The Thirteen Attributes of the Divine:
Toward a Theology of Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Third and Fourth Generations

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Introduction:

The Thirteen Attributes in Exodus 34:6-7

This paper, divided into two parts, will first explore the Biblical context of the Thirteen Attributes of the Divine, the Thirteen *Middot* of Exodus 34. We will compare and contrast this selection of Exodus with other similar Biblical portions, and explore how the excerpt itself is quoted in later Biblical texts. We will then examine the ways the rabbis interpreted the verses' meaning, truncating them for use in our liturgy. The first part of the paper will consider the following questions: Why did the rabbis abbreviate the verse? How are the attributes used in our liturgy? How did these attributes inspire generations of Jews to try to be like the Divine.

After having reviewed the Biblical context and how the rabbis interpreted it and used it for our liturgy, the second part of this paper will uncover a new use for the verse, creating a new paradigm for breaking seemingly unbreakable cycles of violence, those entering their third and fourth generation of conflict and tension. In this section we will consider the question: Can we use this ancient Biblical text to provide a framework for forgiveness, reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of the Holocaust in 3rd and 4th generation survivors, in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis now in its 60th year and even in the case of domestic violence that seems to be repeated one generation to the next?

No Biblical verse alone has the power to right generations of wrongs. That power comes with hard work, introspection, and personal reflection first. To assist people who which to engage in this process, I have created a workshop that can be used in a congregational setting to introduce this verse on reconciliation and

forgiveness—either as part of the pre-High Holiday preparatory *Selichot* service or during the Yom Kippur afternoon break in services or as an alternative exercise to the main service. In addition, I have designed a guided journal that can be used by an individual from the first day of Elul through Yom Kippur, paralleling the time that the rabbis taught us in *midrash* that Moses spent on the mountain getting the second set of the Ten Commandments and during which he heard the Thirteen Attributes personally.

A *caveat*—Maimonides pointed out that one cannot discuss God because to discuss God is to limit God and God is limitless. Nonetheless, throughout Jewish history, Jews have tried to explain the ineffable. Others have argued that our understanding of the Divine has evolved over time and that this evolution can be traced in the Bible itself.

For me, this paper is personal. This portion of Exodus is part of what I read at my Bat Mitzvah. At that time, my rabbi and mentor, Dr. Albert M. Lewis, was fond of saying that all Bar or Bat Mitzvah students would be given the perfect text for them, one that they would return to over and over again in different ways and at different time periods in their lives. This was certainly the case for me. In some periods, I resonated with the idea that Moses was a leader—a tired leader to be sure—and that it was God who would go with Moses and lighten his load and give Moses rest. It was this portion that answered the question which Christian friends asked about whether the God of the Old Testament was a God of love. Yes, this verse, Exodus 34:6-7 confirms that idea powerfully.

When I was struggling at a particularly difficult time period in my life, one Episcopalian minister, Dr. David Ferner, wanted to know if I could find the place in me where I knew I was loved. At first I couldn't answer that question. Driving down the highway to a business meeting in Armonk, New York, and listening to a musical setting of this verse, I knew that the answer was yes. It was this very verse that led me to seek rabbinic ordination to be able to share that view with others from within a Jewish context. And it was this verse that helped me heal from the violence in my own life and understand—not just academically but in a very profound and personal way—the nature of God's eternal lovingkindness. In this verse, only two words are repeated—*Adonai, Adonai* and *ḥesed*. This teaches me that God loved me before the trauma and after the trauma and that God is a God of lovingkindness, both before and after.

Why look at the reconciliation of Germans and Jews? Aren't there bigger problems in the world? Certainly. However, I believe we can learn something from this that will help bring peace in ever widening circles. And again, for me it is personal. In 2005 I left my job as a marketing consultant at a niche consultant firm, owned by an Orthodox Jew, and went to work at SAP, a German software company founded well after the Second World War. Many wondered how a rabbinical student could work for a German company, could even go to Germany on business. I had the feeling that my father would be rolling over in his grave. We never even bought German products because he could not ever forgive the Germans for their inhumanity. I had to find a way that justified my working for this German company. This verse, my verse, talks about God being a forgiving

God to the thousandth generation—except for some unspecified sins that God visits on the children of the third and fourth generation. We are precisely at that moment.

Similarly with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has been 60 years since the founding of the State of Israel. In 1983 I lost my first love, Yuval Berger, to the first "incursion into Lebanon." For years I was angry with Ariel Sharon whom I held personally responsible for the debacle of Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps bombed by Israel in Lebanon and for Yuval's own death. While I remain concerned about the atrocities that Arabs had perpetrated on Israeli citizens, I had to find some meaning to his death. I became someone committed to working for peace. Then Israel attacked Lebanon again in 2006. I was haunted by an interview with a new Lebanese father who said that he didn't have any issues with Israel but he feared that it would take 20 years, a generation, to heal from the damage and he doubted that his daughter, 3 months old, had a generation to wait.

Finally, I experienced a great personal trauma as the victim of a violent crime perpetrated by Israeli soldiers while I lived in Israel. Again, trying to seek meaning, I was trained as a domestic violence and rape counselor. Unfortunately we have learned that some families pass down this kind of violence within families—to the third and fourth generation and beyond. Many people have helped with this work and a full list can be found in the acknowledgements. Any errors in interpretation, understanding or translation remain mine alone.

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PART ONE: BIBLICAL AND RABBINICAL ANALYSIS

Chapter One: The Thirteen Attributes of the Divine in the Bible

Chapters 33:12-34:7 of the Book of Exodus comprise a remarkable passage that frequently gets quoted out of context. Moses has gone up Mount Sinai, received the Ten Commandments, gone back down and discovered that the Israelites are dancing around a golden calf. He is angry, really angry and he smashes the tablets in response. God wants Moses to come back up and to receive the law again. Moses wants some reassurance that God will go with him during the wilderness journeys and wants to see God face to face. God explains that this last request cannot be granted, but offers to allow all God's goodness to pass before Moses and while reciting the Thirteen Attributes of the Divine as Moses is hidden in a cleft of the rock.

How do the rabbis count Thirteen Attributes of God? Why these attributes? Aren't there others? A close reading of the text provides some answers. We first need to understand the usage of each of these descriptions and then set the text back into a context.

In terms of how to count to thirteen, it is not surprising that the rabbis disagreed. We will explore this disagreement more fully in the next chapter on the rabbis. For now we will follow the grouping that Rabbeinu Tam developed in his commentary on Rosh Hashanah 17b, which has become the accepted standard method of counting the Thirteen Attributes. In this paper we will follow Rebbeinu Tam, counting "The Lord, The Lord" as two separate attributes. We will use a

format similar to Gunther Plaut's in *The Torah, A Modern Commentary*,[1] the Reform Movement's *chumash*.

It is not enough in this age of pluralism and trans- or post-denominationalism to look at material from the perspective of only one Movement so this paper will contrast what the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox *chumashim* say about this important verse. In a grammatical note, *Etz Hayim*, the Conservative Movement's *chumash*, points out that the Hebrew "allows the first YHVH to be taken as the subject of the antecedent verb, thus: 'And the Lord proclaimed.'[2] *The JPS Torah Commentary* makes the same point and adds that this is how Saadia and Maimonides understood it, while Ibn Ezra disagreed, saying that the repetition of the Name would be common as in a summons or invocation.[3]

> **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 the fathers upon children and children's children upon the third and fourth generation.[4]**

One and Two: The Lord, The Lord *(Adonai, Adonai)* Traditionally this name of the Divine is seen as denoting the attribute of mercy in counterpoint to *Elohim* which shows God's attribute of justice.[5] The rabbis teach us that there are no extra words in the Torah; every word comes to teach us something unique.

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[1] Gunther Plaut, editor, *The Torah, A Modern Commentary*, (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 663.
[2] David L. Lieber and Jules Harlow, editors, *Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary*, New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001), 541.
[3] Nahum M. Sarna, editor, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Exodus*, *The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), page 216.
[4] Sarna, *op. cit*., 216-217.
[5] Plaut, *ibid*., 663.

When words repeat, it is frequently for emphasis. Emphasizing God's merciful nature, as opposed to God's judgmental nature is a comforting thought as we come before God seeking Divine forgiveness.

We see this tension between justice and mercy also at the beginning of Exodus when Moses learns a little bit more about the Name of God at the Burning Bush in Exodus Chapter 3. According to Plaut, "The repetition of the attribute of mercy was taken to mean that God is merciful both before and after man has sinned and repented; it is man who changes, not God."[6] *The Stone Chumash,* the Modern Orthodox's standard English/Hebrew *chumash*, furthers this understanding by explaining that the first use of *Adonai* means that God is merciful before a person sins even though God knows that "future evil lies dormant in the person." The second occurrence indicates that after the sin, God mercifully accepts the person's repentance. *The Stone Chumash* cites Or HaChaim, a prominent rabbi originally from Venice and then Morocco and Israel in the early eighteenth century, saying that "God is merciful even to people, who, while they may not have committed sins, have not earned His mercy with good deeds."[7]

Three: God *(El)*, This divine attribute suggests God's rulership. According to Plaut, this means that God is the Almighty, as in *El Elyon*—God most high.[8] *The Stone Chumash* teaches that this Name denotes power which would parallel Plaut's understanding of a God on high. However, it furthers our

[6] *Ibid*., 663.
[7] Rabbi Nosson Scherman, editor, *The Chumash, The Stone Edition*, (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 2000), 509.
[8] Plaut*, op. cit.,* 663.

understanding by explaining that when combined with *Adonai, Adonai* above, "in the context of the Attributes it implies a degree of mercy that surpasses even that indicated by the name *HaShem*."[9] Modern Biblical scholars promulgating the documentary hypothesis have argued that when the Bible uses the *Adonai* form of God's name it was written by the J editor and it describes a God of mercy. According to these scholars, when the *El* or *Elohim* form is used, it indicates that the section was written by the E editor and it describes a God of justice. Although Richard Elliott Friedman contends that this entire section was compiled by J,[10] it is a good example of weaving together both J and E editors since we see both the use of *Adonai* and *El* in the same verse. By focusing on defining the authors of the passage as tightly as he does, Friedman obscures some of the merits of the text itself with its inherent beauty, majesty and tension.

Four: Compassionate *(Raḥum)* The adjective describes the quality of being sympathetic to suffering. Plaut adds that "this quality is linguistically a 'female principle,' the word being of the same root as *reḥem*, the mother's womb."[11] Brown Driver and Briggs agree that the root is from womb and furthers our understanding by explaining that *raḥum*, is always an adjective and is only used to describe God. *Raḥamim*, the noun, meaning "compassion" also may be related to the word *reḥem* meaning "womb" and would connote that sense of motherly feeling and can be applied both to God's or people's compassion.[12]

[9] Scherman*, op. cit*., 509.
[10] Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 251.
[11] Plaut, *op cit*., 663.
[12] Francis Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted from the 1906 edition), 933-934.

It is significant that in this grouping of "compassionate and gracious" this motherly concern comes first, because we learn from this text about God's more feminine attributes which have been less emphasized given the gender-specific nature of Hebrew. The phrase as we have it, *"raḥum v'ḥanun* only appears in two other places. Contrast that with the fact that in nine other Biblical texts we have a similar phrase, but the word order is reversed as it is in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:5-6) where it is *ḥanun v'raḥum* and in Psalm 145:8. *Etz Hayim* sheds light on this observation by pointing out that "Emphasis and priority are here given to God's magnanimous qualities rather than to His judgmental actions."[13] In the *Stone Chumash*, we learn that "God eases the punishment of the guilty and does not put people into extreme temptation. He is compassionate in that He helps people avoid distress."[14]

Five: Gracious *(Ḥanun)* This attribute describes God's helpful concern, according to Plaut[15]. Brown Driver and Briggs define the word as "gracious" As an adjective, it only applies to an attribute of God although it is related to *ḥain*, "to show favor, grace," as in *matza ḥain*—find favor, or as a noun "compassionate, favorable," Brown Driver and Briggs describe *ḥanan*, as a verb, "to show favor or to be gracious with synonyms of yearn towards, long for, be merciful, compassionate, favorable, inclined towards." *Ḥain* as a noun means favor or grace. To find favor can either mean with people as in Proverbs 28:23 or with God as in Jeremiah 31:2[16]

[13] Lieber and Harlow, *op. cit*., 541.
[14] Scherman, *op cit*., 509.
[15] Plaut, *op cit*., 663.
[16] Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op cit.,* 336 -337.

Six: Slow to anger; endlessly patient *(Erech apayim)* It is this attribute of God that gives people the opportunity to repent. As the *Stone Chumash* points out, "With both the righteous and the wicked, God is patient. Instead of punishing sinners immediately, He gives them time to reflect, improve and repent."[17] Sometimes it is also translated as "long-suffering" or "endlessly patient". Brown Driver and Briggs shed some light on this. *Erech* comes from the adjective for long. It can be read as "long to anger" and thus endlessly patient."[18] Since *apayim* is the dual form (nostrils, anger, countenance), Rashi expounds that the phrase comes from "lengthening his nose," a sign of anger meaning God's anger is prolonged. According to the *Stone Chumash*, Rashi's implication is that God's face is lengthened in a cheerful manner for the righteous and in an angry way for the wicked. On the other hand, *Targum Onkelos* has "keeping far away His anger." With this a subtle changing of the grammar, Onkelos changes the perspective from time to distance, which Drazin points out that the Targum emphasizes God's humanlike emotions.[19] The notion of either "slow to anger" or "endlessly patient," provides a good contrast with Moses—who is somewhat hot tempered—and with ourselves—who can also anger quickly and lose our patience. Our goal of living is to try to be patient and slow to anger like God.

Seven: Abounding in kindness, *(Rav ḥesed)* There may be an implication with this attribute that God's kindness goes as Plaut suggests "beyond what

[17] Scherman, *op cit*., page 509.
[18] Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op cit*., 73-74.
[19] Israel Drazin, editor, *Targum Onkelos to Exodus*, (Jersey City: Ktav Publishing House, 1990), 314.

humanity deserves."[20] The word *ḥesed* is not clearly defined but is central to our understanding the nature of the Divine. Dr. Nelson Glueck, the former president of Hebrew Union College and an archeologist wrote his Ph.D. thesis on this very topic of *ḥesed* and concluded that we cannot know its meaning fully.[21] Nonetheless, it carries with it the sense of kindness or even lovingkindness. Brown Driver and Briggs list it as goodness, kindness and, specifically when referring to God, as kindness or lovingkindness. They point out that it is frequently grouped with other attributes, particularly *emet*, or with the idea that God's lovingkindness is abundant, *rav ḥesed*.[22]

The word *ḥesed* like *Adonai, Adonai*, is the only other word that repeats in this verse. The rabbis would suggest that the repetition would give it more weight because they teach that there are no extraneous words in the Torah, there must be some inherent meaning in the repetition. However, the rabbis did not comment on this repetition. The *Stone Chumash* explains that God is kind even to those who lack personal merits. Also, if one's personal behavior is evenly balanced between virtue and sin, God tips the scales of judgment toward the good.[23] Only Onkelos makes the implied "doing" or "making" explicit in his translation of *nosei ḥesed*.[24] By translating *ḥesed* as mercy rather than just goodness, it suggests a more compassionate and active emotion.

Eight: Truth *(Emet)* This word is another attribute that appears as part of a phrase, here following *ḥesed*. It can also be translated as "faithfulness." As *Etz*

[20] Plaut, *op cit.,* page 663.
[21] Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz, in personal communiqué to author
[22] Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op cit.,* 338 and 339.
[23] Scherman, *op cit*., editor, 509.
[24] Drazin, *op cit*., 314.

Hayim makes clear, *ḥesed v'emet* often appear together to "emphasize a single concept. *ḥesed* involves acts of beneficence and obligation that flow from a legal relationship…. *Emet*, usually translated 'truth' encompasses the notions of reliability, durability, and faithfulness. When used together, the two words express God's absolute and eternal dependability in dispensing His benefactions."[25] Therefore, in this pairing of attributes, we see there is a connection between *ḥesed,* the obligation that comes with beneficence and mercy and *emet* which brings with it the obligation of justice.

Emet is an intriguing Hebrew word that is seen as another name of God. It is written using *alef*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *mem* the centermost letter and *tav*, the last letter. Thus, in the word meaning truth which is all encompassing, there is another name for God, also all encompassing.

Nine: Extending kindness to the thousandth generation *(Notzer ḥesed la-alafim)*, In traditional manuscripts the *nun* at the beginning of *notzer ḥesed* is written large, although the reason is not clear. Perhaps, as Plaut suggests, it is so it will not be confused with *otzer*, "withholding kindness" which would be the opposite concept entirely[26]. *Etz Hayim* suggests the phrase may express either God's continuous *ḥesed* or the idea that merit for the *ḥesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation.[27] The *Stone Chumash* teaches that "kindness in this context refers to the good deeds of people, even though the Torah requires them to perform such deeds. He *preserves* those deeds for the benefit of their offspring, so that newer, less virtuous generations can be rewarded

[25] Lieber and Harlow, *op cit*., 541.
[26] Plaut, *op. cit*., 663.
[27] Lieber and Harlow, *op. cit*., 541.

for the good deeds of their forebears, just as we constantly invoke the merit of the Patriarchs."[28]

The Hebrew phrase can also be interpreted to mean "extending kindness to thousands *of people*", rather than making it generational "to the thousandth generation." However, given the continuation of the verse with its reference to "the 3rd and 4th generations", it makes more sense that the words be understood to mean "to the thousandth generation." This interpretation would agree with the Onkelos translation of "thousandth generation." *("l'alaphai dorin")* which makes it explicit. We will look more closely at this generational question when we come to Ezekiel 18:3 on page 30.

Sarna in *The JPS Commentary* teaches, "the merit for the *ḥesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation",[29] in some kind of ancient and profound way, it is reminiscent of the concept of "*paying* it *forward;"* of being the recipient of a good deed and then reciprocating by causing benefit to the next generation, which leads us to the next attribute. A broader discussion of this generational issue is the subject of Chapter Three on page 63.

Ten, Eleven and Twelve: Forgiving iniquity, transgression, sin *(Nosei avon,vafesha, v' ḥata'ah)* Each of these is a different form of wrongdoing and thus counts as a separate attribute. *Avon* is an intentional sin; *pesha* is a willful sin, committed with the intention of angering God; and *ḥata'ah* is more like an error. It is an archer's term signifying missing the mark—done with carelessness

[28] Scherman, *op. cit*.,509.
[29] Sarna , *op. cit*., 216.

or apathy, according to Brown Driver and Briggs[30] and the *The Stone Chumash*.[31] Targum Onkelos inserts "to" into this verse three times, "*to* those who commit iniquity, *to* those who commit transgression and *to* those who commit sin"[32] in order to demarcate that these are three separate types of sin and thus make clear that these three words count as separate attributes.

The word *nosei*, "forgiving", here is difficult. It has a sense of "carrying" or "clearing" as well as forgiving. Onkelos's choice of *sbq* which means to 'let go', 'abandon' or 'forgive' when applied to God—who has the power to forgive—helps clarify that sense of clearing the sin. However, when a similar metaphor is used to describe the priests, Onkelos uses *shelach*, "send", since the priests only intercede for atonement and don't grant the forgiveness themselves.[33] It is God who does the forgiving and the priests who act as agents.

Thirteen: Yet He does not remit all punishment, *(V'nakeh lo yenakeh)* God cleanses the sin so that the effect of the sin vanishes. However, there are limits to God's mercy. Both the *Etz Hayim* Commentary and the *JPS Commentary* on Exodus, basing their interpretation on Rashi, put it so eloquently. The former states, "Divine mercy does not mean that sinners can expect wholly to escape the consequences of their wrongs."[34] JPS continues its explanation, "Yoma 86a interprets the sentence to mean, "He remits punishment for the penitent but not for the impenitent."[35] The *Stone Chumash* echoes this interpretation citing

[30] Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op. cit.,* 306.
[31] Scherman, *op. cit*., 509.
[32] Drazin, *op. cit*., page 313.
[33] *Ibid*., 313.
[34] Lieber and Harlow, *op. cit*., 541.
[35] Sarna *, op. cit*., 216.

S'forno who teaches that "God cleanses fully those who repent out of love. Those who repent only out of fear of retribution receive only partial cleansing."[36] We will see later that the liturgical recitation of the Thirteen Attributes closes with "acquitting" (the penitent) and omits the negative element of extending punishment to further generations. This limitation suggests that there is no limit to God's mercy which is more palatable to hear while atoning.

Yet, there is still a potential contradiction here, because God threatens in Exodus 32:33 to punish the Israelites for the sin of the Golden Calf even longer than the thousandth generation by erasing them from God's record entirely, blotting them out of God's book. To resolve this contradiction, the *Stone Chumash* cites the Kitzur Mizrachi, a compendium of supercommentary on Rashi compiled by Jacob Marcaria in 1561 from the work of Elijah Mizrachi and R. Bachya teaching:

> The sin of the Calf was so grievous that even after a delay of four generations the punishment would have been very severe. To avoid this, God made an exception and spread it out over all of history. According R. Bachya, God does not punish for the Golden Calf; He only remembers it, so that the degree of His mercy is diminished from what it would otherwise have been."[37]

While this interpretation seems to be saying that the sin of the Golden Calf was so egregious the punishment had to extend beyond the third and fourth generation, other commentaries try to limit God's anger and punishment by bringing other Biblical verses such as Deuteronomy 24: 16 which explicitly states that children should not be put to death for the sin of their parents and Ezekiel 18:1-3 which explains that the soul that sins is the one that must die, in order to

[36] Scherman, *op. cit,* 509.
[37] *Ibid*., 510.

show God does not allow the punishment to extend beyond the lifetime of the sinner.

