

The Palm Tree of Deborah - Chapter I: Attributes 1-2

It is proper for man to imitate his Creator, resembling Him in both likeness and image according to the secret of the Supernal Form. Because the MAIN ASPECT of similarity to the Supernal image and likeness is in deeds. A human resemblance merely in bodily appearance and not in deeds debases that Form. Of the man who resembles the Form in body alone it is said: 'A handsome form whose deeds are ugly.' For what value can there be in man's resemblance to the Supernal Form in bodily limbs if his deeds have no resemblance to those of his Creator? Consequently, it is proper for man to imitate the acts of the **Supernal Crown**, which are the thirteen highest attributes of mercy hinted at in the verses:

Who is a G-d like you, that bears iniquity and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage, He retains not His anger forever, Because he delights in kindness. He will again have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities, And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Yaakov, mercy to Abraham As You have sworn unto our fathers from the days of old (Micha)

Hence it is proper that these thirteen attributes, which we shall now expound, be found in man.

I Who is a G-d like You?

This refers to the Holy One, Blessed is He, as a King Who is insulted Who bears insult in a manner that is above human understanding. For behold, without doubt, there is nothing hidden from His providence. Furthermore, there is no moment when man is not nourished and does not exist by virtue of the divine power which flows down upon him. It follows that no man ever sins against G-d without the divine affluence pouring into him at that very moment, enabling him to exist and to move his limbs. Despite the fact that he uses it for sin, that power is not withheld from him in any way. But the Holy One, Blessed is He, bears this insult and continues to empower him to move his limbs even though he uses the power in that moment for sin and perversity offending the Holy One, Blessed is He, who, nonetheless, suffer it. Nor must you say that He cannot withhold that good, G-d forefend, for it lies in His power in the moment it takes to say the word 'moment' to wither the sinner's hand or foot, as he did to Jeroboam (And yet though it lies in His power to arrest divine flow - and He might have said: 'If you sin against Me do so under your own power, not with Mine' - He does not, on this account, withhold His goodness from man, bearing the insult, pouring out His power and bestowing of His goodness. This is to be insulted and bear the insult, beyond words. This is why the ministering angels refer to the Holy One, Blessed is He, as 'the patient [Humiliated] King.' And this is the meaning of the prophet's words: "Who is a **G-d** like you?" He means: 'You, the good and merciful **G-d**, with the power to avenge and claim Your debt, yet You are patient and bear insult until man repents.' Behold this is a virtue man should make his own, namely, to be patient and allow himself to be insulted even to this extent and yet not refuse to bestow of his goodness to the recipients.

II That Bears Iniquity

This is greater than the preceding quality. For a destroying angel is created whenever a man sins, as we have been taught: 'He who commits a sin acquires a prosecutor for himself,' who stands before the Holy One, Blessed is He, saying: 'So-and-so made me.' As no creature can exist without the divine flow of power how does the destroying angel who stands before Him exist? It would only be right if the Holy One, Blessed is He, were to say: 'I will not nourish this destroying angel, let him go to the one who made him to be sustained by him.' If He were to say this the destroyer would at once descend to snatch the sinner's soul or to cut it off or the sinner would be obliged to expiate his offence in creating the destroyer by suitable punishment unto the latter is made naught. The Holy One, Blessed is He, does not behave in this fashion. He bears the sin and endures it. He nourishes the destroyer and sustains it as He does the whole world until one of the three things happens. Either the sinner repents and makes an end of the destroying angel by the severity of the penances he inflicts upon himself. Or the righteous Judge brings the destroyer to naught by bringing suffering or death upon the sinner. Or the sinner descends to Hell to pay his debt.

This is the meaning of Cain's plea: 'My sin is too great to bear,' interpreted by our Rabbis of blessed memory as: 'You bear (that is to say, You nourish and sustain) the whole world; is my sin so heavy that You can not bear it (that is, sustain it until I repent)?'

This is the greatest quality of tolerance, that He nourishes and sustains the evil creature brought from which a man should learn until the latter repents. From which a man should learn the degree of patience in bearing his neighbor's yoke and the evils done by his neighbor even when those evils still exist. So that even when his neighbor offends he bears with him until the wrong is righted or until it vanishes of its own accord and so forth.

