

Imitating Hashem

1. Devarim 28:9

יְקִימָהּ ה' לְךָ לְעַם קְדוֹשׁ כְּאִשְׁרָךְ בְּשִׁבְעַת לָךְ כִּי תִשְׁמַר אֶת מִצְוֹת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו.

Hashem will establish you as His holy people as He swore to you, if you observe the commandments of Hashem your G-d, and walk in His ways.

2. Talmud, Sotah 14a

ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב: "אֲחֲרָי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ?" וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר: "כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר אֲכָלָה הוּא!"

And Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina, says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "After Hashem your G-d shall you walk..." (Devarim 13:5)? But is it possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? But hasn't it already been stated: "For Hashem your G-d is a devouring fire [a jealous G-d] (Devarim 4:24), and one cannot approach fire!"

אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה, מה הוא מלביש ערומים, דכתיב: "ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאישתו כתנות עור וילבשם", אף אתה תלביש ערומים; הקב"ה ביקר חולים, דכתיב: "ויראה אליו ה' באלוני ממרא", אף אתה ביקר חולים; הקב"ה ניהם אבלים, דכתיב: "ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלקים את יצחק בנו", אף אתה נהם אבלים; הקב"ה קבר מתים, דכתיב: "ויקבר אותו בגי", אף אתה קבור מתים.

Rather, [the meaning is] that one should follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: "And Hashem G-d made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them" (Bereishis 3:21), so too, should you clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, visits the sick, as it is written [with regard to G-d's appearing to Avraham following his circumcision]: "And Hashem appeared unto him by the plains of Mamre" (Bereishis 18:1), so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, consoles mourners, as it is written: "And it came to pass after the death of Avraham, that G-d blessed Yitzchak his son" (Bereishis 25:11), so too, should you console mourners. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead, as it is written: "And he was buried in the valley..." (Devarim 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.

3. Talmud, Shabbos 133b

אָבָא שְׂאוּל אוֹמֵר: "וְאַנְוֵיחוּ" — הֵיךְ דּוֹמֶה לוֹ, מָה הוּא חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם — אִף אַתָּה הָיָה חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם.

Abba Shaul says: *Ve'anveihu* [should be interpreted as if it were written in two words: *Ani vaHu*, me and Him (G-d)]. Be similar to Him: Just as He is compassionate and merciful, so too should you be compassionate and merciful.

In the image of G-d

4. Malbim to Bereishis 2:7

ע"י נשמת חיים שבו מרוח העליון היה לנפש חיה. כי היא המחיה והזנה אותו. ולכן חיותו משונה מחית הבהמה. כי שרשו מן העליונים. וע"כ יש לו כח הבחירה והחפשיות שעי"ז נברא בצלם אלקים כמ"ש על "נעשה אדם בצלמנו". וכן יתר כחות נפשו שמתעלים על כחות נפש יתר בע"ה.

Through the *neshamah* of life placed in him from the higher spirit, he became a *nefesh chayah*; this is what gives him life and nourishes him. Therefore, his life is different from that of a beast, for its root is from the upper realms. And therefore he has the power of free choice, for thus he was created in the image of G-d, as it is written, "Let Us make Man in Our image." And so the other powers of his spirit are higher than those of other creatures.

5. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. 1, 3:18-19

Since G-d desires to give man the greatest good possible, He gave him the ability to resemble Himself (Derech Hashem 1:2:1). This is another reason that G-d gave man free will. Just as G-d acts as a free Being, so does man. Just as G-d acts without prior restraint, so does man. Just as G-d can do good as a matter of His own free choice, so can man (Derech Hashem 1:2:2). Man is therefore spoken of as being created in the image of G-d (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 5:1, Bereishit Rabbah 21:5).

6. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav me'Eliyahu I:32

כאשר ברא אלקים את האדם עשהו לנותן ונותן. כח הנתינה הוא כח עליון ממדות יוצר הכל ברוך הוא, שהוא מרחם ומטיב ונותן, מבלי לקבל דבר בתמורה. וככה עשה את האדם, ככתוב "בצלם אלקים עשה את האדם", כי יוכל לרחם וליתן.

When Hashem created man, He made him a giver and a taker. The power to give is an elevated power from the traits of the Creator of all, Blessed Be He, Who has mercy and gives without accepting anything in return. So too, He made man, as it is written, "in the image of G-d, He made man," for [man] can have mercy and give.

How can we imitate G-d?

7. Michah 7:18-20

מי קל כְּמוֹדִי, נִשְׂא עוֹן וְעֵבֶר עַל פְּשָׁע לְשֹׂאֲרֵית נִחְלָתוֹ, לֹא הִחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוֹ, כִּי הִפִּץ חֲסֵד הוּא: יָשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנוּ, יִכַּבֵּשׁ עֲוֹנֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם כָּל חַטָּאוֹתָם.