Biblical Context:

Having explored the nuanced meanings of the Thirteen Attributes, it is time to turn to understanding the context of their revelation. Clearly this revelation of God's very essence to Moses is a pinnacle experience, (pun intended). Why now? What purpose does it serve? Let's remember, both Moses and God were very angry. The passage is about limited and limiting anger—both Moses' and God's—while reaching for forgiveness, both on the national level after the sin of the Golden Calf and on the personal level between God and Moses. God models for Moses how to contain his anger.

Moses has just returned from the profound experience of receiving the Ten Commandments and has discovered that the Israelites, feeling abandoned and alone, created a substitute—a golden calf, an idol around which they were dancing. Moses is angry and God is angry. Moses smashes the tablets. There is an irony here. Although the Thirteen Attributes which will be revealed in the very next chapter says that God is slow to anger, God is angry here. God, in anger, threatens to destroy the people, telling Moses that God wants to rage in solitude and not be questioned. "Now let Me be that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them." (Exodus 32:10)

Moses, sensing that this is a pivotal moment, begs God not to destroy the people. He reminds God of the divine covenantal promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He uses what we might identify as modern psychological techniques—

essentially imploring God to worry about what the neighbors might think, hinting that the Egyptians will think that God took the Israelites out of Egypt only to kill them off in the wilderness. (Exodus 32:12) Moses uses the language of forgiveness and reconciliation, imploring God not to let God's anger blaze forth. God, surprisingly, agrees.[38] When Moses treks down the mountain and sees what the people are actually doing, in his anger, he smashes the tablets. It is now God's turn to beg Moses—to go back up the mountain and receive the law again. Moses, by this point, is exhausted and does not want to lead this stiff-necked people. Moses asks, "Who will go with me?" God promises, "I will go in the lead and lighten your burden." (Exodus 33:14)

But that is not enough for Moses. Moses wants to really understand who this God is who is requiring of him these heroic acts. He wants to see God. He wants to understand God's very essence. God agrees to this as well—not completely, for no one can see God and live—so God hides Moses in a crevice of the rock and allows all God's goodness to pass before Moses. Moses sees what the text describes as God's back side. Stating the essence of this scene in non-anthropomorphic terms, *Etz Hayim,* quoting Hatam Sofer, says that "we cannot see God directly. We can only see the difference that God made after the fact. We can recognize God's reality by seeing the difference God has made in people's lives."[39] It is the Divine afterglow, as it were. Anthropomorphic or not, the power of the imagery and experience is unmistakable.

[38] God did destroy Sodom and Gomorrah despite Abraham's urging otherwise since God could not find even ten righteous people (Gen 18:23-19:25)
[39] Lieber and Harlow, *op. cit*., 540.

Moses had an experience of the Divine unlike any other person. This was a personal encounter. Only Moses was allowed all the way to the top of the mountain.[40] Only Moses was allowed to see God "face-to-face" as it were, a point driven home at the end of Deuteronomy, 34:10 when we are told that never again would there arise a prophet like Moses who knew God face-to-face.

Although Moses' experience is not as direct as Moses would have liked, we become the beneficiaries as we, through Moses' encounter, understand more of the nature of the Divine, and thus having this list of attributes, we can become Godlike: compassionate and gracious, abounding in lovingkindness, slow to anger, endlessly patient, forgiving. We glimpse the Divine through Moses's eyes.

The Divine forgiving nature permeates the entire narrative: Moses begs for forgiveness for the people; God forgives the people; God shows the Divine's compassionate, merciful, forgiving self; Moses again begs for God's forgiveness of the people, even though it is a stiffnecked people; God then renews the covenant with the Israelites through Moses.

Paying close attention to the pronouns in this section of anger, forgiveness and reconciliation is important. In Exodus 32:7, "The Lord spoke to Moses, 'Hurry down, for *your* people, whom *you* brought out of the land of Egypt have acted basely." Notice the use of the second person, both in the imperative and in the possessive. There is no sense here that this is *God's* people. Moses' plea to not let God's anger blaze forth reminds God that this *is His* people whom He brought out of the land of Egypt and God renounces the planned destruction. Moses, too,

[40] Aaron was left behind ostensibly because of his leadership allowing the Golden Calf to be built. While other Biblical characters have encounters with the Divine[40], for instance, Elijah, in a cave, experiencing God not as a fire, not as the wind, but as the still, small voice that is God.

in his anger, loses sight that this is *his* people, asking Aaron, "What did *this* people do to *you*…?" (Exodus 32:21) The text continues referring to the people as "this people" until the middle of Chapter 33, when Moses asks for God's reassurance. Moses now reminds God again that this is God's people and that Moses is a part of it, not separate. "Consider too that this nation is *Your* people….unless *You* go in the lead do not make *us* leave this place…*You* go with *us*, so that *we* may be distinguished…*Your* people and *I*." (Exodus 33:13-16) When Moses begs God again on behalf of the Israelites and for their forgiveness, after his encounter with the Divine goodness on the mountain, he again uses first person language. "If *I* have gained Your favor, O Lord, pray, let the Lord go in *our* midst, even though this is a stiffnecked people. Pardon *our* iniquity and *our* sin, and take *us* for Your own!" (Exodus 34:9) Only then is the forgiveness complete. Only then is the covenant renewed. This becomes the language used over and over again to beg God's forgiveness.

This, then, is the central meaning of the text: God's inherent loving and merciful nature, both at an individual level and for the good of the greater group allows God to model the release of anger and the granting of forgiveness so the damaged relationship may be healed.

It is clear from this close analysis that the Thirteen Attributes are an expansion of the concept only hinted at in the Decalogue earlier in Exodus 20:5-6: "for I, the Lord your God, am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation of those who reject Me,

but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments."

The second version of Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5:9-10 repeats Exodus 20:5-6 almost verbatim: "I, the LORD your God, am a zealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

This motif is repeated again in Deuteronomy 7:9 where just after the *Sh'ma, the watchword of our faith, declaring God's oneness,* the Israelites are exhorted to "Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments but who instantly requites with destruction those who reject Him" Here it is made explicit that it is "a thousand generations." Childs points out that the choice in phrase in Deuteronomy 7:9 becomes "exegetical rather than strictly grammatical." Childs prefers the clearer option of including the word generations as better providing the contrast with the commandments."[41] For the purposes of this paper where we are explicitly comparing the lovingkindness and mercy shown to different generations, I will use "thousand generations".

Exodus 34:6-7 emphasizes the compassionate nature of the Divine to an even greater extent than the formulation in the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue "hinted at God's forgiveness but mentioned it only after describing

[41] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus,* (Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1974), 388.

God's impassioned nature as a punishing divinity. The later revelation of God to Moses makes God's merciful nature explicit."[42] The forgiveness motif and references to Exodus 34:6-7 are found in other Biblical texts as well.

In Micah 7:18-19 there is another list of divine attributes, "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." The parallels are clear; the language is similar. This is a forgiving God who does not stay angry and will allow the return and repentance of the Israelites because of Divine lovingkindness and mercy.

In Numbers 14:11-20, after the incident with the spies returning from Canaan, Moses pleads again for mercy on behalf of the Israelites. He invokes the divine attributes and concludes, "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt." (Numbers 14:19). The Lord answers, "I have pardoned according to your plea." (Numbers 14:20) This verse becomes the central reassuring answer to *Kol Nidre* and is repeated during *Ne'ilah*. God has pardoned and will pardon according to our plea.

The refrain of God being a merciful God, full of compassion resounds in Psalms. Preserving the order of *raḥum v' ḥanun*, Psalm 86:15 implores God to recognize and remember God's own attributes, "But You, O Lord, are a God

[42] Reuven Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 127.

compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Overall, the Psalm is a direct plea to God to have mercy on David. The word order is again preserved in Psalm 103:8, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love." The difference here is that while Psalm 86 was a plea to God in the 2nd person, this psalm is a reminder in the third person of God's attributes. This Psalm continues by reminding us that God is like a faithful, loving parent who has compassion for his children because God knows how we are formed. This comparison expands our understanding from Psalm 86 that God is a forgiving God.

In a series of Psalms, the attributes are repeated but with the word order reversed. In Psalm 111:4, it says, "God has made Divine wonders memorable; Adonai is gracious and compassionate". In Psalm 112:4, it says, "Light shines for the upright in darkness, for God is gracious, compassionate and good." In Psalm 145:8, we find "*ḥanun v'raḥum Adonai, erech al payim v'rav ḥesed*, "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, endlessly patient and slow to anger and great in lovingkindness." All three of these psalms are alphabetical acrostics. While the order is reversed from the version in the Thirteen Attributes, this is a clear retelling of the central portion of the attributes. Blumenthal cites two interesting commentaries on this verse: Ibn Ezra teaches that a human king is good to those who are loyal to him but God is good to all, even to the wicked and to animals. He adds that feminist alternative would be "slow to anger and pregnant with gentleness."[43] Rabbis Martin S. Rozenberg and Bernard M. Zlotowitz in their

[43] Blumenthal, "Ashrei Words" published on the web at http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/AshreiWords.html accessed on June 7, 2009 citing

book on Psalms cite the Radak that here compassionate means "guards Israel from injury and affliction."[44]

Nehemiah in 9:17, describing a day of fasting and penitential prayers, references the lesson of the Golden Calf incident, "Refusing to obey, unmindful of Your wonders that you did for them, they stiffened their necks, and in their defiance resolved to return to their slavery. But You, being a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and abounding in faithfulness, did not abandon them." The reminder is repeated again a few verses later in Nehemiah 9:31, "Still in Your great compassion, You did not make an end of them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God." Like in the Psalms above, the word order is reversed from the order in Exodus. This plea to remember us because God was merciful to the Israelites at the time of the Golden Calf, remains central to our liturgy to this day.

Jonah, in trying to justify his stubbornness, utilizes the Thirteen Attributes to explain why he had fled to Tarshish. "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[45] God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment." (Jonah 4:2**)** Again the order is reversed from Exodus to *ḥanun v'raḥum* as opposed to *raḥum v' ḥanun*. In a bit of irony, Jonah reminds God of God's very nature, by

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Siddur Nashim, ed. M. Wenig and N. Janowitz, unpublished: 1976, 69. While the words Blumenthal highlighted in his essay on Ashrei suggest that Wenig and Janowitz were dealing with rachum v'hanun, we include them here with the discussion of Psalm 145.

[44] Martin S. Rozenberg and Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms, A New Translation and Commentary*, (Northvale: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1999),917.

[45] The new JPS translation uses compassionate and gracious although the older edition has gracious and compassionate. The Hebrew is clear--*ḥanun v'rachum*

complaining about it! God fulfills the implicit request not only to forgive Ninevah but the wayward Jonah who needs to keep learning this lesson of God's caring nature: the One who cares about Jonah, cares as well about the great city of Nivenah, all its inhabitants and even the cattle.

In the prophet Joel, there is another reference to the verse in Exodus. Like the story of Jonah, once again the Ninevites have become corrupt and no one remembered Jonah or Jonah's message. Nahum arrived to deliver another prophesy to the people of Ninevah. This time there is much more emphasis on the power and the anger, passion of God. Nonetheless, Nahum reminded the people of Ninevah that "The Lord is slow to anger and of great forbearance. But the Lord does not remit all punishment."(Nahum 1:3) This is a not-so-gentle reminder of God's mercy and forgiveness coupled with the threats of God's destructive power in nature if the people do not repent.

The prophet Joel exhorts the people to return to God, to do *t'shuvah*, ("*V'shuvu*", Joel 2:13) in order to prevent the destruction that Joel is prophesizing. God will accept the people's repentance again because of the very nature of God to be forgiving. "Rend your hearts rather than your garments. And turn back to the Lord our God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and renouncing punishment." Again, the order is reversed to *ḥanun v'raḥum* as opposed to *raḥum v' ḥanun,* but the message is the same. God will forgive and renounce the announced punishment if the people will only repent and return to God.

The similarities between Joel and Jonah are striking and important. Thomas Dozeman[46] compares and contrasts them to teach us about the nature of God's mercy and forgiveness. He points out that both prophets receive a threatening word from God which they need to deliver, urging the people to repent. Both then utilize the Thirteen Attributes, together with an expanded form of confession, offering the hope that if the people repent then God will not destroy. Joel, on the one hand, actually instructs the priest how to pray for God's divine mercy, prefiguring the *seliḥot* liturgy to come. However, Jonah, is a reluctant prophet who runs in the other direction from Ninevah. In contrast to Joel, while Jonah urges the king to repent, he does not call the whole people to repentance. In Jonah, the declaration of God's attributes is used by an angry Jonah who is almost mocking in his charge that God is merciful. Dozeman argues that the final line in the Jonah and Joel repetitions of the Thirteen Attributes makes the renewal of the covenant in Exodus possible. Having God being able to repent of God's own anger makes the repair of the covenant possible after the Golden Calf, after Ninevah and for the people Israel in Joel's day. Dozeman's careful inner-Biblical reading helps our understanding of *t'shuvah,* forgiveness, and God's mercy and willingness to forgive as set forth in the verses of Exodus.

In 2 Chronicles 30:9 again there is a reference to the Thirteen Attributes. Again the word order is reversed: "for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful; He will not turn His face from you if you return to Him." This verse comes after a repetition of exhorting the Israelites to return to the God of their

[46] Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh's Gracious and Compassionate Character", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 108, No. 2. (Summer, 1989), 207-223.

fathers, not to be stiffnecked, to return to the sanctuary and serve God so that they and their children can experience God's divine compassion and be returned to the land of Israel which God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and again to the remnant of Israel. The parallels in the language are striking.

Is this difference in word order significant? None of the traditional commentaries find cause to comment on it. However, it could suggest three things. The first is that there is no significance whatsoever and that the reversed order is merely an echo of what appears in Exodus or bad editing. The second perhaps is that when God describes the Divine self, God is compassionate and gracious, however, when humans exhort people to repent or to remind God of God's merciful and forgiving nature, then God is gracious and compassionate. The third reason maybe that like only the High Priest pronounced the name of the Divine out-loud and then only once a year and only in the Holy of Holies, using the compassionate and gracious formulation maybe drawing too close to the Divine and it was only permissible for Moses or David to do so. None of those explanations is clear completely from the text itself.

What about this tension between a forgiving God and one who continues to visit the sins of the ancestors on the children and the children's children? Can this tension be resolved? Marc Brettler points out in his *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, that "This notion of intergenerational punishment is expressed elsewhere in the Bible, and is illustrated, for example, when God 'transfers' David's sin to the child of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, and the child dies (2 Samuel 12:18). Yet this idea, unambiguously stated in the Decalogue (and elsewhere) is disputed

by other biblical sources, including by Ezekiel in 18:4 which states decisively: 'the person who sins, only he shall die'"[47] Brettler continues by explaining that Deuteronomy 7:9-10 "is even more striking, quoting from this injunction in the Decalogue only to argue against it." He argues that "This polemic indicates that those who constituted biblical Israel did not all agree with the Decalogue's theology."[48]

So again, how can we resolve this tension, if, as the rabbis believe, every word of Torah comes to teach some lesson? A hint appears in Leviticus 19:18 when it instructs, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your friend as yourself: I am the Lord." This verse from the center of Leviticus, from the center of the Five Books of Moses is part of the "Holiness Code", a recipe of how we are to be like God and in so doing become holy, distinct, set apart, special. The Torah instructs in other places, "Vengeance is Mine" says the Lord." (Deuteronomy 32:35) but vengeance explicitly does not extend to beyond the 3rd and 4th generation. God seems to limit God's own anger. If we are to be like God then we must limit ours as well and not hold grudges.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to attempting to resolve this tension, examining first how the rabbis do so, then how the rabbis reinterpret the verse in the liturgy Finally, we will see how the biblical model for limiting anger can be used to help with reconciliation—on a personal and on a geo-political basis.

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[47] Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 66.
[48] *Ibid*., 67.

Chapter Two: The Rabbis' Interpretation and the Use of the Thirteen Attributes in Liturgy

From the earliest rabbinic writings, many have weighed in on what these verses from Exodus Chapter 34 mean. Most emphasize the role of God's mercy and compassion as reasons we can hope for Divine forgiveness. Some wrestle with the troubling portion of visiting the sins of the parents on the children and the children's children, choosing to limit God's anger and ultimately urging us to be like God. The roots of the liturgical significance can be seen clearly in the early rabbinic writing and throughout the history of rabbinic commentaries to the present day. This chapter, then, serves as an overview of the rabbinic material on these verses and the development of our liturgy asking for forgiveness.

The Thirteen Attributes are repeated, codified, and even elevated by the rabbis and included in our liturgy, and added to the Torah service by the Kabbalists, first for Elul and the High Holidays and then for the three pilgrimage festivals. The Thirteen Attributes provide assurance of God's mercy and a counterbalance to God's justice. If we confess our sins with the *Vidui*, we will experience God's forgiving nature and we will be pardoned. Reuven Hammer explains the early rabbis' interpretation and codification of the liturgy: since Judaism teaches that without confession of wrongdoing, repentance cannot be achieved. "There would be no point in confessing, however, without the assurance that forgiveness is possible…The entire liturgy of Yom Kippur rests on these two

pillars: God is merciful and forgiving, and confession brings forgiveness and atonement." [49]

The format of using some kind of confession and supplication for forgiveness appears very early. Nehemiah, active in the fifth century BCE, describes a day of national fasting like this: "Standing in their places, they read from the scroll of the Teaching of the Lord their God for one-fourth day, and for another fourth they confessed and prostrated themselves before the Lord their God." (Nehemiah 9:3) Nehemiah continues by invoking the Thirteen Attributes, to remind God to be merciful. "But You, being a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and abounding in faithfulness, did not abandon them (Nehemiah 9:17)." However, at this stage the supplications were still not yet fixed and may have varied from community to community. While Mishnah Ta'anit 2:4, redacted c 200 CE, has a litany already defined for forgiveness, it doesn't include our verse.

However, as Marc Brettler points out in *My People's Prayer Book*, this is not the first time this verse is truncated. Cutting it short predates the fixed liturgy; this is precisely what Jonah does, in order to remind God's of God's own positive attributes when he is fled to Tarshish (Jonah 4:2). Brettler maintains, "These types of selective quotations should be seen as creative rather than problematic."[50]

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[49] Reuven Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 125.

[50] Lawrence A. Hoffman, editor, *My People's Prayer Book*, *Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries, Volume 4,* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publications, 2000), 66.

Talmud:

The Babylonian Talmud, comprised of the Mishnah and the Gemara was redacted approximately 500 CE, contains expanded commentary on the Mishnah and is considered the first compilation of Jewish law. It preserves much of the argument back and forth between the rabbis and uses the Mishnah as the building blocks.

Rosh Hashanah 17b

Not surprisingly, in a discussion on the theme of God's forgiveness that abounds at the High Holidays, the rabbis turn to discussing our verses, Exodus 34:6-7, that describe the Divine as a forgiving God, full of compassion, graciousness, lovingkindness and faithfulness, and extending that kindness to the thousandth generation.

What is particularly important for us in the following quote from Rosh Hashanah 17b is the idea that God taught Moses the order of the *tefilah*, and specifically, the order of *seliḥot.* This Talmudic passage gives us glimpses into the historical development of the liturgy and our appreciation of the Divine nature including God's lovingkindness, compassion and forgiveness. It is in the Tosephot written by Rabbeinu Tam on this section of the Talmud, that we learn how the rabbis ordered and counted the thirteen attributes.

> R. Huna contrasted [two parts of the same verse]. It is written, The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and then it is written, and gracious in all his works. (Ps. 145:17). [How is this]? (that God can be both righteous, just and gracious at the same time?)— At first righteous and at the end gracious. (when He sees that in strict justice the world cannot endure) R. Eleazar [similarly] contrasted two texts. It is written Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, and then it is written, For thou renderest to every man according to

his work. (Ps. 62:12) [How is this]? — At first, 'Thou renderest to every man according to his work', but at the end, 'unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy'.

Ilfi (or, as some report, Ilfa) [similarly] contrasted two texts: It is written, abundant in goodness, and then it is written, and in truth. (Ex. 34:6) [How is this]? — At first, 'truth', and at the end 'abundant in goodness'.

And 'the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed [etc.]. (Ex. 34:6) R. Johanan said: Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing; this verse teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, drew his robe round Him like the reader[8] of congregation and showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sins, let them carry out this service before Me, and I will forgive them.

'The Lord, the Lord': I am the Eternal before a man sins and the same[10] after a man sins and repents. 'A God merciful and gracious:' Rab Judah said: A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes that they will not be turned away empty-handed, as it says, Behold I make a covenant. (Ex. 34)

R. Johanan said: Great is the power of repentance that it rescinds (tears up) a man's final sentence, as it says , Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes, lest they seeing with their eyes and hearing with their ears and understanding with their heart return and be healed. (Isa. 6:10) Said R. Papa to Abaye: Perhaps this was before the final sentence? — He replied: It is written, 'and he be healed'. What is that which requires healing? You must say, the final sentence.

An objection [against this view] was raised [from the following]: 'If one repents in the interval (between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), he is forgiven; if he does not repent in the interval, should he even offer [subsequently] all the rams of Nebayoth, (Isa. 60:7) he is not forgiven'! — There is no contradiction: the latter statement refers to an individual, the former to a community.[51]

Yoma 86a

Yoma, the tractate on Yom Kippur, also turns to our verses explaining the puzzling contradiction between God clearing and not clearing the guilty or sinful, concluding that God acquits those who repent and does not acquit those who do not repent.