III And Passes By the Transgression

This is a great quality. For pardon of sin is not granted by a deputy but at the hand of the Holy One, Blessed is He, himself. As it is written: 'For with You is forgiveness.. the pardon being that he washes away the sin. As it is written: 'When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion. And so, too, it is written: 'And I will sprinkle clean water on you.. This is the meaning of 'And passes by the transgression': He pours out clean water to wash away the sin. Man, too, must so behave. He should not say: 'Shall I put to rights that which another has perverted or which is the result of his sin?' He should not speak in this way. For when man sins the Holy One, Blessed is He, Himself (and not by means of a deputy) rights the sin and washes its stain away. From this one can learn the depth shame in sinning, for the King is obliged to cleanse the filthy garments.

IV Of the Remnant of His Heritage

Behold, how the Holy One, Blessed is He, behaves with regard to Israel: He says: 'What can I do to Israel since they are My relatives with whom I have a relationship of the flesh?' For they (the Community of Israel) are the spouse of the Holy One, Blessed is He. He calls her 'My daughter,' 'My sister,' 'My mother,' as our Rabbis of blessed memory have explained. It is further written: 'Israel, the people near to Him' (literally: related to Him) for they are His children. This is why the verse says 'To the **she'erith** of His inheritance' - from the term '**she'er basar**' (relationship of the flesh). For come what may they are His inheritance. G-d says: 'What shall I do if I punish them, for the pain will be Mine?' As it is written: 'In all their sorrows He was afflicted.' The word **Lo** ('He') is written with an 'Aleph (to mean not). For their sufferings extend to the Highest Wonder and how much more so to the Two Faces where the divine Providence is chiefly concentrated. And the word **LO** is read with a Waw (to mean 'He'). It is further written: 'And His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.' For He cannot bear their pain and disgrace for they the she'erith of His inheritance.

So it is with regard to one's neighbors. All Israel are related one to the other, for their souls are united and in each should there be a portion of all the others. This is the reason why a multitude carrying out the divine commands cannot be compared with the few who do so, for the multitude possesses combined strength. This is the reason, too, for the Rabbis' explanation that those are counted among the first ten in the Synagogue receive reward equal to all who come later, even if the late-comers are a hundred in number. The number 'a hundred' is meant literally, for the souls of the first ten are united in each other so that there are ten times ten, each one of the ten including one hundred souls in his own soul. For this reason, too, all Israel are surety one for the other since each possesses literally a portion of all the others; and when one Israelite sins he wrongs not only his own soul but the portion which all the others possess in him. From which it follows that his neighbor is a surety for that portion.

And since all Israelites are related to each other it is only right that a man desire his neighbor's well-being, that he eye benevolently the good fortune of his neighbor and that his neighbor's honor be as dear to him as his own; for he and his neighbor are one. This is why we are commanded to love our neighbor as yourself. It is proper that a man desire the well-being of his neighbor and that he speak no evil of him nor desire that evil befall him. Just as the Holy One, Blessed is He, desires neither our disgrace nor our suffering because we are His relatives, so too, a man should not desire to witness evil befalling his neighbor nor see his neighbor suffer or disgraced. And these things should cause him the same pain as if he were the victim. The same applies to his neighbor's good fortune.

V He retains not His anger forever

This is yet another divine quality, that even when man persists in sinning the Holy One, Blessed is He, does not persist in retaining His anger and even when He does it is not for ever but He

allows His anger to abate even when man does not repent; as we find in the days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, that the Holy One, Blessed is He, restored the border of Israel. Though they were unrepentant calf-worshippers He had mercy upon them. Why did He have mercy upon them? Because of this quality of not retaining His anger forever. On the contrary, He allows His anger to lose its force and though the sin still lingers He does not punish but ever longs, compassionately, for man's repentance. Hence it is written: 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I bear grudge.' For the Holy One, Blessed is He, show both severity and tenderness to Israel for their benefit.

