

Explanation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

(based on ArtScroll Siddur)

The enumeration and explanation of the Attributes follows the generally accepted opinion of Rabbeinu Tam, as found in Rosh HaShanah (17b).

(Note: The first two Attributes are based on the two-fold occurrence of the "Name," "Hashem." "*Hashem*" is really not in itself a Name of G-d; rather, it simply means "The Name." It is used here in place of a particular One of G-d's Names because we are not permitted to articulate, or even to write, that Name, except for in the Torah scroll itself)

1. *Hashem*. This Name denotes mercy. G-d is merciful **before** a person sins, even though He knows the evil lies dormant in the person.
2. *Hashem*. G-d is merciful **after** the sinner has gone astray.
3. *E-L*. This Name denotes power. G-d's mercy sometimes surpasses even the degree indicated by the name Hashem.
4. *Rachum*. Compassionate; G-d eases the punishment of the guilty, and He does not put people into extreme temptation.
5. *ve-Chanun*. And Gracious; even to the undeserving.
6. *Erech Apayim*. Slow to Anger; so that the sinner can reconsider long before it is too late. (Rav Moshe Cordovero in "*Tomer Devorah*," describes G-d as a "*Melech Ne'Elav*," an "Insulted King," Whose subjects disobey Him, yet He maintains their existence.)
7. *Ve-Rav Chesed*... And Abundant in Kindness...; towards those who lack personal merits. Also, if the scales of good and evil are evenly balanced, He tips them towards the good.
8. ...*Ve-Emet*. And Truth; G-d never reneges on His word.
9. *Notzer Chesed La-Alafim*. Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations; The deeds of the righteous benefit their offspring far into the future.

10. *Nose Avon*... Forgiver of iniquity...; G-d forgives the intentional sinner, if he or she repents.
11. ...*Va-Phesha*... ..and willful sin...; Even those who purposely anger G-d are allowed to repent.
12. ...*VeChataah*. ...and error; This is a sin committed out of carelessness or apathy.
13. *VeNake*. And Who cleanses; G-d wipes away the sins of those who repent.