[51] The Complete Soncino Talmud,, http://wilkerson.110mb.com/index.htm , accessed on September 6, 2009

> The Master said: In connection with Horeb [penitence and] forgiveness is stated. Whence do we know that? Because it was taught: R. Eleazar said: It is impossible to say. 'He will not clear the guilt' (Exodus 34:7) Since it says: 'He will clear the guilt'; nor is it possible to say: 'He will not clear the guilt' since it is said: 'He will clear the guilt'; how is that to be explained? 'He clears the guilt' of those who repent, and does not 'clear the guilt' of those who do not repent.[52]

Tosefta:

Tosefta is a compilation of *baraitot*, additional commentary on traditional law dating from the period of the Mishnah but compiled by the *amoraim*, to supplement the mishnaic commentary. It had been the scholarly opinion that the author was Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba. However, Bacher and Lauderbach cast doubt on whether Hiyya bar Abba could be the author of Tosefta since it would be unlikely that the work would then cite him if he was the author. They conclude that, just as the Gemara had three redactors, Akiva, Meir and Judah Hanasi, the Tosefta also must have had three redactors, Akiva, Nehemiah and an unknown, third redactor.[53]

In Tosefta Yoma 5:13 we learn, "A person sins once, twice, three times and is forgiven, as it says (Ex 34:7), "forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin"—three times, but thereafter God no longer remits punishment."[54]

This explanation of the verse from Exodus tries to explain people's individual responsibility, an ancient "three-strikes; you're out" form of Divine justice. It may seem harsh to our modern ears, especially for those of us who

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[52] The Complete Soncino Talmud, http://www.torrentreactor.net/torrents/1817676/The-Babylonian-Talmud-(Complete-Soncino-English-Translation)-tor (accessed on February 15, 2009)
[53] William Bacher and Jacob Lauterbach, "Tosefta," *Jewish Encyclopedia,* http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=277&letter=T (accessed February 15, 2008)
[54] Plaut, *op. cit.,*664.

don't like to limit ourselves or the Divine. Indeed, later rabbis in looking at the entire verse and the role of punishment on the third and fourth generations come to reject this argument.

Midrash:

Midrash is a collection of writings about the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Scriptures, which the rabbis wrote to explain the gaps in the text. Midrash uses an exegetical method that enables the comparison of texts in order *l'drosh*, to seek out, to draw out more meaning. It is divided into halachic *midrash*, those parts dealing with the law portions and aggadic *midrash*, those parts dealing with the stories.

The Sifre on Deuteronomy, a halachic *midrash* ascribed to the school of Rabbi Akiva and redacted in the time of the Amorim c 500 CE uses our verse to explain the necessity to emulate God:

> "To walk in God's ways" (Deuteronomy 11:22). These are the ways of the Holy One: "gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, assuring love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon" (Exodus 34:6). This means that just as God is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving, you too must be gracious, compassionate, and forgiving.[55]

The important thing here is that it is teaching us to be like God, to emulate God's attributes.

The Mekilta:

The Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael is one of the earliest halachic *midrashic* works. *Mekilta* is specifically on the book of Exodus. Although ascribed to Rabbi

[55] Jules Harlow, editor, *Siddur Sim Shalom, A Prayerbook for Shabbat, Festivals and Weekdays*, (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, The United Synagogue of America, 1985) 19.

Ishmael, the authorship cannot be determined with certainty, however, since the Talmud refers to it, we know that it was redacted sometime between the Mishnah and the Gemara. In the *Mekilta*'s profound *d'var torah* called *Shirata* in Hebrew, about *the Song of the Sea*, the author tries to understand exactly the nature of this God whom we proclaim in this Song saying, "This is my God."

The imagery in *the Song of the Sea* of the Lord as a man of war makes some uncomfortable, but *Mekilta's* understanding makes it more palatable by comparing the God of power and might with the God of the Thirteen Attributes. The Israelites sang to the Lord who is powerful, not just to flatter God, as one might do with an earthly king, but because God encompasses so much more, including the attributes of mercy and compassion. "I will sing unto the Lord" who is merciful, as it is said, "The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious," etc. (Ex. 34:6)" The *midrash* then continues citing other verses as evidence of God's mercy.[56]

Further on in *Shirata*, in Chapter 4, the *Mekilta* addresses this exact question. Why do we call God a man of war? It answers, because God fought against the Egyptians. But it adds that "'The Lord is His name' Because He has mercy over his creatures, as it is said, 'The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious,' etc. (Ex. 34:6)" It continues that unlike an earthly warrior, who cannot take an arrow back once it has left the bow, when Israel repents, because of God's merciful and gracious nature, God can take the arrow back.[57]

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[56] Jacob Lauterbach, translator, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Volume One (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933), 9-10.
[57] *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Mekilta's chapter *Beḥodesh* clarifies the seeming contradiction implied in the emphatic statement *v'nakeh lo yenakeh*. Using essentially the same argument at Yoma 86b, the author clears up this seeming difficulty and contradiction in the text in his discussion of Exodus 20:7-11, while talking about the commandment not to take God's name in vain, and not to swear. "And thus it says: 'For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.' R. Eliezer says: It is impossible to say: "He will not clear," since it is also said, "And that will clear (*ve-nakeh*)" (Ex. 34:7) But it is just as impossible to say: "He will clear" since it is also said: "He will not clear" (*lo yenakeh*) (*ibid*.) You must therefore say: He clears those who repent but does not clear those who do not repent."[58] Simple and elegant.

Pesikta De Rab Kahana:

Pesikta de Rab Kahana is an early aggadic midrashic work dated around 700 CE since it appears that *Leviticus Rabbah* relies heavily on it. Others date it from the 5th or 6th century CE. In *Piska 6*, Rab Kahana uses our verse from Exodus to begin his long explanation of Numbers 28:2: "My food which is presented unto Me for offerings." He explains that God says:

> 'If I were hungry I would not speak to thee of it: for the world is Mine and the fullness thereof' (Ps 50:12). Of the words, I would not speak to thee of it, R. Simon said: Thirteen qualities of mercy are attributed in Scripture to the Holy One, as indicated in the verse The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, and passing over transgression and sin, clearing (those who repent)" (Exodus 34:6-7). Do you think it likely, then, that One so merciful would entrust the providing of

[58] *Ibid.*, Volume Two, 248-249.

> His sustenance to man who is cruel. Hence, 'If I were hungry I would not speak to thee of it.' (Ps. 50:12)[59]

In Numbers, God requires offerings of food. Rab Kahana is making the point that our relationship with God needs to be built on the same Divine Attributes as God. However, God who is merciful is not willing to rely on humanity which is cruel and cannot be counted on to feed God.

Leviticus Rabbah:

Leviticus Rabbah is another ancient midrashic work; this one on the book of Leviticus. Modern critical scholarship has not agreed on how to date this work. Leopold Zunz, a 19th century German Reformer dated it to the seventh century CE but both Jacob Neusner and the *Encyclopdiea Judaica* date it to the fifth century. Since it seems to rely on the *Pesikta*, the fifth century seems less likely.

Leviticus Rabbah 19:20 looks at the another version of our verse: Exodus 20:5 "for I, the Lord your God, am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments. After Moses argues that there are wicked parents who gave birth to righteous children, God declares that "By your life, I am voiding My words and fulfilling yours. As it is said, "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children for parents (Deut. 24:16) And by your life, I am writing them down in your name."[60]

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[59] William G. (Gershom Zev) Braude and Israel Kapstein, translators, *Pesikta De Rab Kahana*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 124.

[60] Dov Pertz Elkins, Forty Days of Transformation, (Princeton: Growth Associates, 1999,) pages 60-61

Dov Peretz Elkins explains that the significance of this interpretation is that it clarifies why the rabbis would feel justified truncating the verse in the liturgy because it grants permission for God to void the Divine's own, early words. This helps the rabbis in our instance when they felt uncomfortable with a theology that depicts God punishing children for the sins of the parents.

In addition, by shortening the verse, the rabbis reduce the theological contradiction between God being a God of mercy and wiping the slate clean and God continuing to mete out punishment to the children, a system that Dorff echoes Jeremiah's (31:29-30) and Ezekiel's (18:1-32) words saying that God will not punish children for the parents' sins; only the person sinning would die for his sin. "Clearly they (the rabbis) still believed in God's justice, but in prayer we are to appeal exclusively to God's mercy even if we must excise a part of a biblical verse and thereby change its meaning completely."[61]

Tanna debe Eliyahu:

The Tanna debe Eliyahu or The Lore of the School of Elijah, a *midrashic* work whose earliest references are in the Talmud but which had its final redaction in the 10th century of the Common Era,[62] refers to our passage from Exodus 34:6-7 four times. At the very beginning of Chapter One, in describing Adam, we find:

> I must have successive misdeeds pass out of mind. And He had them do so. As for the proof, you can readily see it for yourself. When Israel were in the wilderness, they befouled themselves with their misdeeds. Thereupon He proceeded to have all that they had done pass out of mind, as it is said, The Lord passed before him (Exodus 34:6). Do not read passed, but "had pass"—that is He had

[61] *Ibid*., 67.
[62] William Bacher and Schulim Ochser, "Tanna debe Eliyahu," *Jewish Encyclopedia,* http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=58&letter=T (accessed on February 15, 2009)

> all their evil pass away from before Him so that He was able to proclaim Himself Lord, Lord (of mercy)[63]

By using this verse, the author links the concept of God's mercy and forgiveness midrashically, both with Adam and Eve and with the Israelites, all noted for their misdeeds.

Emphasizing the mercy of God, and the *Seliḥot* tradition of begging for God's compassion, *Tanna debe Eliyahu* utilizes three of the scriptural references we examined, including Exodus 34:6 and Psalm 145:8, while referring explicitly to Jonah:

> Remember how many orphans and widows there are in Israel who have nothing at all, yet every day without fail occupy themselves with Torah. My Father in heaven, remember Your compassions which are of old, "Remember O Lord, Thy compassions and Thy mercies (Ps. 25:6); "The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. 145:9; and "To the Lord our God belong compassions and forgiveness (Dan 9:9); and "The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious" (Exod. 34:6)…Our Father in heaven, to hearten us, You wrote the verse which You gave us through Your servants the Prophets, namely, "Should I not have pity on Ninevah, that great city?" (Jon. 4:11) Would that Your great compassions flood over us, and in our behalf there be fulfilled, "For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake, will I do it! (Isa. 48:11)[64]

As part of a parable about a king and his father-in-law explaining what the king desired in a wife, the father-in-law concludes that the fruits the king sent represented those things he loved—truth, peace, justice and charity. Similarly, God, the King, desires truth, peace, justice and charity. The author recounts our story from Exodus in the same terms: that Moses is asking what it is the King desires. Moses then asks to see God's ways;

[63] Braude and Kapstein, *op. cit*., 43.
[64] *Ibid.*, 283-284.

> The Holy One replied, Moses you cannot fathom My ways. But I will show you some of My ways…I will make all My goodness (bestowed upon the righteous and the wicked) pass before thee."(Exodus 33:19)—"My goodness," as specified by its thirteen attributes: The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and having pass out of mind transgression and sin, clearing (those who repent)" (Exodus 34:6-7) Had God said, "My goodness," and not all My goodness, I might have supposed that the days of the Messiah were not included (days during which recompense is to be given to the righteous who in this world did not supplicate for the happiness which God's mercy bestows). But since He said, all My goodness, He meant to include the days of the Messiah.[65]

Similar to the story in the Hagadah about "all the days and all the nights", by emphasizing "all of My goodness", the *Tanna debe Eliyahu* suggests that God's goodness is both accessible to Moses when he was on Mount Sinai and into future times including the days of the Messiah.

Finally, for our examination of how the rabbis used this verse for the development of Jewish liturgy, this following midrash mentions a special service for forgiveness that comforted King David. This service included the Thirteen Attributes, is derived from Rosh Hashanah 17b and expounded upon here. It is in this work that we have the one of the oldest records of prayers for forgiveness and the order of the service known as *Seliḥot* that marks the beginning of the penitential season:

> David, knowing that because of Israel's iniquities the Temple was to be destroyed and that offerings were to cease, was distressed for Israel and asked: When trouble (in the wake of sin) comes upon Israel, who will atone for them? The Holy One replied: David, do not be distressed. Long ago I disclosed to Moses the order of prayers for forgiveness saying to him When troubles come upon Israel, let them stand before Me as one band and utter in My presence the prayers for forgiveness, and I shall answer them.

[65] *Ibid*., 430-431.

> Where did He reveal this order of prayers? (At Sinai), When the Lord enfolded His face, and proclaimed (the thirteen attributes of his mercy) (Exodus 34:6). This verse proves, so says R. Johanan, that the Holy One came down out of His thick cloud like an emissary of the congregation who enfolds himself in his prayer shawl as he takes his place before the ark, and disclosed to Moses the order of prayers for forgiveness….Whenever Israel gather in My presence and stand before Me as one band, crying out in My presence the order of prayer for forgiveness, I shall answer them.[66]

Thus we see the link between this midrash and the Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 17b. We also see the Talmudic phrase *sidre tefillah* from Rosh Hashanah 17b is patterned after *sidre seliḥa*, the order of the prayers of forgiveness, therefore we can conclude that these are one and the same referring to the Thirteen Attributes found in our verse.

Amram Gaon:

By the ninth century CE, the Spanish Jews wanted a written copy of the prayers, so Amram Gaon declared as part of his prayerbook, that the Thirteen Attributes and the confession, "We have sinned" were to be recited on all Mondays and Thursdays linking this with Torah reading since Mondays and Thursdays are also Torah reading days. *Seliḥot* itself did not belong to statutory prayers outlined in the Talmud but includes the Thirteen Attributes as a refrain. The idea of saying *seliḥot*, prayers of forgiveness, is hinted at in Isaiah (55:7), according to Idelsohn.[67]

Seliḥot must be said at all Yom Kippur services. Linking the recitation of the attributes to Yom Kippur makes sense. The midrashic interpretation of the timing of Moses on Mount Sinai is that he ascended Mount Sinai for the second

[66] *Ibid*., 516.
[67] Idelsohn, *op. cit.,* 99.

time on the first of Elul and received the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes on the 10th of Tishri—on Yom Kippur itself. This makes the custom of reading the attributes on Yom Kippur very powerful, especially when coupled with the idea that God taught Moses how to pray for forgiveness, using these very words.

In the liturgy, the rabbis truncated the full Biblical verse significantly, leaving out the part about not remitting all punishments and, in fact, reversing its meaning. The Hebrew phrase, "*nake lo yenake"*, literally means "remitting, not remitting; assuredly not remitting" used as a grammatical way of emphasizing the negative which cannot be fully captured in the English. However, the rabbis ended the liturgical version with *nake*, "remitting", in order to emphasize the forgiving nature of the Divine and thus eliminating threats of God's punishment and judgment. According to Hammer, "Although it may do violence to the simple meaning of the particular verse, it is well in keeping with the general tenor of the passage, which stresses the merciful nature of God."[68]

The reason for this seems clear on the surface. It would not be good to sit in a service during which the focus is our repentance only to be told that while God forgives transgression, iniquity and sin, yet God may still punish our children and children's children. People sitting there may think—"why repent, what's the point?" *The JPS Torah Commentary on Exodus* clarifies this, "It should be stressed that the incorporation of the Thirteen Attributes into the liturgy is not to be interpreted as an automatically effective means of attaining forgiveness of sin.

[68] Hammer, *op. cit*., 126.

Rather, the idea is to inculcate the human imitation of God's moral qualities: compassion, graciousness, forbearance, kindness, fealty and forgivingness."[69]

Other particularly auspicious time for asking for forgiveness are public fast days: *Tzom Gedalia, Ta'anit Esther* and *Tisha B'Av*. This custom is based on Rabbi Yochanan's comment in Rosh Hashanah 17b "that God's recital of His moral qualities was intended to set the pattern for Israel's future petitions to God."[70] Elliott Dorff, in Lawrence Hoffman's *My People's Prayer Book*, points out that it makes sense to plead for God's mercy at the turning points in the year—at the festivals—and then again from year to year. A continuation of life was not guaranteed.[71]

Saadia:

Tachanun, or the supplemental supplications, includes the phrase "*raḥum v'ḥanun chatati raḥam alai*" "Merciful One I have sinned; have mercy upon me and accept my supplication" which Elbogen says first appears in Saadia. Note here that the order is exactly as it appears in Exodus 34:6, "*raḥum v'ḥanun"*

Machzor Vitry:

By the time of the compilation of the *Machzor Vitry*, an 11th century work, we are told, "it is a custom to begin on the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah to rise early to go to the synagogue before the sun rises and beg for mercy."[72] In order to accommodate many worshippers who might not get up for a dawn

[69]Sarna, *op. cit,,* 216.
[70].bid., 216.
[71] Hoffman, *op. cit*., 66.
[72] Hammer, *op cit.,* 39.

service, the service was moved to midnight, considered an auspicious time for supplication

Rashi:[73]

Rashi, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, (1040-1105) was the leading medieval commentator on the Talmud and the Torah. Born in France and a student in Germany, at times he explains the text by using a medieval French word translated into Hebrew characters. By looking so closely at the text itself, he is known to elucidate the *peshat*, the simple or common meaning of the text. There is a simplicity and elegance in his writing although sometimes it is written in such shorthand that his commentary can make it even more difficult to understand. No Jewish textual analysis would be complete without focusing on Rashi. In his elucidation of Exodus 34:6-7 he incorporates Biblical, Talmudic and midrashic material:

> **Exodus 34:6: The Lord, The Lord**, This is the attribute of mercy. One is before a person sins and the other is after a person sins and repents (returns, from *t'shuva*) (Rosh Hashanah 17b)
> **God:** This also is an attribute of mercy and as it says (Psalms 22:2), "My God, My God why have You forsaken me?" And one would not say to the attribute of justice, "Why have You forsaken Me?" Thus I have found in the *Mekilta*.
> **Long suffering**: He elongates His anger and He does not hurry to punish that maybe the person will repent.
> **And abundant lovingkindness**: to those that need lovingkindness that do not have many merits.
> **And truth**: to pay a good reward to those that do His will.
>
> **Exodus** 34:7 **Extending kindness**: Which a person does before Him.
> **To the thousandth generation**: to teach, to mean two thousand generations, '*peshaim*', these are acts of rebellion which a person does to provoke, to anger.

[73] Translation of the Rashi commentary by Margaret Frisch Klein

> **And will surely not acquit:** According to its *peshat* (common, simple) meaning it implies that He does not overlook a sin completely, rather punishes from it little by little. And our rabbis interpreted: He acquits the repentant (the *ba'al t'shuva*) and He does not acquit the one who does not repent (return). (Yoma 86a)
> **Visiting (or remembering) the sin of the fathers upon the children**: when they retain the deeds of their fathers in their hands (as in the children repeat the sins of their fathers) that (Scripture) has already explained in another place (Exodus 20:5) "of those hating Me."
> **And unto the fourth**: fourth generation. It was found that the attribute of good is greater than the attribute of one punishment five hundred times that with the attribute of goodness, it is said, "extending kindness to two thousand generations." (Tosefta Sota 4)

Rashi teaches these verses emphasize God's merciful and forgiving nature. God forgives both before and after the sin, those who are those who are repentant. So merciful is God that forgives not only to the thousandth generation but to the two thousandth generation. Even more importantly Rashi teaches that God only punishes the subsequent generations when they repeat the sins of their ancestors. This becomes a critical concept when we look at why the rabbis omit this part of the verse about punishing the third and fourth generation out of the liturgy. However, Rashi by explaining that the children they retain the deeds of their fathers in their hands, repeating them, allows us to contemplate whether we can reclaim this part of the verse to understand sins that people repeat from generation to generation, as a way to begin to understand cycles of violence and ways to break them.

Rabbeinu Tam:

Rabbeinu Tam, the grandson of Rashi, who lived in France from approximately 1100 CE to 1171 CE commented on Rosh Hashanah 17b. This

Tosephot on Rosh Hashanah 17b makes it explicit that *Adonai, Adonai* counts as two separate attributes, because the Lord is merciful before a person sins and after the person sins and repents. Rabbeinu Tam also reads *v'fesha, v' ḥata'ah, v'nakeh* as three distinct attributes, thus bringing the count to thirteen. As we saw in the Chapter on the Bible, most commentaries hold with Rabbeinu Tam's method of counting to thirteen attributes. Because of this, we used his method of counting to explicate the Thirteen Attributes in Chapter One.

Ramban:[74]

Ramban, Moses ben Nachman or Nachmanides was a Spanish Talmud and Biblical scholar and a physician. He was born in Gerona in 1194 and died in Israel around 1270. He studied Kabalah with Azriel, one of the most important Jewish mystics in Spain who had himself studied with Isaac the Blind, known for his work on the *sephirot.* In 1210 by the age sixteen, Ramban had mastered enough Talmud that he was compiling a commentary, *Milchamot Hashem* on the Talmud and defending the work of Rabbi Isaac Alfasi against the attacks of Zechariah Halevi. He often was at odds with the interpretation of Maimonides and ibn Ezra but respected them both.