This is the quality which a man should make his own in dealings with his neighbor or his own children who suffer as a result he should, because of this, not persist in his rebuke nor linger in his anger but make an end and not retain ire for ever. This applies even where such anger is permissible: for instance, in the case expounded by the Rabbis on the verse: 'When You see the ass of your enemy...', they explain that this enmity refers to the man who sees his neighbor commit a sin but when there is no other person present so that he cannot be testified against in a Court of Law. In this case it is permitted to hate the sinner for the offence he has committed but, nonetheless, the Torah says: '**AZOBH TA'AZOBH 'IMMO** ('You shall surely help him'), explained by the Rabbis to mean: 'You shall leave aside that which is in thy heart.' It is a religious duty to encourage him lovingly, and, perhaps, this way of dealing with him will succeed. This is the very quality of which he have spoken: 'He retains not His anger forever.'

VI Because He delights in Mercy

Behold I have already explained elsewhere that there are angels in a certain celestial palace whose function it is to receive the kindness done by man and when the divine quality of justice please against Israel these angels immediately bring that kindness to the notice of the Holy One, Blessed is He, Who has mercy upon Israel, for He delights in mercy. Even when they are guilty He has mercy upon them if they are kind to one another. As it was in the time of the destruction of the Temple when Gabriel was told: 'Go in between the wheelwork..' For Gabriel is the prince of justice and power and permission was given him to receive the power of justice from between the wheelwork from under the cherubim from the fire of the altar - namely, the judgment of the power of Sovereignty- so that the force of judgment became so strong that it sought to destroy utterly, to exterminate the germ of Israel, for they were deserving of annihilation. But it is written: And there appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings.' That is, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Gabriel]:

'They do kindness one to another so that even if they are guilty they shall be spared and have a remnant.' The reason is because He delights in mercy. He delights in the mercy which Israel does one to the other and remembers this aspect even when they are guilty from another point of view. It is fitting, therefore, that man make this quality his own. Even when he is offended or

provoked, if the offender has his good points in that he is kind to others or he possesses some other good quality this should be sufficient to soothe his anger so that his heart is pleased with him and he delights in the kindness he does. And he should say: 'It is enough for me that he possesses this good quality.' How much more so with regard to one's wife, as the Rabbi's say: 'It is enough that they rear our children and save us from sin.' So he should say with regard to all men: 'It is enough for me that he has shown me or another man kindness or that he possesses this particular good quality.' And he should delight in mercy.

VII He Will Again Have Compassion Upon Us

The Holy One, Blessed is He, does not behave as a human being behaves. When the latter has been provoked he cannot bring himself to love as formerly the one who offended him, even when he has been appeased. But in G-d's sight the repentant sinner has a higher status than the man who has never sinned. This is the meaning of the Rabbinic teaching that in the place where the penitent stands the perfectly righteous cannot stand. The reason for this has been expounded by the Rabbi's in the chapter 'He Who Builds' where it is stated that the letter He is shaped like an exedra so that whomsoever wishes to go astray may do so. That is to say, the world was created by means of the letter He and the Holy One, Blessed is He, created the world wide open in the direction of sin and evil. As the exedra, the world is not fully enclosed but is broken open towards the direction of evil. Consequently, he who wishes to go astray need not turn in those directions where there is no sin and iniquity by which to enter in the province of the Outside Ones. But the He is open at the top left-hand corner so that if the sinner repents he can be received back there. Upon which the Talmud asks: 'And why should he not re-enter by the same way as he went out?' and the reply is give: 'This will have no effect,' meaning that the repentant sinner cannot be content to be fenced around from sinning as are the perfectly righteous. For a slight fence is sufficient to act as a barrier against sin for those who have not sinned. But such a barrier will not suffice for the penitent. He requires new and difficult fences. For the slight fence has been broken through and if he tries to draw near in that direction his evil inclination will find it easy to tempt him. He needs to be very far removed from sin. Consequently, he cannot enter at the opening of the exedra where it is breached. He must ascend to enter through the narrow opening, tormenting and mortifying himself until the breaches have been healed. This is why the righteous cannot stand in the place of the penitents. For the latter have not entered by the door of the righteous, but they have tormented themselves, ascending through the upper door. They have far deeper mortified and separated themselves from sin than have the righteous. They have therefore ascended until they stand in the spiritual degree of He - namely, the fifth palace of the Garden of Eden which is the roof of the He, while the righteous have entered at the opening of the He at the entrance to the exedra.

Consequently, then man repents - and this means that he restores the He to its proper place - he does not return only to G-d's former love but that love is increased more and more. This is the

meaning of: **He will again have compassion upon us:** that He will increase His mercies towards Israel and perfect them and draw them near to Him.

