His love for the evil forces which are trying to destroy our world is that they can only do so one generation at a time because our genetic potential can only be corrupted and never compromised.

This is what G-d is like. Are you taking full advantage of who He is? May we be swept up in His generational steadfast love as we are shown mercy and compassion and we are forgiven repeatedly until the corruption of the generation we are born into is swallowed up and dissipated by the superiority of who He is and what he is like!

So when I say G-d bless you, it is not just a wish based on wishful thinking, but an affirmation of the potential which our great G-d and Saviour has to do exceedingly abundantly above we can think or ask – because of who he is and not because of who we are or even because of where we are.

Let's pray.