> **And the Eternal passed by before Him**: This means that He fulfilled His promise to Moses, "I will make all My goodness pass before you." (Exodus 33:19)
>
> **And He proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord, God**: These three words are holy Names of the Holy One which the sages call *middot*/attributes because they are the attribute of the Master of repentance, the attribute of His mercies and attribute of His goodness. The correct Name of God cannot be plural. And behold, the attributes which are perceived by humanity are ten: merciful

[74] Translation of the Ramban commentary by Margaret Frisch Klein

> and gracious, etc. Thus on one side they are all attributes, and on the other side, there are the three which denote the Names of His being, and the Ten are attributes. Now the attributes also represent the Names, because merciful and gracious, long-suffering, etc are the Master, the Most High. Thus it does not say, "The God Who is merciful, gracious and is long-suffering, because the Name's actions come from these attributes.
>
> **And abundant in goodness and truth**; **extending mercy upon the thousandth generation:** the attribute of mercy since He increases the goodness over His strength and might and the truth in His mercies.
>
> **And *notzeir* extending mercy unto the thousandth generation**, because "He remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the House of Israel." (Psalm 98:3) Or *notzeir* means "sprouting" from the root *nun tzede resh* like *v'neitzer* "shall sprout" from his root out of his stock." (Is. 11:1) And in His goodness He is *nosei*, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. From the language, "I made" and "I will make" (Is. 46:4)
>
> **Will by no means clear the guilty**, and **visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children** are explanations to the one of forgiving iniquity. And it is called an attribute because He will clear him (the sinner) with this visitation, remembering, taking note of. And because this act of forgiving is not equal for iniquity, for transgression and for sin, but instead in each type has its own special form of clearing the sinner, it will be called in each case, "one attribute."

Ramban adds to our understanding by emphasizing that all of these attributes are part of God's essential nature. At first Ramban tried to divide the attributes into three names of God and ten attributes but concludes that the names cannot be split from God's essential nature. We have seen, God is a merciful and forgiving God, but Ramban adds that mercy sprouts forth as God remembers the House of Israel and therefore pardons both now and in the future including to the thousandth generation. He even says that the difficult concept of visiting the iniquity of the parents on the children is really a commentary on not clearing the guilty parents,

not a commentary on the children and counts as one attribute—a clear difference from Rabbeinu Tam.

Maimonides:

Maimonides, the "Rambam" was one of the greatest Torah scholars of all time and was a rabbi, physician, and philosopher. Born in Cordoba, Spain in 1135 and died in Egypt in 1204, he was fluent in Spanish, Hebrew and Arabic. One of his central tenets of philosophy is that truths cannot be derived by human intellect in order to contradict those revealed by God. Maimonides believed that it is impossible to describe God in positive attributes, instead he derived the positive from the negative. For instance, he would not say that God is One, rather that God is not multiple. This philosophy influenced his understanding of the verse in Exodus when he claimed, "they only showed that God was ultimately unknowable. We cannot know Him in His "positive" attributes, that is, we cannot really know what and how He is; the thirteen attributes, he said, interpret His actions, not His being. At best we can only know what He is not, that is His "negative" attributes."[75]

Abraham ibn Daud:

Abraham ibn Daud, a 12th century Spanish rabbi who frequently argued with Maimonides, deduced seven positive attributes: God's unity, truth, existence, omniscience, will, omnipotence, and being.[76] Again we see here the need to try to count to thirteen attributes and ibn Daud only coming up with seven.

[75] Plaut, *op. cit*., 664.
[76] *Ibid*, 663-664.

S'forno:[77]

Obadiah ben Jacob S'forno was part of a large Italian rabbinic family. He was a philosopher, physician and Biblical scholar. Born in Cesena in 1475, he died in Bologna in 1550. He studied medicine in Rome where he was recognized as a great scholar and was called upon by the church on complex legal questions confronting the church. Characteristic of his Biblical exegesis is his unceasing desire to uncover the literal meaning of the text and his unwillingness to be swayed by any mystical interpretations.

> **Exodus 34:6**: **And proclaimed**: God, The One who will be blessed. (Blessed One)
>
> **The Lord, The Lord**: He is the cause that made something from nothing and He sustains the existence of all that exists, for there is no preservation of any existence except for that which flows from His existence.
>
> **God**: possible, capable of all actions according to His will, the opposite of actions from the natural act which do so out of necessity, not from free choice.
>
> **Merciful** to those who are guilty, lessening their punishment, in that they call out to Him, as it says, "The face of God is against those who do evil, etc...they cry out to Him and the Lord hears (Psalms 34:17-18). And He also sees the affliction of the oppressed, "and also I have seen the oppression…" (Exodus 3:9)
>
> **And gracious**: He makes graciousness, and rewards good to those who beseech Him even though they don't warrant it.
>
> **Long-suffering**: to the righteous and to the wicked in order that they will repent, return. (Baba Kamma 50b)
>
> **And abundant in loving-kindness**: Tilting toward loving-kindness in His judging as our Sages say, (in Rosh Hashanah 17a) "He forgives the first of the first (iniquity) and thus this is His attribute.

[77] Translation of the S'forno commentary by Margaret Frisch Klein

> **And truth**: And abundant truth. He is long-suffering but collects His due (Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 67:4) as our Sages say, (there, Rosh Hashanah 17a) "But the sin itself is not forgiven;" and as it says, "Who regards not persons…" (Deuteronomy 10:17) "Abraham cannot save Ishmael and Isaac cannot save Esau," (Sanhedrin 104a) and "…does not take bribe(s)" (Deuteronomy 10:17) "A mitzvah does not extinguish a sin." (Sotah 21a)
>
> **Exodus 34:7. Extending loving kindness to the thousandth generation**: He guards/keeps the merit of the parents for the children, to do good for the children because of their parents.
>
> **Forgiving iniquity**: (a sin) with premeditation
> **And transgression**: (a sin) a rebellion against the kingdom
> **And sin**: with provocation added to rebellion similar to "When you do evil as you were exalting." (Jeremiah 11:15) But, the forgiveness of the one is not like the forgiveness of the other, without doubt, and therefore we number these attributes separately.
>
> **And forgive**: Although He will clear/forgive the penitents from (out of) love, and the *t'shuvah*, the return, "repentance reaches until the throne of the glory" (Yoma 86a), as our Sages said that, (in Yoma 86b) "iniquities are considered to them as merits" (Yoma 86b) and as it was said about them, "He shall surely live." (Ezekiel 33:15) Nevertheless, "He will not forgive" even those who repent when and if their repentance is from of fear of punishment alone, as our Sages said, "sins of premeditation are considered sins committed in error" as it is written, "because you have fallen in your iniquity." (Hosea 14:2)
>
> **Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children**: He waits to destroy the wicked of the land until their measure will be full. And this fullness comes when our iniquity reaches from the evil where there is no hope of repentance. And this will be most often when their wickedness persists over several of these generations.
>
> **Unto the third**: When and if the later generation adds more wickedness than their fathers, similar to "but they stiffened their neck; they did worse than their fathers" (Jeremiah 7:26)
>
> **And unto the fourth generation**: When and if they do not add yet they will persist.

S'forno's interpretation of some phrases differs from Rashi's interpretation.

Regarding the repetition of *Adonai, Adonai*, Rashi says it emphasizes God's

mercy, both before and after a person sins. S'forno says that it demonstrates two aspects of God's omnipotence—as Creator before the fact of Creation and then after the actual Creation. He differs again with Rashi in that Rashi says that *El* means mercy and compassion whereas S'forno believes instead that it indicates God's power in the Universe to exercise free will over the natural order which He set in course at the creation of the world and which cannot be changed. He follows Rashi's comments on the first two types of sin as being premeditated and then against God but adds his own understanding of the third type, *ḥ*ata'ah, as a sin that one rejoices in or celebrates as one does it which is similar to how the sin of the Golden Calf was described.

Nonetheless, God's mercy extends to both the righteous and the wicked if they would but return, repent. It is a delicate balance—literally on a scale with God weighing each action and tipping the scales toward mercy if there is a question. S'forno distinguishes between *t'shuvah* out of love and *t'shuvah* out of fear. Repentance out of love converts the sin into a merit. In terms of the generational issue of the verse, he brings two midrashim to his understanding of *emet* that we have not seen elsewhere. Bereshit Rabbah 67:4, helps us to understand that while God is long-suffering and patient, God will eventually demand justice—and that the parent cannot save the child. "Abraham cannot save Ishmael and Isaac cannot save Esau," nor do two rights correct a wrong since a "mitzvah does not extinguish a sin." (Sotah 21a) However, because of God's mercy, God waits for the sinner to repent—until even the third or fourth generation. If the subsequent generations add to the wickedness, they will be

punished. If they continue in their wicked ways but do not add, they will still be punished.

Moses Cordovero:

Moses Cordovero, 1522-1570 known also by his acronym the Ramak, was one of the leading scholars of the Kabbalah in Safed. The Thirteen Attributes have been used as a way to exhort us to be like God. In the notes of his *Tomar Devorah*, the Palm Tree of Deborah, Moses Cordovero explains that there is a difference between the list of attributes in Micah that he will spend the rest of his book explaining and the Thirteen Attributes in Exodus:

> The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy mentioned in *Michah* are of a higher order (deriving from *keter*) than those mentioned by Moshe (*Shemot* 34:6-7) which derived from *Ze'ir Anpin*. Thus, they are recited by the prophet not in the form of prayer but as praise and adulation of the Holy One, Blessed be He. In contrast, the thirteen attributes recited by Moshe are a plea for mercy, and they have been established in the liturgy as such. (*Eilimah Rabbati, ma'ayan 3; tamar 4, ch. 14; Rosh Hashanah 17b*)[78]

Isaac Luria:

Isaac Luria (1534-1572), was another of the great Kabbalists in Safed. The addition of the Thirteen Attributes during the service for reading the Torah seems to have been emphasized by Isaac Luria who introduced it in his services at first for the month of Elul, and then for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and finally to the services for the three pilgrimage festivals. The mention of this tradition first appears in the seventeenth century, in *Sha'arey Tzion*, *The Gates of Zion* an anthology of kabbalistic liturgy compiled by Nathan Hanover. According to

[78] Moshe Miller, translator, *The Palm Tree of Devorah*, (Southfield: Targum Press, 1993), 145.

Hammer, "Although its appropriateness for the festivals which are times of joy and not of forgiveness—seems remote, it has become the trademark of those services throughout the Jewish world." [79]

Modern Commentators:

Umberto Cassuto, (1883-1951) was the chief rabbi of Florence, Italy and one of the first Jewish scholars to recognize the documentary hypothesis. However, his enduring legacy remains his Bible commentaries on individual books of the Torah. Perhaps the most interesting piece here for our purposes is the idea that the influence of evil is limited—only to three or four generations--while the influence of good lasts for thousands of generations. It is significant that Cassuto wrote this in the shadow of the Holocaust, having fled Florence to Israel when he lost his teaching post at the university in 1938. His own son was killed in the Nazi death camps, and yet he has the courage to say that God is merciful, extending kindness to thousands of generations and only carrying the sins of the ancestors to the third and fourth generation! He understands the repetition of The Lord, The Lord God as "The Lord, He is the Lord" and adds that:

> "It is impossible to define His nature in any other words (compare iii 14, 'I am who I am'). The proclamation of the attributes comes, as it were, to sum up in synthetic form what is to be deduced from the preceding narrative:
>
> 1) First and foremost a God compassionate and gracious—the more real qualities of grace and compassion, which had already conceded Moses' requests on behalf of the people (compare also xxxiii 19 'And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show compassion to whom I will show compassion').

[79] Hammer, *op. cit.,* 231.

2) Slow to (literally, 'long of') anger, that is, His anger prolongs itself and is not quick to inflict punishment on the sinner, in order that he may repent, as happened on this occasion.
3) Abounding in lovingkindness and truth: this is a single attribute, since lovingkindness and truth are dual elements of a unitary quality—lovingkindness of truth, true and faithful lovingkindness in this instance.
4) Keeping lovingkindness for the thousands: he continues to shew His lovingkindness even for thousands of generations, to the distant descendants of those to whom the promises were made, and thus He will do on this occasion to the people of Israel.
5) Forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin, even as God had answered Moses' entreaty when he prayed to Him to forgive Israel's sin (xxxii 32). It is actually difficult to determine the distinction between the three synonyms iniquity, transgression and sin. Possibly, however, it was not intended here to differentiate between the three varieties of sin, but to mention various synonyms in order to cover the entire range of wrongdoing
6) But who will by no means clear the guilty, that is to say, that the first-named attributes of the Lord, the qualities of compassion and grace are not signs of weakness and do not imply perversion of justice. Sin is not completely expunged by mercy; the punishment is suspended, and if a man sins again, the Lord exacts retribution from him for both the present and the former sin (compare above xxxii 34; nevertheless, in the day when I visit, etc.).
7) Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children: even if it entails waiting several generations, and the children or the children's children sin, God will visit upon them the iniquity of their fathers. Nevertheless, the influence of evil is limited, and affects only a few generations—to the third and fourth generation—whereas the influence of good extends to thousands of generations, as it is stated earlier: 'keeping lovingkindness for thousands' (on all this see above, my commentary on xx 5)[80]

Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) was one of the most important Jewish philosophers of the 19th century. He reduced the Thirteen Attributes to two: love and justice. "In their various expressions in Exodus 34 and elsewhere they are

[80] Israel Abrahams, translator, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus by U. Cassuto*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1951), pages 437-440

meant as examples of what men ought to do in pursuit of a godly life."[81] This fits with the rabbis like ibn Daud who tried to reduce the attributes to the positive ones. It is similar in methodology to those who tried to reduce the number of mitzvoth to the most important ones.

Benno Jacob, a German born and educated, Reform Jewish scholar who opposed the documentary hypothesis deduced that the list of attributes parallels the Ten Commandments, especially the one to not make an idol or graven image, possessing. He suggests:

> "formal and real relationship to the second of the ten Sinaitic statements…the sin of the golden calf was trespass against the prohibition, and it could have led to the execution of those threats, had Moses not intervened. This led to a new expression of HIS being…Here mercy was emphasized in the richest possible manner…The threatening portion of the second commandment begins, "For I, y=h=v=h, your e-lo-him, as a zealous, divine power….the Decalogue continued with *el qa-na* which employs a more general term for divinity and an intensive adjective. The same occurred here, but two even more intense adjectives were used, *ra-hum v'hanun*—not only merciful to the highest degree, but gracious and kind in equal measure. Then a second pair is added: *e-rekh a-pa-yim* and *rav he-sed v'e-met*…The attributes *ra-hum v'ha-nun* apply to the helpless, the abandoned, the poor and the oppressed. The two others were intended for the guilty who had opposed God and angered Him. Yet God was not only suffering and patient but received the repentant with doubled real love (compare with *he-sed v'e-met*, Gen 47.29)[82]

Jacob's comments are important here because they look at the attributes as a series of word pairings. While he doesn't specifically address the word order question, he does point out a difference between *rav ḥesed v'emet* in our text and

[81] Plaut, *op cit*., 664.
[82] Benno Jacob, translator, *The Second Book of the Bible, Exodus*, (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, Inc, 1992), 992-993.

where it appears in Genesis and concludes that there is a doubling of God's mercy and love similar to what we said about the repetition of the word *ḥesed*.

Modern Uses of the Thirteen Attributes in Liturgy Today

The order of traditional *Seliḥot* prayers said today begins with Psalm 145 which reflects the Thirteen Attributes by saying, "*ḥanun v'raḥum Adonai, erech al payim v'rav ḥesed*; The Lord is gracious and compassionate, endlessly patient and slow to anger and great in lovingkindness." This is followed by Kaddish and the recitation of the Thirteen Attributes themselves. Despite the outline in Rosh Hashanah 17b, the Divine Attributes alone are not enough to affect God's mercy. One must add the confession of sin as well. On the High Holidays, this takes two forms—the *Ashamnu* (the short, alphabetical listing of communal sins) and the *Al Chet*. In *Seliḥot* services themselves only the *Ashamnu* is recited.

The practice of *Selḥhot* varies between Ashkenazi and Sephardi customs and a full analysis of the differences can be seen in Idelsohn's appendix.[83] However, in Sephardic custom, Jews start saying *Selḥhot* on the first of Elul, thus taking the full 40 days penitential period and mirroring the time period that the midrash teaches Moses spent on Mount Sinai the second time, when he experienced the Thirteen Attributes.

The Thirteen Attributes are still also chanted aloud during fast days as well as for *Seliḥot*. In the Sephardic tradition, having been influenced by the emergence of this tradition in Safed with the kabbalists, Tachanun ends with the confession of sin and the Thirteen Attributes every day. This custom appears to have been borrowed from the prayers of Mondays and Thursdays which are Torah

[83] Idelsohn, *op. cit.,* 346-352.

reading days and which used to be fast days.[84] Why were these fast days? Because, according to Elbogen, citing *Seder 'olam,* the 17th of Tammuz, when Moses smashed the tablets, was a Thursday and the 10th of Tishri (Yom Kippur) occurred on a Monday and that is the day on which God first proclaimed the Thirteen Attributes.[85] This repetition through the ages of the midrash tying Moses to particular dates that correspond with our liturgical holidays is a powerful image and illustrates just how linked our liturgy continues to be to our understanding of our verses from Exodus.

Adin Steinsaltz sees the recitation of the Thirteen Attributes as a very personal moment in the service:

> It is as though, having stood in prayer and being admitted into the "king's chambers" (Song of Songs 1:4), one finds oneself in the inner sanctum, and takes the opportunity to add a few things of a more private nature, like a whispered secret in a moment of intimacy….The question then arises: in light of all this guilt and betrayal, how can one come and make requests? The answer appears in the form of the communal recitation of the Thirteen Attributes, which serves as a form of encouragement and strengthening, as if to say that, on the highest of levels, that there is Divine mercy accorded to all, which has the power not only to grant forgiveness and pardon but also to serve as a pretext for us to make requests.[86]

While the custom of reciting the Thirteen Attributes before the open ark as part of the Torah service is quite ancient, and had its roots in the Sephardic world, today, only the Ashkanazim have retained the custom—and for all the holidays,[87] according to Elbogen. However, Milgram disagrees, saying that the prayer that follows raised opposition in the modern world and many Ashkanazi congregations

[84] Elbogen, *op cit.,* 68.
[85] Ibid, 69.
[86] Adin Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2000), 93.
[87] Elbogen, *op cit.,*160.

dropped the prayer, retaining only the Thirteen Attributes. The Sephardic congregations retained both the Thirteen Attributes and the kabbalistic prayer that follows.[88]

The Thirteen Attributes are included in the *Musaf Amidah* for Rosh Hashanah after a *piyyut* reflecting God's mercy as Abraham pleaded for Sodom.[89] They are also included after a *piyyut* in the *Neilah Amidah* as we exhort God to remember us as the gates are closing.[90] *Piyyutim* were also written reflecting the Thirteen Attributes like *U-vekhen Va-Adonai pakd et Sarah*, written by Rabbi Simeon of Mainz and recited on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. This *piyyut* in particular picks up the themes of the conception of Isaac, the Book of Life, remembrance and repentance, the observance of the covenant and the Thirteen Attributes, themes which make sense when we are begging for Divine forgiveness, and for God to take note of us like God did of Sarah.[91]

Another place that the Thirteen Attributes are used liturgically is during the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah as part of the *tashlich* service. With its origins in the Middle Ages, *tashlich* is a wonderfully concrete way of symbolizing casting away sins. The *tashlich* liturgy draws primarily on three verses from Micah (Micah 7:18-20) which talks about God's promise to "cast all their sins to the depths of the sea" as a way that God shows Divine forgiveness. The verses from Micah parallel the Thirteen Attributes, "Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity, and remitting transgression; who has not maintained His wrath forever."

[88] Abraham Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), 497.
[89] Hammer, *op cit*. 86.
[90] Ibid., 171-173.
[91] Ibid., 65.

Individuals walk to a nearby body of water where they throw breadcrumbs or pocket lint into the water to symbolize throwing their sins into the sea. It is not surprising that the medieval rabbis would have included the truncated form of the Thirteen Attributes as part of this plea for mercy.

Finally, the Thirteen Attributes are used as part of a prayer recited for a group B'not Mitzvah in Milan and Turin. Again, it is a plea for God's mercy as these young women approach Jewish adulthood[92]

We have traced the rabbis' interpretation of Exodus 34:6-7 in the commentaries and shown how they used their interpretation to formulate a central portion of our liturgy that remains a powerful part of our worship today. We demonstrated that the rabbis reversed the meaning of the verse, shortening it to "**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," thus suggesting a merciful God** and not a God who visits the sin on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. We are now ready to examine the value in reclaiming the full verse in order to break cycles of violence that can extend to the third and fourth generation and beyond.

[92] The full text of this prayer is in the Appendix

PART TWO: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Chapter Three: Be Like God, End the Generational Cycles of Violence with Reconciliation

"We recognize the unfairness of such punishment, yet it is true that the bad habits of parents are too often repeated by their children, for whom parents are the primary role models, "[93] the Torah commentary, *Etz Hayim* proclaims in discussing the troubling part of the verse—that God does not remit all punishment and continues to hold subsequent generations responsible for what their parents have done. The rabbis dropped this phrase from the liturgy. But is there a certain power in reclaiming it? Surely we can see patterns of behavior in things such as alcoholism, domestic violence and child abuse. When perpetrators are asked why they did it, frequently they respond, that they were abused by their parents and they just thought it was normal, or what everybody does.

And yet, if we believe the rabbis and their system of exegetical interpretation, there are no extraneous words in the Torah. There must be a reason that the full list of the Thirteen Attributes includes this difficult concept that the sins of the parents are visited on the children. What is it? An early recognition of psychological truth? Perhaps.