This is how man should behave towards his neighbor. He should not feed hatred from his former anger but when he sees that his neighbor wants to love him he should show him a greater degree of kindness and love than formerly. He should say: 'Behold he is to be compared to the penitents in whose place the perfectly righteous cannot stand.' And he should encourage him to a far greater degree than those who are perfectly righteous, namely, those who have not offended him.

VIII **He will subdue our Iniquities**

Behold, the Holy One, Blessed is He, behaves in this way towards Israel. For, behold, the divine precepts are 'and as it was budding its blossoms shot forth,' shooting up without limit to enter His blessed Presence. Sins, however have no entrance there, G-d forefend, but He subdues them so that they cannot enter. As it is written: 'Evil shall not sojourn with Thee ' - evil cannot dwell in Thy dwelling place. If this is so then sin does not enter into the inmost Presence. This is why there is no reward in this world for the carrying out of a good deed, for good deeds are in His Presence and how then can He give from the spiritual reward that is in His Presence in a material world? Behold, the whole world is not worthy of a single good deed and its spiritual bliss.

For this reason, too, He does not accept the bribe of good deeds. For instance, the Holy One, Blessed is He, does not say: 'He has done forty good deeds and committed ten sins. The ten cancel each other out leaving thirty good deeds,' G-d forefend. But even the perfectly righteous man who commits a single sin is seen in the eyes of G-d as one who burns the whole Torah until his debt is paid, after which he will receive the reward of all his good deeds. This is a great kindness which the Holy One, Blessed is He, gives to the righteous: that He does not deduct the good deeds, for these are very precious, ascending to His blessed Presence. How then can He deduct them because of the sins a man commits? For the desert of sin is from the portion of Hell, from that which is despicable. And the reward of good deeds is from the esteemed glory of the **Shekhinah**. How then can these be deducted for these? But the Holy One, Blessed is He, claims the debt of the sins and gives reward for all the good deeds.

This is the meaning of: **He will subdue our iniquities**, that the sins do not prevail in His Presence as the good deeds prevail, but He subdues them so that they do not ascend and do not enter. Although His Providence extends over all the ways of man, both good and evil, He, nonetheless, does not subdue the good but it blossoms upwards exceedingly and good deed is added to good deed until an edifice is built out of them and an honorable robe. But sins do not possess this property; but He subdues them, that they should not have this success not entry into the innermost Presence.

This quality, too, a man should make his own; not to subdue the good his neighbor had done and to remember the evil he has done. On the contrary, he should subdue evil, forget it and reject it so that evil does not dwell within him. But the good his neighbor had done should always be arraigned before him and he should remember this good so that it prevails over all the deeds his neighbor has done. And he should not deduct in his heart, saying: "If he has done good to me he has also behaved badly to me," so that the good is forgotten. He should not do this, but with regard to the evil his neighbor has done to him he should allow himself to be appeased in every possible way. But the good should never be removed from his sight and he should hide himself from the bad as far as he possibly can, just as the Holy One, Blessed is He, subdues iniquity, as I have explained.

IX And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea

This is a good quality of the Holy One, Blessed is He. For, behold, when Israel sinned He delivered them into the hands of Pharaoh. But when they repented why should Pharaoh have been punished, or Sancherib, or Haman, and the others? The Holy One, Blessed is He, is not content with saying: 'Because they have repented, no more evil will befall them but Haman or Pharaoh or Sancherib will be removed from them.' This does not suffice, but the toil of Haman reverts on to his own head and so with Pharaoh and so with Sancherib. The reason for this type of Providence is in accordance with the secret of: "**And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities to a land which is cut off.**" The meaning is that the goat actually bears their sins. Now, this is very hard to understand. Shall the goat bear if Israel has sinned? But the idea here is: man confesses his sin, his intention in confessing being to purify himself. As David said: 'Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity.' So, too, our prayer: 'Purge the sins away in your abiding compassion.' He prays that the punishment be a light one only so that it should not interfere with his study of the Torah. Therefore, the prayer continues: 'Though not by sore affliction.' This is his intention, too, when he says: 'But You are just with regard to all which comes to me.' He actually welcomes suffering, in order to find atonement; for there are sins which only suffering or death can purge. And so it is ordained. The Zohar ha Kaddosh Pekude explains that, following on his confession, the sins become a portion of Sama'el like the goat. What is this portion? That the Holy One, Blessed is He, decrees suffering upon the repentant sinner, upon which Sama'el immediately appears to claim his debt. So that Israel becomes pure because the goat bears their sins, for the Holy One, Blessed is He, gives him permission to claim his debt. Blessed is He, gives him permission to claim his debt. And the reason is that the Holy One, Blessed is He, had so decreed in His world that he who does so loses his identity. This is why Scripture says: 'And the animal shall be killed' So, too, with regard to the stone with which the command to stone the criminal is carried out and the sword by which an execution is performed. These have to be buried to nullify their existence and their power, after justice has been meted out.