Who is a G-d like You, Who pardons iniquity and overlooks transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not maintain his anger forever, for He desires kindness. He will again be compassionate with us. He will suppress our iniquities, and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

8. Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, Journey to Virtue 60:3, 6, 9

The first attribute described in Michah is derived from the phrase *Who is a G-d like You?* G-d has infinite patience and tolerates those who insult Him, as seen from the fact that he maintains the existence of the entirety of Creation at all times, so that even at the very moment that a person sins... We should learn from this to tolerate people who offend and annoy us, and to keep doing kindness for them even as they continue to upset us.

The fourth quality is described in Michah as being for *the remnant of His inheritance*. This tells us that G-d considers Israel to be His children and says, "What can I do to them; they are My children after all, and if any harm befalls them, I will also suffer!" We, too, should act as if all Jews were close relatives, wishing them only good and the same degree of honor and respect we would like for ourselves. After all, we are all parts of one collective soul originating from the same source in Heaven.

The seventh attribute is *He will again be compassionate with us*. It is human nature that someone who sustains an injury and later forgives his assailant might still bear residual resentment over the hurt suffered; the forgiveness may not be complete. G-d, however, is different – when He sees that a sinner genuinely wants to repent and to reject his sin, He draws the penitent even closer than before... We should try to emulate this behavior as well. If a person who has upset us genuinely wants to make amends, we should not bear a grudge or harbor any resentment of our previous anger... [and] we should treat him with even more kindness than we did prior to the upset.

9. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, p. 205

כל אחד ואחד במדרגה שלו צריך להשתדל לאמץ לעצמו את דרכי השי"ת ועי"כ להיות מרכבה לשכינה... העבודה הקדושה המוטלת עלינו היא ללמוד ולהכיר את דרכי ה', ועי"כ לאמץ את דרכיו וללכת בהן. מדרגות רמות אלו בוודאי ניתנות לשיעורין, כל מעשה קטן של חסד, נושה בעול עם חברו, התחשבות בזולת, ולפחות סבר פנים יפות לכל אדם – אשר זהו דבר גדול – והקדשת מחשבה איך להיטיב עם הבריות, הן הן צעדים ופסיעות בהליכה בדרכי השי"ת המביאים לקרבה ולדביקות בו ית'.

Every single person, on his level, must exert himself to adopt the ways of G-d, and thereby become a chariot for the *Shechinah* himself... Therefore the holy work that is placed before us is to study and recognize the ways of G-d, and thereby adopt His ways and walk in them. [Although] these are high spiritual levels, they can certainly be accomplished in small steps. Each small act of kindness, such as:

- Every time one supports another emotionally
- Considers the other's needs
- Greets people with a pleasant expression – which in itself is a significant matter, and
- Gives thought as to how best to benefit others –

All these steps constitute walking in the ways of G-d, which result in a closeness and cleaving to Him.

10. Rabbi Yitzchak Silber, Mishpetei HaShalom 14:8

ומי שאינו משתדל להישר דרכיו, ולכבוש יצרו, ולתקן מחשבותיו ומעשיו לאהבת ה', ולקיים המצוה הזאת, ביטל עשה זה.

One misses the opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah if:

- One does not exert himself to improve his general conduct,
- One does not overcome his negative and self-destructive inclinations,
- One does not improve his thoughts, attitudes and actions to love G-d, and
- One does not intend to fulfill this mitzvah.

11. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Derech Hashem I:2:1-3

ואמנם מלבד היות הבריה הזאת שקנתה השלימות ראויה לידבק בבוראה ית' מצד התדמותה לו, הנה על ידי קנותה השלימות לה, נמצאת מתדבקת והולכת בו, עד שסוף קנותה השלימות והמצאה מתדבקת בו, יהיה הכל ענין אחד.

By means of acquiring perfection [i.e. by choosing the true good that G-d has placed in the Creation], this unique creature [man] becomes fit to “cleave” to its Creator, simply because through acquiring perfection, it has, in a certain respect, begun to “resemble” its Creator. Moreover, by incorporating elements of perfection into itself, it “cleaves” to the Creator’s Perfection, and is drawn to Him continually – until, ultimately, its earning of perfection and its bonding in closeness to Him are one matter.

A responsibility

12. Ramban, Iggeres HaKodesh, Ch. 1

מאחר שכל מעשינו כדמיון מעשה השם יתברך נמצא שכל זמן שאנו עושין הטוב והישר, שאנו מקדשין שמו הגדול כאמרו (דברים ד) "ומי גוי גדול אשר לו חקים ומשפטים צדיקים", לפי שאנו מתדמים לבוראנו יתברך. וכל זמן שלא נתנהג כשורה (וכל מעשינו) [ונעשה מעשים] מקולקלים, אנו מחללין בהם שם שמים, אחר שאנו מתדמים לו והנה מעשינו מכוערים.

Since all of our actions are supposed to be a reflection of G-d’s actions, as long as we are doing that which is good and straight, we sanctify His great Name, as the verse states, “And who is this great nation who possesses righteous laws and statutes” (Devarim 4:8) – because we are emulating our Creator, may He be blessed. However, when we do not behave properly, and our actions are twisted, we thereby desecrate the Name of Heaven, since we are compared to Him, but our actions are abhorrent.