Perhaps the best understanding of the importance of these verses came in a *d'var Torah* by Hara E. Person, published by the URJ as part of its Torat Chayim series:

[93]David L. Lieber and Jules Harlow, editors, *Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary*, (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001), page 541

> In commenting on the problematic idea expressed in Exodus 34:7, that God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, Rashi taught, "When they retain the deeds of their fathers in their hands."…Iniquity gets passed down because parents model negative behavior for their children, which their children then emulate. The legacy of sin and pain can be stopped if the next generation makes different choices than those of their parents. With God's support, Moses can free himself from the cycle of violence and oppression he witnessed as a child. Buoyed by God's compassion and forgiveness, Moses does not have to be a victim, like his biological parents, or a perpetrator of oppression like his adoptive father figure, Pharaoh. [94]

The concept of forgiveness is not easy, and doing it is even harder, but as we learned from the rabbis, we need to emulate God, become like God, "To walk in God's ways" (Deuteronomy 11:22). According to Sifre on Ekev, "These are the ways of the Holy One: "gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, assuring love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon." (Exodus 34:6). This means that just as God is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving, you too must be gracious, compassionate, and forgiving."[95]

The definition of forgiveness

What then does it mean to forgive? Are there some things that are beyond forgiveness? Are there ever limits to forgiveness? Our text from Exodus tells us that God forgives the sins, iniquities and transgressions to the thousandth generation. But just as quickly the text tells us that not in all cases, that some sins carry forward to the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. The sin that seems to be beyond forgiveness is repudiating the Divine.

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[94] Hara E. Person, "The Journey Toward Freedom" (New York: URJ, 2004) on http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2964 (accessed on October 18, 2008)
[95] Harlow, *op. cit*., page 19.

As Deuteronomy 5:9-10 makes clearer, God seems to have a hard time forgiving those who hate God, visiting that sin on the parents on those third and the fourth generations. In addition, we are told that even in the tenth generation Israelites could not welcome a Moabite or an Amorite. Pretty harsh.

Elliott Dorff in his article in *Dimensions of Forgiveness*,[96] explains the Jewish understanding of forgiveness as follows. For Jews, forgiveness is really about returning, of *t'shuvah*, of making things right again. There are certain prescribed steps, twelve of them, outlined by Maimonides and these are hard. They include acknowledging that you have done wrong, promising not to do it again, making amends and restitution for it, and if encountering the situation again not repeating the sin. I have often quipped it was the original 12 Step program,

It is not easy to be the victim either and accept someone's request for forgiveness. You might need to give up your claim to justice—that you have been wronged and the offender owes you something. You have to trust that the person is serious and will not repeat the offense. You have to give up your own feeling of vulnerability and you need to feel safe.

Maimonides also teaches that if a person seeks forgiveness three times and it is not forthcoming, then it is the victim that has the problem. But does this work in all cases? Not necessarily.

Limits to forgiveness:

There are limits on forgiveness. On a community level, historically no Moabite or Amorite could gain entry into the people of Israel, allegedly for the sin

[96] Elliott Dorf, "Forgiveness: A Jewish Approach" in Dimensions of Forgiveness, edited by Everett L. Worthington, Jr, (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998), pages 29-55

of not providing food and water as the Israelites were fleeing Egypt (Deuteronomy 23:4-7). Even more harshly, we are told to remember not to forget Amalek—in fact, the Israelites were commanded to destroy all the Amalekites and when Saul did not kill them all, he lost his kingship. Nonetheless, we are also told that we should welcome the Egyptian and the Edomite in the third generation. (Deuteronomy 23:8-9) There is that generational message again that by the third generation we should welcome the very people who had set out to destroy us; that we should not hold a grudge. There must be something to it. For us there are implications in our own age. How do we forgive an entire community for the sins of their ancestors who perpetrated the atrocities of the Holocaust—far outshadowing any crimes of the prescribed Biblical proportions. Do we? Can we? Can we even engage in this conversation? I believe the answer is yes. At least we can begin to engage in the conversation while recognizing that it is complicated. As we will see, how we handle it as a community may be different than how individual survivors entitled to their own personal autonomy, handle it.

At the individual level there are also some sins that seem to be beyond forgiveness. Citing Maimonides, Dorff lists several categories of sinners who permanently lose their place in the world to come, heretics and those who deny the authority of the Torah, those who cause a multitude to sin, who secede from the community, who commits sins in a high-handed fashion, informers against the Jewish community, those who terrorize a community other than for religious purposes, murderers and slanders and those who remove the mark of their circumcision.

But new questions hang in the air in our day, categories of sins not listed in the ancient lists, that the rabbis maybe could not even have conceived of. What about those who perpetrate violence against women—rape, domestic violence, or those who sexually abuse young children? What about those who show no remorse and don't go through any of the process of return, *t'shuvah*? Should victims forgive them? The Jewish tradition is not clear on these issues. However, what is clear is the Jewish concept that people are always free to choose good over evil, to make the right choice, to change and return to a moral and ethical life. Similarly, it is in the power of the victim, and the victim alone to forgive. For some it is a very powerful experience indeed. For others, the need to feel safe before they can forgive is paramount.

The role of anger

But what about anger? Don't victims have the right to be angry? Yes. Both Moses and God demonstrated their anger in the Torah passages surrounding our verse of Exodus 34:6-7. Yet our verse tells us that God is slow to anger. Is anger ever justified? I believe the answer to that is also yes. Despite societal norms to the contrary, there is a place in holding onto anger in some cases. For instance, domestic violence victims can be spurred to action to get out of an unhealthy and unsafe relationship by being angry at their perpetrator. That anger can help them become a survivor rather than a victim. At some point however, the anger can turn a person bitter. It is not for us to say when that point is, nor to tell a victim they

should give up their anger. In a previous paper[97] I wrote I discovered that much is written about the need to give up anger but little is actually written about how to do it. Some of it seems to come with this natural progression towards forgiveness. But again, revisiting what was said earlier in this chapter, the victim needs to know that he, that she is safe and that the perpetrator will not hurt them or someone else again.

Forgiveness is not forgetting

Forgiveness and return does not mean that the person needs to forget what happened. In fact, rooting out memory is a very difficult and dangerous proposition. However, there is another danger as well. In not forgiving, we run the risk of holding onto what becomes a grudge—and even passing that to the next generation and beyond—something akin to the Hatfields and McCoys. Is this what we want? I don't think so—not in our own families and not in the broader community. And it is not just me saying so, the Torah warns us, commands us against it. In Leviticus 19:8, the section called the Holiness Code, the very center of the Torah, we are told, "Do not take vengeance or carry a grudge, but rather love your friend as yourself, I am the Lord"

Now that we understand that the Biblical text has validity, that some sins may transfer to subsequent generations and that some sins seem perhaps beyond forgiveness, can we break the cycle of violence by using this knowledge? I think the answer to that is also yes.

[97] Margaret Frisch Klein, unpublished paper entitled Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Marriage prepared for Dr. Sol Schimmel, Spring 1999 course "Justice Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Jewish and Christian Thought"

What is being done in cases of domestic violence?

For years, domestic violence was something that the Jewish community believed did not happen to it. We thought we were immune from so many societal problems like alcoholism, domestic violence, divorce, AIDS, gambling, mental illness and others,. However, unfortunately, domestic violence knows no boundaries of race, class, religion, educational level or social-economic group. This includes Jews. Also unfortunately, our modern rabbis, in their roles of counselors were not well trained and too often sent women back to their abusers.

Fortunately, this has changed considerably in the past twenty years. In almost every large Jewish community there is a domestic violence task force, a hotline that Jewish women (and men) can call to get support and help, signs posted in most synagogue bathrooms reminding women that no one has a right to hit them and providing resources, and a willingness on the part of rabbis to speak about the issue openly from the *bimah.* A quick Internet search on Jewish domestic violence leads to over 700,000 responses. I am pleased to report that while women in the rabbinate have had some role in raising this awareness, it is not limited to women. Some of the most ardent spokespeople and writers on the topic are men, amongst them, Rabbi Mark Dratch of JSafe and Dr. David Blumenthal. Even the Orthodox community is catching up and recently announced a task force in Brooklyn on domestic violence so that women feel safe in reporting abusers.

However, there are still problems. Women, including Jewish women, who are abused, find themselves feeling very isolated and alone. They think that this can't possibly be happening to them. There is still a tendency to think that the

woman must have done something wrong—and even worse for the woman herself to think that she did something wrong—and often she returns—allowing the cycle of escalating violence to repeat. Having worked with victims of domestic violence, I can tell you it can be frustrating to watch that cycle repeat and repeat.

Equally scary is knowing that any children of the relationship are at risk, both in the present and later on in life. They have seen how their parents act and interact and are at danger of repeating those behaviors in their own families—since they see it as normative.

This is why the push about domestic violence and education in the Jewish community is so key. For women going through a domestic violence, knowing that there are other women facing similar situations, and knowing that there are women who have gotten out, rebuilt their lives and survived is very powerful and helpful. Teaching non-violent behaviors—both to victims and perpetrators and their children helps to lessen the likelihood that the abuse will continue into the next generation and beyond.

Other difficulties that Jewish victims of abuse might experience unique to Judaism center around the concepts of forgiveness. Do victims have a duty to forgive? I think the answer to that lies in the hands of the individual victim. Marcia Cohn Spiegel suggests it just may not be possible and that the time during those prayers for forgiveness be used to focus on *shlemut*, wholeness and healing from the pain.[98] I would add that Yoma 8:9 teaches us that Yom Kippur atones for sins against God but for sins against another we must seek forgiveness from the

[98] http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/forgivenessholidays.html

victim first. If this has not happened, the victim does not have a duty to forgive. If the victim does not yet feel safe because she fears that he will harm her again, she cannot morally forgive.

Another issue is the question of honoring parents. We are taught that one of the Ten Commandments is to honor father and mother, but if the domestic violence occurred under his or her watch, it can be difficult again, if not impossible to forgive. Questions of why didn't he, why didn't she protect me may still be in play. Saying Kaddish, particularly during the High Holidays for a parent who did not protect can seem too high a price with too big a risk. However, Kaddish was intended not as a memorial prayer but as a praise of God for life itself. In addition, we can mourn for the parent we wished that we had but did not.

In truth, each of the holidays can have triggers for women (or men) coming to terms with abuse in their lives. Sukkot, the time of our joy, brings with it an imagery of a Divine shelter (sukkah of peace) spread over us, a line from the *Haskivenu* prayer. This can force someone to ask where is God, how is God protecting me and why can't I feel that safety, that peace, that joy? Hanukah can be a time to withhold presents or love. Perhaps the most troubling is the story of Purim with its emphasis on drunken revelry and Ahashuerus's treatment of Vashti. To some dealing with alcohol induced abuse, this can feel all to familiar and too scary. Passover, with its tight control of food rules and regulations can be an opportunity for an abuser to further the abuse if the victim is not meeting the standards of the house. These can be overcome slowly when the victim feels a

sense of safety and with the compassion of the Jewish community, especially its professionals.

In our prayers themselves, none is more problematic than the nighttime Sh'ma, which says that the individual should forgive anyone who has sinned against him or her, whether against his or her body, property, or honor.[99] Other prayers may also be triggers. On the other hand, victims can be comforted by learning to pray and by reaching out to the Jewish community.

The rabbi's role in working with domestic violence victims is to be a source of comfort, compassion and security. Learning to recognize what within the tradition can be a trigger and realizing that there may, in fact, be victims sitting in our pews goes a long way to breaking this cycle of violence.

A full bibliography developed by Marcia Cohn Spiegel on this troubling topic is available with permission at

http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/bibs/jewish/jewish.html

What is being done in German-Jewish relations?

We are at a unique moment in time—it has been sixty years since the end of World War II, since the end of the Holocaust. Is there any hope that in the third and fourth generation that there can be healing and reconciliation between Jews and Germans? Should this even be a goal? The answer is not clear. Simon Wiesenthal wrote a compelling book, *The Sunflower*, to answer this very question. The premise of the book revolves around his own experience where he was asked to be the confessor of a dying SS guard while Wiesenthal was working in a

[99] Rabbi Nosson Sherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, editors, The Complete Artscroll Siddur, (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd, 1984), page 289.

detention camp. That particular SS guard had committed no crime against Wiesenthal himself; however, he had killed many Jews in a small village. Wiesenthal in the moment remained silent, not granting the dying man's request. Eventually he went to visit the SS guard's mother to return the guard's personal effects and then spent the rest of his life wrestling with this question. The book outlines not only his response but provides a symposia of responses, including Jews and non-Jews, famous and less so, survivors of atrocities including those of the Holocaust, South Africa, Bosnia, Cambodia, China and Tibet.

The answers seemed to break down by religious background. Most Christians seemed to think that the deathbed confession was sufficient and Wiesenthal had a moral obligation to grant forgiveness. The Jewish responses seemed to center on the fact that it is only the victims themselves that have the right to forgive, not a representative of the community. Therefore, most of the Jewish responses urged not forgiving and agreed that Wiesenthal's response had been correct.

I, a Jew, a woman studying to be a rabbi, work for a German software company founded after World War II. I have spent many pleasant evenings sitting in pubs in southwestern Germany drinking beer and schmoozing with my colleagues. At first I was not at all comfortable. Words of my father, who felt he could never forgive the Germans echoed in my brain. But the reality is this. The people I work with were not responsible for the actions of their grandparents and great grandparents. And they are well aware of their legacy. They see their role in the world as unique. As Jews have said "Never again," and work on issues like

Darfur, my colleagues see their role as being peacemakers and work actively on issues like Afghanistan.

Is this true of all Germans? Unfortunately not. Anti-semitism is on the rise again throughout Europe and this includes Germany.

As we saw in the Dorff article, some people who never showed remorse cannot be forgiven. Based on this text that would include Hitler—he was a mass murderer and showed no remorse for his actions. He can never be forgiven for what he did to the entire Jewish people. However, this may not extend to the entire German people—particularly those born after the war, those in the third and fourth generation today.

Do I think we should forget what happened in Germany and the rest of Europe at the hands of the Nazis under the leadership of Hitler? Absolutely not. As we said previously, forgiving is not forgetting. However I believe that Germany—and individual German people have met the requirements of Maimonides in the laws of *t'shuvah*. They painfully are aware of what occurred, regret their parents and grandparents actions, have paid restitution to survivors (although I suspect it can never be enough), and have worked actively to ensure it will not happen again—even recently at the highest governmental levels decrying the pope's reinstatement of a bishop who denies the Holocaust.

To continue to boycott German goods and Germany in general, to continue to hate the German people violates the law we learned in Lev. 19:8 of not holding a grudge. We have a shared and painful history where both groups are saying "Never again." Let's us work together towards that end.

I do think that we need to remain vigilant and keep reminding them of their duty to be peacemakers and to not fall into old traps—particularly as the economic situation and unemployment continues to rise in Germany. But for me what is really important is the educational component. Acknowledging what happened so we and the world will not forget, inspiring our children and our children's children to work for prevent similar atrocities and to work for peace. There are a number of good programs that are doing precisely this right now. They include:

Facing History and Ourselves, http://www.facinghistory.org/

I have actually been trained and taught in a high school Hebrew school setting an early version of this program. Its commitment to making students understand what happened, why it happened and helping them confront difficult issues about what they might do in similar situations make students wrestle with the realities on both sides. What they say is, "Facing Today helps educators connect history to current issues in our world today through the lens of universal themes including identity, membership, judgment, and participation."

The Paper Clips Project,
http://www.whitwellmiddleschool.org/homepage_pc.cfm?id=78
The Paper Clips Project was a project begun in 1998 in a middle school in Whitwell, TN, a small rural American town with no Jews that tried to find a way to explain the enormity of the Holocaust to its eighth grade students as part of an experimental class in Holocaust education designed to teach tolerance. The students discovered that a Norwegian Jew had designed the paper clip and that many Norwegians wore them during World War Two as a protest against Hitler. They set a goal of collecting 6,000,000 paper clips. Peter and Dagmar Schroeder, German journalists picked up the story and wrote a book promoting the project in Germany. Eventually it was covered as well by the Washington Post, a movie was made and a Holocaust Museum created in Whitwell.

Like Facing History and Ourselves, this kind of educational program continues to teach tolerance and helps prevent another Holocaust from happening by confronting an often painful, scary history and making it accessible and real to the next generations.

Germany Close Up is a program administered by the Foundation New Synagogue in Berlin and sponsored by Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology. Dedicated to allowing American Jews to see modern Germany, participants visit sites of historical events, partake in aspects of contemporary Jewish life in Germany, meet with Germans of all backgrounds while

encountering Germany's different facets in Berlin and other venues. The purpose is to allow participants to gain their own perspective on Germany through individual experience while engaging in discussion about the Holocaust and Germany's Nazi past, confronting memories and discovering Germany's efforts to come to terms with its history while becoming a modern country and the home of the third fastest growing Jewish community worldwide.

http://www.germanycloseup.de/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

The Compassionate Listening Project was one of the first groups to bring Jews and Germans together. http://www.compassionatelistening.org/delegations/jewish-german Unfortunately, there are no trips currently scheduled to Germany.

Other similar programs include those by the Actiona Reconciliation Project http://www.actionreconciliation.org/index.php?id=1714 and German Jewish Dialogue http://www.germanjewishdialogue.org/1.html .

What is being done in Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

The situation in the Middle East is complex and ancient, predating the end of World War II. For thousands of years, Jews have hoped for and prayed for the return to Promised Land, "Next year in Jerusalem." For thousands of years there has been conflict in the land of Israel as it is a thoroughfare on a major trade route. Whoever controlled Israel controlled the world. Three major religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam consider it holy ground and wars have been fought over those religious beliefs. The Dome of the Rock where Islam believes Mohammed ascended to heaven after his night journey to Jerusalem stands on the ruins of the Temple Mount. The Via Delarosa and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are a stone's throw away. Stone throwing and worse have too often been part of the culture of these places for a very long time. And yet, the very name Jerusalem came to mean, *ir shalem*, City of Peace.

After World War II, Europe was not sure what to do with its displaced persons, mostly Jews. Jews didn't necessarily want to return to their home cities, towns and villages nor were they always welcome. Some longed to move to Palestine. Others came to the United States. The newly formed UN voted for partition of Palestine in November of 1947, dividing it into Israel and Palestine[100]. Jews around the world were elated but new problems were just beginning. As Jews from Europe streamed in, Arabs who had been living in the land of Israel for generations, frequently even peaceably with their Jewish neighbors, left., whether in response to the urging of Arab leadership or voluntarily.

On the eve of Israel Independence in May of 1948, more Arabs fled their homes afraid of what might happen the next day. For a good overview of this history, told from both perspectives, which is rare, I highly recommend *The Lemon Tree*. In this book, the author looks at two families, one refugees from Europe and the other a long established Arab family, one house and one lemon tree. She examines questions of fear and safety, longing, belonging and identity. She wonders if peace can ever come. In the end, it is not a very hopeful account. Another book worthy of note for trying to tell both sides is *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* by Benny Morris. He concludes that the war was inevitable and changed the course of history in the Middle East.

Now that we are in the 3rd and 4th generation, the question that this paper poses is: can peace come? That too is a difficult and complex question. Both sides have lost too much. There are wrongs on all sides and neither side feels safe yet...

[100] Full text of UN Resolution 181 may be found here: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/United_Nations_General_Assembly_Resolution_181

Generations have lived in fear and the seeds of that damage have already been laid with the next generation. Until safety can be assured then there cannot be forgiveness or a sense of lasting peace. The stakes are just too high at the moment. That does not mean that we as Jews do not have an obligation to work for peace. On the contrary, as Jews we are commanded to pursue peace, to actively run after it.

My first love was killed in the war, the incursion into Lebanon in 1983. It has taken a long time for me to work through my personal anger—first at the Israeli government who put him in that place and secondarily at the Lebanese who allowed militias to plant roadside bombs outside of Beirut. I am not sure I can say that I have fully forgiven. I do know that Ariel Sharon who was Defense Minister at the time and whom I had held personally responsible for the massacres at Sabra and Shatilla has become an outspoken proponent of peace. The Kahan Commision cleared him of direct responsibility but faulted him for not taking proper precautions. The federal court of New York reached a similar conclusion in Sharon's libel suit against Time Magazine in 1985. Nonetheless, Sharon seemed to have had a change of heart and became in his later years a man of peace.

I am not alone, however, in my grief and anger. Because it is such a small country, there are very few Israelis who haven't lost someone. There are differing responses to traumatic loss. One way is to become embittered and vow never again and build up our military strength and prowess. However, the Psalmist said that no king is saved by the size of his army and that a warhorse will not save (Psalm 33:16-17). Another way is to decide that no other family needs to go

through that intense pain and to actively work for peace. It isn't easy and people who again are the victims should not be faulted for the choice they make.

However, beyond the individual choice, there is a societal choice. Some have argued that unless we are living there we have no right to criticize Israel. They seem to have an Israel right or wrong mentality. Do not misunderstand me. I believe firmly that Israel has a right to exist and a need to exist. But we as Jews, as Zionists, need to be very careful not to lose our moral standing. We need to not become the oppressors which all too often can happen—repeating those very cycles of violence and dooming another three generations to the miseries we ourselves have endured.

For me, it is very simple, not in a Christian-turn-the-other-cheek kind of way. More like in the sandbox. If I hit you, you may hit me back. Then I hit you again and you go get your mother and I get my father and soon the whole neighborhood is involved. It doesn't work long term. It has generational implications. I have my parents involved and I tell my children not to play with your children because you once hit me. No, I have to be a big girl and say, even though you hurt me and what you did was wrong, I am not going to hit you back. Research has shown that military might doesn't work as a deterrent anyway.

Some organizations are working towards peace and reconciliation. It isn't easy, especially if people do not feel safe—and how can they if they continue to fear suicide bombers, missiles raining down on school playgrounds or whether they can get through the security lines to go to work or get to a hospital for medical care. Nonetheless, some organizations press on and encourage encounter

and exposure to the other. They look to build mutual trust and understanding through dialogue and even summer camps or orchestras. Others use working on a project together like Rabbis for Human Rights and their olive harvest campaign. Still others use political advocacy. What follow is a synopsis of some of the organizations working for peace especially with the next generations. It is by no means exhaustive

Abraham's Vision, http://www.abrahamsvision.org/

Abraham's Vision "transforming the present, shaping the future", was founded in 2003 and is a conflict transformation organization that explores group and individual identities through experiential and political education. Examining social relations within and between the Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, and Palestinian communities, we empower participants to practice just alternatives to the status quo. It offers opportunities for university students and high school students from different traditions to learn conflict resolution skills and to learn to appreciate the other. Its two main programs, a year long Unity Program and a shorter Vision program combine a commitment to equal partnerships across ethnic, religious and gender lines, experiential learning, intergroup encounters and political education. They have taught in the Bay area and in New York at the Heschel School. I was privileged to take a course with two of their excellent facilitators at the Academy for Jewish Religion in the summer of 2006, during the second incursion into Lebanon. Watching how the facilitators took care of each other was an excellent modeling experience as we all dealt with the pain of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Bereaved Families Forum, http://www.theparentscircle.com/

This organization was founded by Israeli businessman Yitzhak Frankenthal in 1985 after his son was killed by Palestinians while he was serving in the IDF. Forum members have all lost an immediate relative in the conflict and believe that the violence must stop so that no other family has to endure the pain they have undergone. They say, "It is, as far as we know, a world precedent that bereaved families, victims from both sides, embark on a joint reconciliation mission while the conflict is still active."

Their mission statement says its aim is:

- To prevent further bereavement, in the absence of peace
- To influence the public and the policy makers – to prefer the way of peace on the way of war
- To educate for peace and reconciliation
- To promote the cessation of acts of hostility and the achievement of a political agreement

- To prevent the usage of bereavement as a means of expanding enmity between our peoples
- To uphold mutual support between our members

It strives to allow a breakthrough in people's frames of mind, a change of perception, a change to reconsider one's views and attitudes towards conflict and the other side. Activities continue regardless of political circumstance and they were quite active during the recent escalation in Gaza and Sderot.Members initiate and lead projects throughout the region in both the Israeli and Palestinian communities. Programs have included: face-to-face reconciliation programs and dialogue meetings for families that have been bereaved as well as youths and adults, youth leadership seminars, an internet reconciliation program, "Messengers of Reconciliation" public and media events including a TV drama series, a weekly radio show , an art exhibit of Israeli and Palestinian artists creating bowels for peace, and much more.

Brit v'tzedek v'shalom, http://www.btvshalom.org/

Brit Tzedek v'Shalom (The Jewish Alliance of Justice and Peace) was founded in 2002 as an American-based grassroots Jewish organization committed to promoting a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by advocating U.S. foreign policy supportive of Israel and Palestinians and the difficult compromises that this type of negotiated settlement will require. It has a network of 45,000 members and 1500 rabbis and is dedicated to education of the American Jewish community to promote what it believes is the long term Israeli best interest in peace. It organizes local and national events and regularly lobbies Congress to work for a two-state solution.

This kind of organization is less about personal reconciliation between individuals and more about networking and advocating for peace on a geo-political level based on the Jewish value of pursuing peace. In the process, individuals become better educated on the myriad of issues facing Israelis and Palestinians.

Rabbis for Human Rights, http://rhr.israel.net/

This organization is dedicated to the ideal of peace and Zionism as the rabbinic voice of conscience in Israel. With no affiliation with any political party, religious denomination or ideology it was founded in 1988 as a grassroots organization of rabbis to work for change regardless of movement. Widely respected by other human rights organizations, it is quoted frequently in the press. Projects have included championing the cause of the poor, supporting the rights of Israel's minorities and the Palestinians, working to stop the abuse of foreign workers, endeavoring to guarantee the upkeep of Israel's public health care system, promoted the equal status of women, helping Ethiopian Jews, and battling trafficking in women. It received the 2006 Niwano Peace Prize for efforts to promote peace in an interfaith context. Activities have included "Two Trees" to replant olive trees in Palestinian land and Israeli land, defending Palestinian

homes slated for demolition, and defending the residents of Silwan near the Temple Mount. They host an annual human rights conference in New York.

Seeds of Peace, www.seedsofpeace.org

Seeds of Peace is an organization that has fascinated me for some time. In the first days after 911, I became aware of them as one of my dear friends and congregants, Lisette Kaplowitz, struggled to make sense out of the horror in New York. She was an elementary school principal in Acton, MA. The father of one of her students, Philip Rosenzwieg was on Flight 11 out of Boston, the first plane to crash into the World Trade Center. Her first call reached me as I was driving back from the Academy that very afternoon. While she had kept the story out of the school preferring that parents be the one to tell young children, she knew that the next day, she was going to have to explain the unexplainable and she wondered how she was going to approach it. Shortly thereafter, it became clear that the school wanted to do something positive in the wake of the immense loss. His widow, Lauren, to her credit, also wanted to make something meaningful happen out of this seemingly senseless tragedy so in his memory a tradition was born of walking for peace every anniversary and donating the proceeds to Seeds of Peace.

Seeds of Peace was founded in 1993 by John Wallach, an internationally recognized journalist as his personal response to the first attack on the World Trade Center. He was also the child of Holocaust survivors and always told the story of his parents' escape by saying "It's amazing we're still alive." He understood this as a gift and that he had to do something worthwhile with it. He was able to use his strong connections developed as a journalist to found this camp.

According to its website, it is "dedicated to empowering young leaders from regions of conflict with the leadership skills required to advance reconciliation and coexistence." According to the website:

> Seeds of Peace has focused primarily on bringing Arab and Israeli teenagers together before fear, mistrust and prejudice blind them from seeing the human face of their enemy. Seeds of Peace goes beyond international agreements and treaties. It reverses the legacy of hatred by nurturing lasting friendships that become the basis for mutual understanding and respect. By training these young leaders in conflict resolution skills, Seeds of Peace helps them become the seeds from which an enduring peace will grow.

In 1999, Seeds of Peace opened its Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem. Located on the former dividing line between East and West Jerusalem, the Center serves as a neutral, safe meeting space for Israeli and Palestinian Seeds of Peace graduates, their friends and families, and the headquarters of the expanding Regional Program. They also made an award winning documentary that year. Since its beginning it has trained 2500 participants Through the years, Seeds of

Peace has honed its methodology and is able to tweak its formula as the facilitators continue to learn what is most effective. However the overall program is outlined as follows:

> The Seeds of Peace internationally recognized program model begins at the International Camp in Maine and continues through follow-up programming at the Seeds of Peace Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem, international youth conferences, regional workshops, educational and professional opportunities, and an adult educator program. This comprehensive system allows participants to develop empathy, respect, and confidence as well as leadership, communication and negotiation skills -- all critical components that will facilitate peaceful coexistence for the next generation.

The follow-up programming is undoubtedly critical to its success. Being isolated at camp away from the conflict region is one thing. Kids returning from camp frequently suffer campsickness, the reverse of homesickness. Now imagine going home where your friends have not had this kind of transformational experience, may speak derogatorily of the enemy and the bombs may even be flying. Maine would seem like a distant and impossible dream.

Shalom Achshav, Peace Now, http://www.peacenow.org/
Peace Now was founded in 1978 by 348 Israeli army reserve officers and combat soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces on the eve of then Prime Minister Menachem Begin's historic trip to Egypt to make peace, mobilizing thousands to urge support of trading land for peace. In 1981 the Americans for Peace Now was formed. In 1982 following the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, Shalom Achshav sponsored a rally of 400,000 Israelis, roughly 10% of the total population, calling for an end to the war in Lebanon. By 1985 Shalom Achshav had initiated dialogue and reconciliation projects with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and continued to urge dialogue with the PLO with its campaign in 1988 "Speak Peace with the PLO" This helped pave the way for the Oslo accords. However, violence continued and continues to plague the region and Shalom Achshav believes that its continued efforts at dialogue and reconciliation with its "Hands around Jerusalem" campaign of 25,000 Israelis and Palestinians holding hands and encircling the walls of the Old City in Jerusalem during the height of the Intifada. Shalom Achshav recognizes the importance of working with the youth—the next generation as we have been studying and created by 1993 a Shalom Achshav Youth Movement and a parallel organization in the West Bank and Gaza. Some of these youths came to the US in 1996 to promote their ideas of reconciliation and hope, even as new suicide terrorism was sprouting. Like Rabbis for Human Rights, Shalom Achshav opposes housing eviction and land confiscation and is actively monitoring expansion of Jewish settlements in the "Occupied Territories" It continues to work diligently for peace through advocacy and through educational programs with the youth—the next

generation destined to deal with the sins of their parents and grandparents—on both sides.

What all of these programs do well:

There are different theories in how reconciliation can happen. Among the main ones are the contact hypothesis of Allport that says that if the contact fulfills certain specific conditions, then it may be effective in bringing about a positive change in attitude. In other words, that if you have direct, intentional experience with "the other", the other is then humanized. Learning and understanding what the similarities and differences to the groups are is critical to the success of programs like this. However, as the summary of text one suggests, the research on the contact hypothesis has seen mixed results. Encounter for encounter's sake does not work—people must move beyond that. This works toward integrating the in-group and out-group part of the Social Identity Theory originally presented by Henri Tajfel based on work done by Willam Graham Sumner. Having people be safe to tell their stories is one of the steps outlined in Abu-Nimer's work on conflict resolution and reconciliation. What each of the organizations spotlighted in this paper are doing is working for a day of reconciliation when the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation no longer need to live in fear and everyone beneath their vine and fig tree can live in peace and unafraid—at the personal level and at the geo-political level. They aim to:

- Create an environment of safety where trust and mutual respect can grow
- Build a community of trust by starting with "soft" things like camp songs and traditions to build a common base before they get into the tough things.
- Train adults and teens to be facilitators.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for connection—through the leadership training, follow up encounters, ongoing networking

- Develop new programming every year to keep people sharp, enthusiastic and to provide a new base.
- Continually re-evaluate what they are doing Work the media as well as connections/networking between people.

Chapter Four: A Yom Kippur Journey Towards Forgiveness

Audience: An alternative study session in a small Reform Congregation on Yom Kippur Afternoon run concurrently with the more traditional afternoon service or a healing service in the main sanctuary or during the "recess" between the morning and afternoon service. Or it could be used as part of a *Selḥot* service typically said first on the Saturday evening before Rosh Hashanah at midnight.[101] 20 participants would be a high number. It has been piloted successfully in both settings as well as part of an Interfaith discussion group.

Length: 90 minutes

Goals:

- To look at the text "*Adonai, Adonai El Raḥum V'ḥanun*" from Exodus 34:6-7 in a new light
- To be able to begin to define forgiveness and reconciliation
- To answer the question what does it mean that God visits the iniquity of the parents on the third and fourth generation. Although Ezekiel 18:4 seems to override this in later scriptures, what is it doing here? What does that mean in a geo-political sense? What does that mean in our own families?
- To understand why the rabbis truncated the text for inclusion in the liturgy
- To find ways to begin to break the cycle of violence.
- To offer some hope for our fractured world and for ourselves.
- To provide a safe format of discussing these topics

Format:

1. Introduction: Five Minutes

I want to start with a puzzle. Something that has intrigued me for years. In the Kol Nidre service we read and sang Kol Nidre. And then the phrase, from Numbers 14:20, "*V'yomer Adonai Selaḥti Kidvarecha*. The Lord said, I have pardoned according to your word."[102] Then we have another 300 some odd pages of liturgy. Aren't we done? We are taught in the Talmud, in Yoma 8:9, that for sins against humanity Yom Kippur does not atone, that before we can be right with God we have to be right with each other. These are big, big concepts, central to the holiday and I think since you have chosen to be here, in the text study session, it

[101] In Ashkanazi tradition, when Rosh Hashanah falls before Wednesday, then *Seliḥot* is recited first the previous Saturday night in order to give people an adequate time to prepare, at least four days of saying *Seliḥot*. In Sephardic tradition, Jews begin saying *Seliḥot* at the beginning of Elul to mirror the days that Moses spent on Mount Sinai getting the second set of the Ten Commandments.

[102] *Gates of Repentance* renders it "I have pardoned you according to your plea." The Biblical context which is again Moses pleading with G-d to pardon the Israelites who have lost faith in the wilderness, partially quotes our verse from Exodus 34:6-7. After Moses's plea, the Lord pardoned the Israelites.

is important to grapple with these questions and what these very words mean—atone, pardon, grant forgiveness. How do we do this? What does it mean?

For me this session is personal. I want to look at a text from my Bat Mitzvah Torah portion. It is one we read twice a year and it has made its way into our liturgy in a slightly different form, but it is a big piece of Yom Kippur. Let me set the stage. Moses is frustrated with the people—they just built the Golden Calf. He smashes the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. He is frustrated with God who wants him to go back up the mountain and get a second set of the tablets that he smashed. Moses is also feeling somewhat alone and he wants God's reassurance that God will be with him. He wants to meet God face-to-face. God answers that no one can do that and live. However, he agrees to hide Moses in the cleft of the rock and let God's goodness pass before him. Moses can see the back of God, whatever that means. While hidden God "whispers" the 13 attributes of God.

2. Brainstorming a definition of forgiveness. 15 minutes:
Pass out sheets of paper asking participants to write their own definitions for forgiveness and reconciliation. Then ask them to write their own area where they might struggle with forgiveness. Who do they need to forgive? (In a more traditional setting this could be done without writing) Have participants share their definition answers and brainstorm a master list on a blackboard or whiteboard of what forgiveness means and how we do it. Remind participants that this is the central part of what Yom Kippur is all about.

3. Chevruta text study: 15 minutes
In partners have participants look at the following texts:
Texts One and Two: Exodus 34 and the text as it appears in liturgy

Prereading questions:
What are the 13 Attributes of God—can you count them?
Are you surprised that there is a difference in the two texts? What is it? Why do you think the rabbis shortened the verse in mid-sentence to include in the liturgy? What were they uncomfortable with? Are we?

Why were the rabbis uncomfortable with God not forgiving all iniquity?
Do you believe that God does forgive all iniquity?
Are there some sins that you think are beyond forgiveness? Which ones? List them.

4. Return together and process—10 minutes
Any things to particularly come out of the groups? Was it hard to count to 13? What is the list of Thirteen Attributes.

5. Chevruta section two: 15 minutes
Have participants read Texts Three and Four

Do these texts help to explain why the rabbis were uncomfortable with the full verse and why they truncated it in the liturgy?
Do they help give us a model of how we should behave in our own lives?
What message can we come away with?

6. Return together and process. 15 minutes
How are we to become like God? What actions are we supposed to take or attributes we are supposed to emulate? Is this hard? Is it hard for us to personally forgive? What if we can't? Does the prayer before going to bed comfort or make us distraught?
Are there certain sins that are harder to forgive, e.g., murder, rape, incest, domestic violence, others? Research has shown that some of these have a cyclical pattern. *Etz Hayim*, the Conservative Movement's *chumash*, says, "We recognize the unfairness of such punishment, yet it is true that the bad habits of parents are too often repeated by their children, for whom parents are the primary role models."[103]

How do we break the cycles—in our own lives? In the bigger issues like Germany or the Middle East? Isn't this ultimately what Yom Kippur is about?

Story from *Yom Kippur Readings* from Rachel Naomi Remen, MD who wrote Kitchen Table Wisdom. She tells a story of hearing a prominent rabbi talk on Yom Kippur talk about forgiveness. He began by taking his infant daughter from his wife's arms and bringing her onto the *bimah*. He then began his rather traditional and somewhat boring sermon. The baby girl smiled and everyone's heart melted. She patted him on the check with her tiny hands. He smiled fondly at her and continued with his customary dignity. She reached for his tie and put in her mouth. She grabbed his nose and the whole congregation chuckled. He said, "Think about it. Is there anything she can do that you would not forgive her? Heads nodded in agreement. She grabbed his glasses. Everyone laughed. He waited for silence and then said, "When does that stop. When does it get hard to forgive. At three? At seven? At sixteen? At forty five? How old does someone have to be before you forget that everyone is a child of God?" I would add, created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of God, with the divine spark inside. Naomi added that for her, God's forgiveness was easy to understand but that personal forgiveness was difficult. If we are supposed to be like God and follow in God's footsteps, isn't this the message? It is not a lowering of standards. It is being in a family relationship.

5. End with singing *Adonai, Andonai* and *Hashivenu.* 5 minutes
Hashivenu, hashivenu Adonai elohecha. V'nashuva, v'nashuva. Chadaish, chadaish, yamenu kekerdem.
Return to us Adonai our God and we will return. Renew our days as of old.

[103] David L. Lieber and Jules Harlow, editors, *Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary*, (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001), page 541

Give out copies of the nighttime *Sh'ma* for people to use at home.

Materials:
Photocopied sets of the texts
Photocopied worksheet on definitions
Pens or pencils
Whiteboard or blackboard, markers or chalk and eraser

Texts: *Adonai, Adonai El Rachum V'chanun*
Text One:
Exodus 33:12—Exodus 34:12
Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Lead this people forward,' but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me. Further, You have said, 'I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained My favor.' Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this nation is Your people." And He said, "I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden." And he said to Him, "Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place. For how shall it be known that that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name." He said, "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!" And He answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live." And the LORD said, "See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself in a cleft of the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen."

The LORD said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered. Be ready by morning, and in the morning come up to Mount Sinai and present yourself to Me, on the top of the mountain. No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain."

So Moses carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him. The LORD came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name LORD. 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 the fathers upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."

Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage, and said, "If I have gained Your favor, O LORD, pray, let the LORD go in our midst, even though this is a stiffnecked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own!"…

He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the LORD's deeds which I will perform for you. Mark well what I command you this day….
So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, (or horned)[104]since he had spoken with Him.[105]
(New JPS Translation)

Text Two: As It Appears in the High Holiday Liturgy
"Adonai, Adonai, el raḥum v'ḥanun, erech apayim v'rav ḥesed v'emet, notzayr ḥesed l'alafim, nosey avon vafeshah v'chatah-ah venakeh. Adonai, The Lord, The Lord, The Eternal, merciful and gracious, endlessly patient, loving and true, assuring love to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin and granting pardoning."[106]

[105] Sarna, *op. cit*., 216-217 and Bernard M. Zlotowitz, "Moses' 'Face Was Horned'" *CCAR Journal*, (Fall 2003) 53-60,
[106] Chaim Stern, editor, Gates of Repentance, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978) 338.

Text Three: From The Midrash
"To walk in God's ways" (Deuteronomy 11:22). These are the ways of the Holy One: "gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, assuring love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon." (Exodus 34:6). This means that just as God is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving, you too must be gracious, compassionate, and forgiving. (Sifre - Devarim, Ekev)
Follow the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 13:5). What does this mean?...The verse means to teach us that we should follow the attributes of the Holy One…As He clothes the naked, you should clothe the naked. The Bible teaches that the Holy One visited the sick; you should visit the sick. The Holy One comforted those who mourned; you should comfort those who mourn. The Holy One buried the dead; you should bury the dead. (Sotah 14)[107]

Text Four: Also from the Midrash
According to the Midrash, the first of Elul was the day Moses returned to Sinai to fast and pray for forty days to obtain God's forgiveness for Israel's worship of the golden calf. The Rabbis also taught that the word 'Elul' is made up of four Hebrew letters, Alef, Lamed, Vav, Lamed. They are the first letters of the verse from the Song of Songs, Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." Since the rabbinic tradition considered the love poetry of the Song of Songs an allegory for God's love of Israel, the forty days from the beginning of Elul to Yom Kippur is considered an opportunity for reconciliation with God.[108]

Text Five: Prayer on Going to Bed
"Master of the Universe, I hereby forgive anyone who angered or antagonized me or who sinned against me-whether against my body, my property, my honor, or against anything of mine; whether he did so accidentally, willfully, carelessly, or purposely; whether through speech, deed, thought, or notion; whether in this transmigration or another transmigration. May no man be punished because of me. May it be your will, my God and the God of my forefathers, that I may sin no more. Whatever sins I have done before You, may You blot out in your abundant mercies, but not through suffering or bad illnesses. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, my Rock and my Redeemer".[109]

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[107] Harlow, *op. cit*., 19.
[108] Stephen Butterfass for Religious Living on the Web, http://ny054.urj.net/ReligiousLiving/elul.htm
[109] Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, editors, The Complete Artscroll Siddur (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1984), 289.

Chapter Five: A Guided Journal—Preparing for the High Holy Days for the Individual

Why write in a journal or diary? How does it enrich our lives? Why do it in a Jewish context? Why do it for the *Yamim Noraim*—the Days of Awe, the High Holy Days?

Journaling is something I have done off and on since fifth grade. I remember writing in a spiral notebook for my fifth grade teacher my hopes for that secular New Year—ending with "At least Michigan won the Rose Bowl." I find that it enriches my life, provides a written record of my days and allows me to work out thoughts that otherwise would remain unresolved.

Journaling provides us an opportunity to write—it is a concrete way to explore the spiritual realm. These days the journal may take the form of a spiral notebook, a fancy leather bound journal expressly for this purpose or a computer. Many people are now using technology to journal or to blog. These days I find that I am journaling less and I am consistently emailing close significant friends some of these thoughts. The ensuing questions and my responses have been immeasurably helpful to my own emotional and spiritual growth. Any of these tools are OK. The important thing is to write.

For Jews, the period leading up to the High Holy Days, the *Yamim Noraim*, is a particularly auspicious time. It is a time to reassess one's life, to see where we've been and where we are heading. Janet Ruth Falon in her boo*k The Jewish Journaling Book, How to use Jewish Tradition to Write Your Life and Explore Your Soul,* says that this is the most popular period for Jewish journaling. "It's a period of for turning inward, a time for cleaning out cluttered closets of the spirit, the season for making amends and mending breached relationships, and a

time for doing deeds that do some good. At this time a journal provides a safe space for coming clean about failures and disappointments and subsequent resolutions. It's the place to wrestle with your intentions and to lay out a new plan."[110] According to tradition, people are not the only ones who write during the High Holy Days. God writes in The Book of Life, a giant scroll, who shall live and who shall die. While too anthropomorphic an image for me intellectually, I like the idea of God keeping a record, a journal too.

This journal will be unique. It will be based on the story of Moses going up Mount Sinai a second time to receive the 10 Commandments. It is said in the midrash that Moses began his journey on the first of Elul and returned with the new tablets (more writing) on Yom Kippur itself. The rabbis even teach that name of the Jewish month of *Elul* is an acronym for *Ani L'dodi v'dodi li*, "I am my beloved and my beloved is mine"—a verse from Song of Songs 6:3 and while it reads as beautiful love poetry, the rabbis interpret as referring to the loving relationship between us and God.

I echo what Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins said in his introduction to *Forty Days of Transformation*. First, *t'shuvah* is better translated as transformation than as repentance. Second, the goal of this exercise is "to help people become better rather than to have them emerge from the pits of guilt and self-flagellation."[111]

The approach that I have used in this exercise is positive. This is not an attempt to make you feel guilty or bad about yourself. Instead, it is precisely the opposite, reclaiming your identity as a beloved child of God and as such worthy

[110] Falon, *The Jewish Journaling Book*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 2004, page 22
[111] Elkins, *Forty Days of Transformation*, Growth Associates, Princeton, NJ, 1999, page 1

of receiving God's forgiveness and lovingkindness and understanding, like Moses did, that God is a gracious, compassionate, endlessly patient and forgiving God.

So how do you do this? Just start writing. There are no right and wrong answers. It isn't even important to use correct grammar and spelling. Just get your ideas, your thoughts, your dreams down on paper. Don't worry that if you miss a day you have failed. Listen carefully to what your soul is saying. Remember that you are the beloved of God.

The Guided Journal:
Elul 1
Today is the first of Elul—a chance to sit back and begin the reflection process of what happened during the past year. The first of Elul was the day Moses returned to Sinai to fast and pray for forty days to obtain God's forgiveness for Israel's worship of the Golden Calf. He went back up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments for a second time. He received much more than that. On what would become Yom Kippur, he was hidden in a cleft or a crevice of the rock and the glory of God passed before him. (Exodus 34:5-7) He would have a very intimate encounter with the Divine. But on this day, the first of Elul, Moses was scared, exhausted and more than a little angry. He seeks some reassurance from God. He needs some reassurance from God—and he gets it. God will go before him and lighten his burden, giving him rest. What does it mean to lighten your burden? What would you give up carrying? What does it mean that God will give you rest?

Elul 2
Before Moses went back up the mountain, he had been angry, really angry and he smashed the first set of tablets of the Ten Commandments, the Ten Sayings. There are many interpretations of why he does this. Some say that Moses lost all patience with the Israelites who had demonstrated by dancing around the Golden Calf that they are unworthy of God's covenant. Or, just as the tablets are broken, so too is Moses, a broken, discouraged and angry man. He is all alone, cut off from the people he is leading. Others say he protected the people. By smashing the tablets before the people heard the commandments, they could not be responsible.

Yet, out of this destruction, hope arises. A midrash tells us that the Israelites gathered up the broken pieces. Eventually they put the pieces in the ark together with the new set. As Estelle Frankel said in her book, *Sacred Therapy*, "Sometimes we learn to appreciate life's gifts only after we have lost them." Ultimately, Frankel concludes, "the whole and the broken live side by side in us all, as our broken dreams and shattered visions exist alongside our actual lives."[112] What are the dreams that you have that you have not realized yet? How do we hold onto the beauty of our youthful, idealized dreams while maintaining the more mature, realistic ones?

Elul 3
Despite Moses' anger, real violent anger upon seeing the Israelites dancing around the calf, Moses continues to lead the people and advocate on their behalf. He even pleads with God for God's forgiveness on behalf of the Israelites. He shows real leadership in the face of adversity and rejection when he defends the

[112] Frankel, *Sacred Therapy, Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness*, Shambhla, Boston, MA, 2005, page 43

Israelites. God agrees, forgives the people and tells Moses to return and to continue to lead. There are many styles of leadership. What style of leader are you—director, coach, collaborative, hierarchical? What leadership traits do you have? How can you continue to lead in the face of adversity, criticism or rejection?

Elul 4
The Rabbis taught that the word *'Elul'* is made up of four Hebrew letters, *Alef, Lamed, Vav, Lamed*. They are the first letters of the verse from the Song of Songs, *Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li*, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." (Song of Songs 6:3) Since the rabbinic tradition considered the love poetry of the Song of Songs an allegory for God's love of Israel, the forty days from the beginning of Elul to Yom Kippur is considered an opportunity for reconciliation with God. What does it mean to you to be beloved of God? Can you find the space within you that you know you are loved?

Elul 5
Moses didn't want to go up the mountain. He didn't want to be alone. He didn't want to leave his people. He wanted some reassurance. What makes you scared, exhausted or angry? What fears do you hold? Do you fear disappointing yourself or others—parents, teachers, friends, partner? Do you find yourself constantly seeking other's approval or not meeting your own expectations? Having identified some of these, how might you work to overcome them?

Elul 6
Yesterday we talked about emotions we usually would rather not confront. But Moses went beyond his anger. He began the process and started to climb. He went back up the mountain, even though it was something he would rather not do. That took courage.

What are the things you have done that have shown courage? Where does your inner reserve come from? How can you find ways to tap into it?

Elul 7
Hiking up a mountain can be hard work—it takes strength, courage, perseverance, and just a little faith. It takes being prepared—remembering the first aid kit, the water, the flashlight, matches, the Swiss Army knife, the helmet, the cell phone. The rewards can be spectacular. What do you need to do to prepare for this spiritual climbing? What do you need to bring with you? Perhaps a prayerbook, a Bible, your journal, a pen, treasured friends?

Elul 8
The climbing continues. It ***is*** hard work. Sometimes it may seem you are not making any progress at all, but you are. Step by step by step. Day by day by day. You have spent almost a week on this journey. It is time to pause and reflect.

What discoveries have you made along the way so far? What surprises? What has been beautiful or maybe not so beautiful?

Elul 9
Moses went up the mountain alone. Sometimes we need space by ourselves to work on our interior life. Sometimes we need people around us. Think about who you would bring on your journey or whether you would be alone. *Pirke Avot* teaches us to "Find yourself a teacher and acquire yourself a friend." (Pirke Avot 1:6) Who are those special people? Write them a thank you note.

Elul 10
Much of the story of Moses is about leaving his homes. As a baby he was placed in a basket and floated down the River Nile, rescued by Pharaoh's daughter. Thus, he grew up not in his parent's home but the palace of the Pharaoh. Moses had to flee Egypt after smiting an Egyptian. He left his home and all that he knew and wound up in Midian, in the home of Jethro the Midianite priest. Then he left Midian to return to demand that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. And wandering in the desert for forty years surely was not a permanent home. Some have said that "home is where the heart is" Where do you feel at home? What role does home play in your life? What is the balance between security and stability and being in the right place at the right time?

Elul 11
The experience of being slaves was so powerful that 36 times in the *Tanakh* we are told to treat the widow, the orphan and the stranger with justice because we were slaves in the land of Egypt. How do we treat "the other" today? Who are the marginalized people in our society today? Why does each of us have a responsibility to be mindful of this? What can you personally do?

Elul 12
Sometimes Moses struggled to make himself understood. He even tried to tell God that he was not the right person to go to Pharaoh because he was slow of speech. Are there things that you would like to say but can't find a way to express them? What are they? Could they be better expressed as a song, a poem, a hug or something non-verbal? Who do you need to tell? Can you find a way that they can be heard without causing hurt feelings?

Elul 13
At Passover, we are told that each of us must seem as though we personally went out of Egypt, out of the narrow spaces, that each of us must experience the Exodus and the redemption and liberation for ourselves. Now is a good time to think about this again as we prepare to begin anew at Rosh Hashanah. What are the narrow spaces that you still need to exit? What is holding you back?

Elul 14

We also are told that all of us witnessed the miracle of the parting of the Sea.of Reeds After the parting we exclaimed, "*Zeh Eli*, This is My God." At first, not every one was able to see the miracle. Some were busy complaining about the muck. The Israelites were scared, again, and didn't know what to do. They sat on the bank with the Egyptians in fast pursuit, bewailing their fate and complaining that Moses should not have led them out of Egypt. In face, according to the Midrash, the sea didn't part until Nachson ben Aminidav waded into the water. Once he was up to his nostrils, the sea parted. Have you had an experience that you would call a miracle? What are the miracles in your life? How do we notice the miracles? How do you be more like Nachson, ready jump in and to take on a challenge even if the odds seem improbable or impossible?

Elul 15
Today we are half way through the month of *Elul*. Halfway to Rosh Hashanah. Once the Israelites were on the other side of the Sea of Reeds, they broke into song. Miriam led the woman dancing with their tambourines and timbrels. For her role in praising God and in finding fresh, living water, *mayim ḥayim*, she is known as a prophet. I am often mystified that these slaves who didn't have time to bake real bread that would rise, remembered to take their musical instruments. You have already made a lot of progress. For what do you give thanks? How do you find *mayim ḥayim*, fresh living water, to sustain you?

Elul 16
Sometimes trekking through the wilderness is challenging. Finding water can be hard. We all hit dry spots. Sometimes we complain like the Israelites did. Sometimes we don't even have the energy to notice or to complain. What do you do when you hit a dry spot? What do you need to refresh and recharge?

Elul 17
Water is a symbol of purity. When the Israelites were preparing for standing at Sinai, they immersed in some of that *mayim ḥayim*. Today, some Jews still use a *mikveh* or even better from my perspective, a natural body of water, to reclaim that sense of purity and preparedness to transition into another state. There is a custom of doing this before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to enter the new year in this pure state. According to Mindy Ribner, impurity in Hebrew, *tameh*, means to be closed, cut-off from the life force.[113] Imagine yourself immersing or floating in a body of water, opening up to the possibility of *t'shuvah*, returning, opening up to the possibility of wholeness, of completeness, of peace, opening up to healing, opening up to the possibility of the Divine in your life. Water is a symbol of the divine lovingkindness. God's love and compassion surround you. Know that you are loved. Remember the line from the daily morning service, "The soul that You have given me is pure. You created it; You formed it; You breathed it into me." Concentrate on your breath. What is your soul whispering to

[113] Ribner, *The Gift of a New Beginning*, The Jewish Meditation Circle, New York, New York, 1996, page 76-77

you? What quality of the Divine would you like to experience more fully in your life? Leave your *mikveh* experience feeling at one, at peace, cleansed, purified and refreshed.

Elul 18
While Moses is a model of leadership that we can emulate there is a wonderful story about Rabbi Zusia, a Chasidic master.
“Once Zusia came to his followers. His eyes were red with tears and his face was pale with fear. "Zusia, what's the matter? You look frightened!"
"The other day, I had a vision. In it, I learned the question that the angels will one day ask me about my life."
The followers were puzzled. "Zusia, you are pious. You are scholarly and humble. You have helped so many of us. What question about your life could be so terrifying that you would be frightened to answer it?"
Zusia turned his gaze to heaven. "I have learned that the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Moses, leading your people out of slavery?' They will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Joshua, leading your people into the Promised Land?'"
"But what will they ask you," his confused students asked. Looking into their eyes, he replied, "They will say to me, 'Zusia, why weren't you Zusia?'” as retold by Doug Lipman[114]

How do you become the best person you are meant to be? Who is that person?

Elul 19
The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes calling as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Moses was called by God and answered, *Hineni*, Here am I. (Exodus 3:4)Abraham, Jeremiah, Samuel, Isaiah did too. Each person has a unique role to play. Some have even said that each person has their own mitzvah just for them—it could be blowing the shofar (my daughter’s special gift), serving at a soup kitchen, writing poetry, opening your home to guests, or something else entirely. What is it that brings you joy? Where do your talents meet the world’s needs? What is your unique contribution to this world? What can you say *Hineni*, Here am I, to? Take some time to reflect on how making your life meaningful will bring you joy.

Elul 20
The Talmud tells a story from Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav (Menachot, Hakometz Rabba Ch 3), that Moses ascended to the heavens and found God attaching crowns to the letters to the Torah, and asked why God was doing this. God explained that many generations later, Rabbi Akiva would come along and provide pages and pages of interpretations of scripture and complex analysis of them. He would teach us that there are 70 faces of Torah, seventy correct interpretations for every letter, even for the crowns on the letters.

[114] http://www.storydynamics.com/publications/Books/tsc-excerpt.html

Moses then asks to see Rabbi Akiva. God tells him to turn around and Moses finds himself in R. Akiva's class and he sits himself down in the 8th row of students. (This is a reference to the level of scholarship in the room. He ends up in the eight row in Akiva's class.) Moses listened but didn't understand the teaching of Rabbi Akiva. (The commentaries say the language was different) and he became disheartened. Then at one point they asked R. Akiva where he got his opinion and he explained that Moses had brought it down as part of the oral tradition, and Moses felt better and returns to God.

How do we honor the teachers that have come before us? If you could ask Moses or Akiva about any part of the tradition, what would it be?

Elul 21
One of the things that Akiva taught us was to say 100 blessings a day. Make a list of all the things that you are thankful for, the small things and the big, the good and the bad.

Elul 22
After Miriam and Aaron speak negatively about Moses, Moses intercedes on behalf of his sister who was struck with leprosy. He not only intercedes but demands that God heal her. Using very simple language, "*El Na refana la*—God, please heal her," he pleads with God despite his disappointment and hurt in his siblings. God is a God of healing. What needs healing in your life? Find the words to ask God for healing—for yourself, for your family, for others, for the world.

Elul 23
We are taught that *t'shuvah, tzedakah* and *tefilah* can avert God's severe decree as we move closer to Rosh Hashanah. *T'shuvah*, repenting or returning or transforming, involves making things right. This whole process of climbing the mountain and journaling has been about making things right, with you, with God. Now think about your relationships. Perhaps you know you have hurt someone, either by your words or your actions, intentionally or not. Before Rosh Hashanah is a good time to seek that person out and apologize, not in some kind of *pro forma* way but from your heart. This is part of the *t'shuvah* process. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, try making a phone call or writing a letter. If the person has died, try visiting the gravesite.

Elul 24
Tzedakah frequently gets mistranslated as charity. More accurately it is righteous, just action. It is an obligation. Not something to do if and when we get around to it. Writing a check to your favorite charity or non-profit in one way of doing *tzedakah*. Many congregations sponsor canned good drives between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in contrast to the verses from Isaiah,

> Is such the fast I desire,
> A day for men to starve their bodies?

> Is it bowing the head like a bulrush
> And lying in sackcloth and ashes?
> Do you call that a fast,
> A day when the Lord is favorable?
> No, this is the fast I desire:
> To unlock the fetters of wickedness,
> And untie the cords of the yoke
> To let the oppressed go free;
> To break off every yoke.
> It is to share your bread with the hungry,
> And to take the wretched poor into your home;
> When you see the naked, to clothe him,
> And not to ignore your own kin.

The rabbis of the Kabbalah taught at the creation of the world, God created a bright light. It was too intense to be held in a vessel so the vessel shattered. Our job is put the shards back together again, to make the world whole. That is what *tikkun ha-olam* is about, repairing the world and repairing ourselves. *Tzedakah* helps us do this. Do not feel overwhelmed by this. Rabbi Tarfon teaches, "You are not obliged to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it." (Pirke Avot 2:16)

How do you like to do justice, righteousness? Where can you make a difference? Do something between now and Yom Kippur to increase justice in the world.

Elul 25
Tefilah is Hebrew for prayer. In the daily service we pray that God hears our prayers because God is a God of compassion. Say what is in your heart. The Talmud in Berachot 13a teaches us that we need to recite the Sh'ma so that our ears can hear what our mouth is saying. Say your prayer out loud so that your ears can hear what your mouth is saying. There is power in the words themselves.

Elul 26
Perhaps you feel like Moses, who did not get to live long enough to enter the Promised Land after leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness for forty years. Perhaps like Miriam who suffered from leprosy, you have experienced pain and illness. Perhaps like Aaron, you have suffered the untimely and inexplicable death of children. Too much pain for any one of us to bear. How can we cope? Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, wrestles with these very questions. In the end, Kushner concludes that God is with us in our pain.

> Are you capable of forgiving and accepting in love a world which has disappointed you by not being perfect?...Are you capable of forgiving and loving the people around you, even if they have hurt you and let you down by not being perfect?...Are you capable of

> forgiving and loving God even when you have found out that He is not perfect, even when He has let you down and disappointed you by permitting bad luck and sickness and cruelty in His world, and permitting some of those things to happen to you?...And if you can do these things, will you be able to recognize that the ability to forgive and the ability to love are the weapons that God has given us to enable us to live fully, bravely, and meaningfully in this less-than-perfect world.[115]

Can you see how God is with you in your pain? Can you answer any of Kushner's questions affirmatively? If you can't; that's OK—be patient with yourself.

Elul 27
Many of our ancestors in the Bible were dreamers. Jacob had a dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven. Joseph dreamed about seven fat cows and seven skinny cows and seven healthy sheaves of wheat and seven diseased ones. He also dreamed about eleven stars bowing down to him—no self image problem there. Even Moses dreamed. He dreamed of leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land. This was a dream he was not to realize.
Today we have movies that feature people who never give up on their dreams. Rudy, Flashdance, Rocky—any part. Pop some popcorn and watch one of these classics. What are your dreams?

Elul 28
The rabbis of the Talmud taught in Pirke Avot 2:10 that we should repent one day before our death. The only problem is we don't know when we will die. So they answer that we should repent every day—and in fact, a prayers for repentance, *t'shuvah*, and forgiveness are included in the daily service. I once met with a very wise rabbi, who suggested that instead of focusing on all the things I had not done or not done well, I focus on the positive. He suggested a positive *ḥeshbon hanefesh*, reckoning of the soul. *What Color is Your Parachute* has an interesting, similar exercise. Imagine that shortly before your death, there is a dinner party to honor you. People share testimonial after testimonial about the good person that you are and all the good things you have done in your life. What would you hope to hear at that dinner party as people look back on your life? How do you want to be remembered?

Elul 29
Tomorrow is Rosh Hashanah, the new year, the birthday of the world. You have been working very hard. Spend some time today thinking about your journey. Remember that you are a beloved child of the Divine and that your efforts in preparation are loved by God. You are loved by God. Write a letter to yourself to open at Chanukah with your goals for the coming year. While, similar to American New Year's resolutions that seem to never be kept, this is more of a

[115] Harold Kusher, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, (New York: Schocken Books, 1981) 161-162.

covenant between you, yourself and God. Where do you want to be? Perhaps you could include some promises in the spiritual, physical and emotional realms, giving you some balance.

Tishri 1—Rosh Hashanah
"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it." (Psalm 118:24)
Today is the birthday of the world, created again anew. Today we experience the gift of the God's majesty. We see this reflected in our liturgy, in *Avinu Malkenu*, literally translated as "Our Father, our King." What does it mean that God is our Ruler? What does it mean that we call God our loving Parent? How do we relate to such a God? With fear and trepidation? With longing? Are we seeking God's approval? How do we make this relationship right? The shofar sounds call to us, awakening us from our slumber, calling us to remember creation and God's sovereignty.

Tishri 2—Rosh Hashanah
Sunrise. A new day. A new month. A new year. Filled with promise and expectation. What are your hopes for the new year? What are your dreams? Every year a small group of people gather on the shores of Plum Island on the coast of Massachusetts, to watch sunrise. I am reminded of an old Girl Scout song, "God has created a new day, silver, and green and gold. Live that the sunset may find us, worthy God's gifts to hold." That is what Rosh Hashanah is about for me. Like Thoreau at Walden Pond, figuring out how to live deliberately. Some years the sun barely can make it through the morning fog. Other years the sun seems to explode across the horizon, spreading its warmth, dazzling the sand and making the sand look like thousands of diamonds. The promise to Abraham of being as numerous as the stars and the sands of the sea make sense. So too does the story of the little girl walking on the beach. Each starfish she finds she picks up and throws back into the sea. An old man asks her why she is doing it. Surely she cannot make a difference. She picks up another starfish, throws it into the water and says, "It makes a difference to this one."

What are the little things you can do that will make a difference, as this new year begins?

Tishri 3—*Adonai, Adonai*
When Moses was on Mount Sinai, God made all the Divine goodness pass before him and God whispered God's thirteen attributes, the thirteen inherent qualities of the Divine. The first two, Adonai, Adonai, teach us that God is both the God of mercy and of justice. Traditionally the rabbis saw Adonai as expressing the Divine Attribute of mercy in counterpoint to Elohim which shows God's attribute of justice. The repetition here may mean that God is merciful both before and after people sin and repent, as it is people who change, not God. God is steadfast in His mercy and in that mercy joyfully accepts a person's repentance.

The rabbis teach us that since there are no extra words in the Torah, every word comes to teach us something unique. When words repeat, it is frequently for emphasis. Emphasizing God's merciful nature, as opposed to God's judgmental nature is a comforting thought.

How do you see God as both merciful and just in your life?

Tishri 4—*El Raḥum v'ḥhanun*
God is above all a loving God, full of mercy and compassion. Let that sink in. Yes, God is gracious and compassionate, full of love and able to forgive to the thousandth generation. We should feel wrapped in a warm embrace by this image. How do we mirror this? How do we become like God? How do we walk in God's ways? Perhaps it is like the Sifre teaches us, "To walk in God's ways" (Deuteronomy 11:22). These are the ways of the Holy One: "gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, assuring love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon." (Exodus 34:6). This means that just as God is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving, you too must be gracious, compassionate, and forgiving. (Sifre - Devarim, Ekev)[116]

The midrash in Sotah14a teaches us that the Bible begins with acts of love and kindness, with God making clothes for Adam and Eve and ends with acts of love and kindness when God buries Moses. We also learn that God visited Abraham when he was in pain and needing healing after his circumcision.
What can you do today to bring acts of love and kindness into the world?

Tishri 5—*Erech Al Payim*
God is described as being slow to anger and endlessly patient. But anger and patience seem to be in short supply amongst us humans. What causes you to lose your temper? How can you become more patient?

Tishri 6—*V'Rav ḥesed V'emet*
Abounding in lovingkindness and truth, God tips the balance of judgment to the good. By translating *ḥesed* as mercy rather than just goodness, it can imply a more compassionate and active emotion. Truth which is preceded by kindness and can also be translated as "faithfulness." God is steadfast and faithful. These two words, *ḥesed v'emet* often appear together. They encompass the notions of reliability, durability, and faithfulness. When used together, the two words express God's absolute and eternal dependability in dispensing His benefactions. It some kind of ancient and profound way, it is reminiscent of the movie and concept, *Pay It Forward*, since the merit for the *ḥesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation.

[116] Siddur Sim Shalom, Rabbinical Assembly,

Emet is my favorite Hebrew word, almost a code by itself and another name for God. In Hebrew it is spelled *Alef Mem Tav*, which are the very first, the middle and very last letter of the Hebrew *alef bet*. Taken all together, God is the first, the middle and the last. God is truth.

How do you experience God's steadfast lovingkindness and truth in your everyday life? How do you "Pay It Forward'?

Tishri 7—*Nose ḥesed l'alphim*
God extends God's innate lovingkindness to the thousandth generation.

Children Learn What They Live
By Dorothy Law Nolte

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.
If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.[117]

Rodgers and Hammerstein said it this way in South Pacific:

> You've got to be taught to hate and fear
> You've got to be taught from year to year
> It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear
> You've got to be carefully taught

[117]Dorothy Law Notle and Rachel Harris, *Children Learn What They Live*, (New York: Workman's Press, 1998) "Children Learn What They Live"

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made
And people whose skin is a different shade
You've got to be carefully taught

You've got to be taught before it's too late
Before you are six or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate
You've got to be carefully taught
You've got to be carefully taught[118]

What legacy do we want to pass to our children's and our children's children? What kind of role models are we? If you were to write an ethical will, not a list of how the property is to be divided but about how you want your children to live, some kind of moral compass you leave behind, what would it say? Write one.

Tishri 8—*Nose avon v'fesha v'takaa v'nake*
God forgives. God forgives our sins. God forgives our iniquities, transgressions and sins. God forgives. Why do we need three separate words here? What do they add? Yoma 85b teaches us that for sins between the individual and God, Yom Kippur atones. But for sins between one person and another Yom Kippur does not atone until they have made peace.

In something that mirrors the modern day Twelve Step programs, Rambam offers us twenty steps to *t'shuvah*, to repentance and ultimately forgiveness. Mindy Ribner boils these down to three:

1. Regret the actions and the aspects of yourself that you would like to change.
2. Confess what you did out loud to God (It is not enough to do this mentally)
3. Commit to do differently in the future and make a rectification.[119]

Who do you need to forgive? Whose forgiveness do you need? How do you make it right? How do you avoid holding grudges? How do you get rid of your anger? Should all sins even be forgiven? Can you forgive yourself? Remember that God is with you in this process. God is waiting for your return, your *t'shuvah* with open arms.

Tishri 9—Erev Yom Kippur
Tonight we hear the ancient words and melody of *Kol Nidre*. Tonight we chant the beautiful *Kol Nidre*, absolving us of our vows. Whispered on the wings of

[118] Rogers and Hammerstein, *South Pacific* "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," accessed from http://www.lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/s/southpacificlyrics/youvegottobecarefullytaughtlyrics.html
[119] Ribner, *op. cit*., 64.

song, this haunting melody is always spiritual high note for me. In some congregations where instrumental music is permitted, when played on the cello, without words at all, I can be transported to another realm entirely, linking me with generations of Jews who have stood to hear these very notes, this very prayer. While it absolves us from this Yom Kippur to the next what it really commands us is to take words seriously. *Kol Nidre* gives us the space to stand before God, in the presence of the sacred, in the presence of our friends, our family, our community, and think about what words of ours matter.

Perhaps you have heard this story, but it is so good, it is worth repeating on this auspicious day. It is a story about a woman who liked to tell tales about her friends. Her neighbors did not like their gossiping friend. They decided to ask the rabbi's advice. The rabbi asked the woman, "Why do you make up stories about your friends?"
She answered, "It's only talk; I can always take it back."
The Rabbi took a pillow from the couch and handed it to the woman. "Take this pillow to the town square. When you get there, cut it open, and shake out the feathers. Then come back." She did as she was asked. When she returned, the Rabbi handed her a basket and said, "Now please go back and gather the feathers up again." The woman sighed. "But that's impossible."
"You are right," said the Rabbi. "So it is with words. Once spoken, they cannot be gathered again."

You have done the hard work leading up to this auspicious moment. What words are important to you? What words do you want to speak? What words would be better left unspoken? What words do you crave to hear?

Tishri 10—Yom Kippur
It is Yom Kippur. You've made it. You have climbed the divine mountain. You have heard the divine promise, *"Selachti Kidvarecha*—I have pardoned according to your word, which follows the chanting of Kol Nidre. Can you hear the echoes of God's mercy and love? Do you know that you are beloved of God? Yes, you are loved. You are coming back down the mountain. How does that feel? What will you bring with you, what will you take away from your forty day experience? How can you bring this with you into the new year?

Conclusion:

This paper has illustrated how Exodus 34:6-7 have become central in the philosophy of the Jewish people. From his perch in the cleft of the rock, Moses was given a rare, unique and intimate glimpse of the Divine and what God's attributes are: **"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 the fathers upon children and children's children upon the third and fourth generation."**[120]

The paper outlined the Biblical context, examining each of the Thirteen Attributes in turn. It then analyzed how the verse repeats in other books of the Bible showing how sometimes a change in word order changes the nuance. Only three times does *rachum v'ḥanun* appear in that order, including in our verse. However, in eight other places the words are reversed. None of the traditional commentaries deal with this close reading of the text. However, we suggested that it might be that when God is describing the Divine it is in our order and when we beg for forgiveness and mercy the order is reversed. We saw how the roots of our worship today go back to these verses.

The rabbis interpreted the verse and we remarked at their ability to truncate it, reversing the meaning entirely. By the time of the rabbis it was clear that this verse would become central to our prayers of forgiveness in the *Selichot*

[120] Nahum M. Sarna , editor, The JPS Torah Commentary, Exodus, The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), pages 212-217.

prayers and as part of the Torah service since God Himself showed Moses how to pray prayers of forgiveness by wrapping Himself in a talit and repeating these very words. (Rosh Hashanah 17b)

But the rabbis chose to reinterpret the last part of the verse by cutting it off at "He remits all sin." The Torah itself says explicitly that God will punish to the third and fourth generation. It uses a verbal construct, the infinitive absolute, to emphasize the meaning of the verb and to strengthen it. How, then, could the rabbis change the meaning so radically? According to Rachel Adler, "the Rabbis regard the Torah as a cauldron of holy words, each filled with possibilities, each bearing important meanings… Not coincidentally, their notion of *t'shuvah,* 'repentance,' is that God may, indeed, remit all punishment if the wrongdoer has repented, so the verse as it reads biblically does not represent correct Rabbinic theology. Therefore, in Tractate *Yoma,* the Rabbis interpret the problematic construction as follows: "He remits the guilt of those who repent. He does not remit the guilt of those who do not repent" (R. Elazar, cited in Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 86a)."[121]

What holy chutzpah! But that is part of the beauty of Judaism, the ability to reinterpret while not ignoring the whole of the tradition. In the liturgy it makes sense to dwell on God's forgiving nature. We need to be reassured of God's compassion, patience and love. We especially need that reassurance when asking for God's divine forgiveness. The rabbis understood that.

[121] Rachel Adler, The Extent of God's Compassion: Mosaic Chutzpah and Rabbinic Chutzpah, URJ Ten Minutes of Torah, April 6, 2009 via email

While many sources commented on the repetition of *Adonai, Adonai*, in Exodus 34:6-7, I think it is also significant that *ḥesed* is repeated as well. So the God who forgives the sinner before the sin and after the sin is also a God who loves those who need lovingkindness and that love is extended to the thousandth generation. Since there are no extra words in Torah and every word is imbued with layers of meaning, that God is seen as so loving it is repeated twice is very reassuring.

However, it is important to our understanding of God to know that God gets angry, too. God wrestles with whether all sins can be forgiven or whether some sins might be so repugnant that they might carry over to the third and fourth generation is important to our own understanding of anger, forgiveness and some societal ills. It may even help us solve those issues.

We looked at the possibilities of beginning to solve three such issues: German-Jewish reconciliation, Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, and domestic violence. This verse alone does not solve the problems, but fully understanding the whole verse can put them in a context that may begin to unravel them.

Ultimately, all of this, including solving entrenched societal problems, becomes a question of imitating the Divine. If, as the midrash says, we are to emulate God, just as God is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving, we, too must be gracious, compassionate, and forgiving. (*Sifre - Devarim, Ekev*), then similarly we need to stop holding grudges as the text of Leviticus 19:18 instructs, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your friend as yourself: I am the Lord." If God limits God's own anger as we see in our

text from Exodus, moves beyond his anger and renews the covenant with Moses and the Israelites, despite their sin of the Golden Calf; if we are to be like God then we must limit our anger as well and not hold grudges. Our own anger cannot, should not extend beyond the third and fourth generation.

The academic understanding of the Thirteen Attributes and this insight, in particular, can give us courage to look at some societal issues that have extended beyond one generation, allowing us to further the process of *tikkun ha-olam*, repairing the world.

By using this verse, and examining the possibility of German-Jewish reconciliation now that survivors have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, we actually find hope that there can be reconciliation despite the atrocities. The descendants on both sides see a unique role that they have in history. German descendants in particular have expressed the desire to be peacemakers and to understand how what happened occurred. They have paid reparations (although nothing would ever be enough) and have spoken openly and publicly about not allowing such things to happen again. These steps match Maimonides steps in forgiveness. While it is not comfortable for all survivors to even think about this topic—and forgiveness rests with them, it is important to engage in this dialogue now as time grows increasingly short as the survivors continue to age and pass away.

We looked at the current situation between Israelis and Palestinians, also tragically into its third and fourth generation of conflict. Judaism calls upon us to be peacemakers, to pursue peace actively; however, while we grieve the losses on

both sides, reconciliation can not be achieved fully until people on both sides feel safe, one of the major steps in Maimonides' steps toward forgiveness. There are a number of organizations working actively to bring about reconciliation and these should be encouraged until people on both sides feel that sense of safety, security and peace. Until then, I fear that the violence will continue for generations yet to come.

Finally we looked at the situation of domestic violence. Domestic violence is one of those sins that is not easily rooted out. It is a learned behavior one generation to the next—and victims and perpetrators have often said they thought it was normative. Perhaps this is the kind of sin that the verse is really talking about. Acknowledging that it exists even in the Jewish community and that it is not normative nor acceptable may be the first step toward breaking this cycle of violence. Further acknowledging that Judaism itself may have contributed to victims feeling unsafe will also help to break that cycle as Judaism becomes more outspoken about the existing problem and more welcoming to victims that have experienced such trauma. We need to continue to train Jewish professionals—rabbis, cantors, educators, social workers that the problem does exist, what to do if they encounter it and provide access to uniquely Jewish resources to help both professionals and victims.

Included with this paper is a workshop that can be used in a congregational setting either for *Seliḥot* or on Yom Kippur afternoon that address some of the questions that this paper raises. There is also a guided journal for the 40 days of from the first of Elul to Yom Kippur that can be used for personal

reflection and preparation leading up to Yom Kippur. Taken together, the academic interpretation of the Thirteen Attributes, the examination of three societal issues that extend beyond the third generation and the practical individual and congregational reflection of what these verses mean, we can bring more *tikkun ha-olam* to the world and become more Godlike.

Margaret Frisch Klein
Shabbat Chol Moed Pesach 5769
The 35th anniversary of my Bat Mitzvah

Appendix Texts:

Prayer for a Bat Mitzvah According to Italian Ritual in Turin and Milan[122]
"Hebrew Text taken from *Zeved Habat* by Aaron Cohen (Jerusalem, 1990).

The girls traditionally enter in a group, dressed in white and often wearing a crown of flowers on their hair, together with their families and friends. The ceremony takes place outside regular prayer services. The following prayer is said with the ark open, facing the Torah scrolls. The verses of the prayer are divided between the girls. Afterwards, the chief Rabbi addresses the girls.

תְּפִילָה לְבַת מִצְוָה לְפִי נוּסַח יְהוּדֵי אִיטַלְיָה (קְהִילוֹת תּוּרִינוֹ וּמִילַנוֹ)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁגְּמָלַנִי כָּל טוּב וְהֶחֱיַנִי וְקִיְּמַנִי לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה לָבוֹא
בַּאֲנָשִׁים וּלְקַבֵּל עוֹל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ׃ ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת.
הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם הֶחֱלוֹתִי גֶּשֶׁת אֶל הֵיכַל קָדְשֶׁךָ בְּיִרְאָתְךָ לְהִסְתַּפַּח בְּנַחֲלָתֶךָ׃ גַּם כִּי נַעֲרָה
אָנֹכִי וְאֵין מִלָּה בִּלְשׁוֹנִי מוּל כְּבוֹד רוֹמְמוּתֶךָ אַל נָא תִּמְאָסֵנִי. כִּי מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וְיוֹנְקִים
יִסַּדְתָּ עֹז. וּתְנוֹבֵב לְשׁוֹן גְּמוּלֵי חֵלֶב וַעֲתִידֵי מִשָּׁרִים לְהִשְׁתַּבֵּחַ בְּתִהְלָתֶךָ׃ אֵל אֲלֹהֵי
הָרוּחוֹת לְכָל בָּשָׂר מִי כָמוֹךָ מוֹרֶה הַמְלַמֵּד לְיִשְׂרָאֵל דֵּעוֹת׃ מְשַׁמְּחִים הִשְׂמַעְתָּ דִּין.
תּוֹרָה צִוָּה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה מוֹרָשָׁה קְהִילַת יַעֲקֹב. הֵיא חַיֵּינוּ וְאוֹרֶךְ יָמֵינוּ׃ וּבָהּ תְּגֻיֶּה נַעֲרָה
אֶרֶחָה לִשְׁמֹר כְּדָבָרְךָ׃ יַחַד לְבָבִי לְיִרְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ הַדְרִיכֵנִי בַּאֲמִתֶּךָ לְהִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׁעַ בְּחֻקֵּי
צִדְקֶךָ וּבְדִבְרֵי קָדְשֶׁךָ וּבְלִמּוּדֵי חָכְמָתֶךָ׃ אֲדַבְּרָה נֶגֶד הַמְתַעֲתְעִים וְלֹא אֵבוֹשׁ. בְּשֵׁם
אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי אֶדְגּוֹל וְלֹא תַכְבִּדֵנָא יָדַי. תַּבַּעְנָה שְׂפָתַי תְּהִלָּה לְהַגְדִּיל תּוֹרָה וּלְהַאֲדִירָה
וְלֹא אֶחֱשָׁה׃
אָתְפָּאַר בְּשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אֲשַׁקֵּר בֶּאֱמוּנָתִי׃ בְּיֵדְךָ עִתּוֹתַי וּבְיָדֶךָ אַפְקִיד רוּחִי׃
הַחְלִימֵנִי וְהַחֲיֵנִי לְלֶכֶת בְּדָרָכֶיךָ בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם וּבְנֶפֶשׁ חָפֵצָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וָחֶסֶד׃ חַזְּקֵנִי
אַמְצֵנִי לִהְיוֹת מֵעֲבָדֶיךָ הַדְּבֵקִים בְּךָ לְהוֹדִיעַ בַּרַבִּים שִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא׃ וּמָלְאָה
הָאָרֶץ וּבֵיתְךָ יִקָּרֵא בֵּית תְּפִלָּה לְכָל הָעַמִּים׃ בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' לַמְּדֵנִי חֻקֶּיךָ׃

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe who has bestowed every goodness upon me, and who has kept me alive and sustained me to this season to become part of the people to accept the yoke of your commandments:
Hashem, Hashem, Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness and truth.
Today, I have started to approach your holy sanctuary to cleave to your heritage. Even if I am a young girl and have no words to face the honor of your supremacy, please do not despise me. From the mouths of babes and sucklings, you have established your strength, God of all, who is like you who guides and teaches Israel knowledge? From the heavens you have emanated justice. Moshe commanded the Torah to us, an inheritance for the community of Jacob. It is our life and the length of our days. And how do you grant a young girl the privilege to keep your commandments? Attach my heart to your name and guide me in your truth to be engaged in the laws of your justice and in your holy words and in the words of your wisdom. I will speak out against the dishonest and misleading people, and will not be embarrassed. I will be a banner for the name of the God of my ancestors. My lips will express praise to magnify and glorify the Torah, and I will not be silent. I will be proud of the name of Israel and will not be dishonest in my beliefs. Hashem, into your hands I commend my spirit. Keep me alive so I may walk in your path wholeheartedly, and with a willing spirit do righteousness and loving kindness. Strengthen me to be among your servants who cleave to you, to introduce many to your great and glorious name. And the earth will be full and your house will be called the house of prayer for all the nations. Blessed are you, God, teach me your laws.

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[122] http://www.ritualwell.org/lifecycles/adolescence/barbatmitzvah/04PrayerforaBatMitzvah.xml

Holidays & Observances

אלול

Elul

Preparing for the Days of Awe

This article was written by Stephen Butterfass for Religious Living on the Web.

Maimonides teaches us that the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a call to awaken Israel from its spiritual sleep. "Awake, you sleepers from your sleep, rouse yourself you slumberers... Examine your deeds, return in repentance and remember your Creator. Those of you who forget the truth in the follies of the times and go astray the whole year in vanity and emptiness, which neither profit nor save, look to your souls, improve your ways and works, abandon your evil ways everyone of you! (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 3.4*)

The month that precedes Tishri, and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is called Elul. It is traditionally a time of reflection, introspection, study and prayer, of preparation for the turning or *Teshuvah,* that is necessary for atonement and God's forgiveness, the themes of the Days of Awe. The month's passage is marked by the blowing of the Shofar during the morning service, except for Shabbat and the last day of the month. Temple Israel has had a tradition of blowing the Shofar during Elul at the conclusion of the Friday evening service.

According to the Midrash, the first of Elul was the day Moses returned to Sinai to fast and pray for forty days to obtain God's forgiveness for Israel's worship of the golden calf. The Rabbis also taught that the word 'Elul' is made up of four Hebrew letters, *Alef, Lamed, Vav, Lamed.* They are the first letters of the verse from the Song of Songs, *Ani Ledodi Vedodi Li, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."* Since the rabbinic tradition considered the love poetry of the Song of Songs an allegory for God's love of Israel, the forty days from the beginning of Elul to Yom Kippur is considered an opportunity for reconciliation with God.

There is also the tradition of the *Selichot* service, the gathering together on the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah to offer special prayers for forgiveness, *Selichot* being the plural for a Hebrew word meaning forgiveness or pardon. One of the prayer books used for this service by Reform Judaism is called *Shaarei Selichah, Gates of Forgiveness.* Its editor, Rabbi Chaim Stern, describes the Selichot service as one "in which the House of Israel individually and collectively, struggles to return to God as we prepare for the Days of Awe."

The liturgy is meant to introduce the mood, music and themes of the Days of Awe and the prayers are both confessional and penitential. Beginning with a reminder that "We are your people, your children...You are our Ruler, our Father..." the prayers address *"El Melech, yoshev al kise rachamim",* God or Ruler, seated on

the throne of compassion, who forgives sin and pardons trangression, and a recitation of the Thirteen Attributes of God's Merciful Name: *"Adonai, Adonai, el rachum v'chanun, erech apayim v'rav chesed v'emet, notzayr chesed l'alafim, nosey avon vafeshah v'chatah-ah v'nakey. Adonai, The Eternal, the compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and full of loving-kindness and truth, assuring love to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and error and pardoning.* The congregation prays *"Shema Kolenu"* " hear our voice, have compassion upon us" and recites several confessional prayers, *"Ashamnu"* an alphabetical litany of offenses and *"al chet schechatanu lefanecha"* "for the sin we have committed against you." The service concludes with a long blast from the Shofar. Some congregations including ours, have offered different programs including films, lectures and discussions in an attempt to address the issue of how to truly change behavior and right wrongs done in the previous year.

It has also been a tradition during Elul to give *tzedakah,* contributions to charity and to visit family graves during this period and during the ten days that separate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a reminder that both the dead and the living have contributed to the eternal cycle of being.

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ability to understand my own tradition as they ask questions about what the text means in the Hebrew and in the midrash

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