In the very same way we must understand the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's image, Israel had been delivered into the hands of the Babylonian king - 'Its head was of gold.' That head was smitten

and they were delivered into the hands of the Persians, who were: 'Its breasts and arms of silver.' And so kingdom is dispossessed by kingdom, until Israel will be at the feet of the image - 'part of iron and part of clay.' What will be the final good? Eventually, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will set them up and execute judgment upon them. As it is written: 'I will spend. Mine arrows upon them' - 'Mine arrows will be spent but Israel will not be spent.' 'Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold.' Behold, at first it is written: 'which smote the image upon its feet'- noting was left of the image except its feet, for the head, shoulders and belly had been removed and their power destroyed. And yet at the end 'the were broken in pieces together ' For the Holy One, Blessed is He, is destined to resurrect Sama'el and the wicked who behave as he does and He will execute judgment upon them. This is the meaning of: **And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.** That is: Thou wilt cast the power of Judgment so that it falls upon so that it falls upon those who are described as 'the depths of the sea'- 'But the wicked are like the troubled sea: For it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt.' These are the wicked who carry out judgment upon Israel and whose dealings will return upon their own heads. The reason for this is that when Israel is punished the Holy One, Blessed is He, repents for what has happened before and He makes demands on behalf of their shame. And not only this but: 'I was but a little wrath and they helped for evil.'

This quality a man should make his own. Even if his neighbor is crushed through suffering as a result of his sins he should not be hated, for 'after he has been disgraced, he is as thy brother.' He should welcome those who suffer and are punished and have mercy upon them. On the contrary, he should save them from their enemies and should not say: 'His sufferings are the result of his sins' but he should have compassion upon him according to this quality, as I have explained.

X You will show truth to Yaakov

This quality means that the name Israel refers to a special excellence. But the average persons who do not go beyond the letter of the law are called Yaakov, for they conduct themselves only in accordance with the truth. The Holy One, Blessed is He, possesses a quality of truth which accords with strict justice and uprightness. For those who conduct themselves in accordance with the truth the Holy One, Blessed is He, has compassion in truth and uprightness. A man, too, should behave in truth and uprightness to his neighbor, without perverting justice. He should have compassion on his neighbor in truth just as the Holy One, Blessed is He, has compassion on those of His creatures who are no more than average, to perfect them in accordance with the quality of truth.

XI Mercy to Abraham

These are the ones who go beyond the letter of the law as did Abraham, our father. The Holy One, Blessed is He, too, behaves towards them beyond the letter of the law. He does not invoke

the power of justice, not does He behave towards them in a strict uprightness alone, but He goes beyond the letter of the law, as they do. This is **Mercy to Abraham**. The Holy One, Blessed is He, behaves with the quality of mercy with those who behave as did Abraham.

This quality a man should make his own. Although he should conduct himself with righteousness, justice and uprightness to all men, he should go beyond the letter of the law when dealing with the good and saintly. If he is only a little patient with other men he should be exceedingly patient with these and show compassion to them, going beyond the letter of the law he follows with regard to other men. These should be especially important to him and exceedingly beloved and they should be his friends.

XII As Thou has sworn unto our fathers

There are people who are unworthy and yet the Holy One, Blessed is He, has mercy upon them. The Gemara explains the verse: 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious' as that the Holy One, Blessed is He, says: 'This storehouse is for those who are unworthy ' There is a storehouse of grace from which the Holy One, Blessed is He, gives them an unearned gift. For the Holy One, Blessed is He, says: 'Behold they possess the merit of the fathers. I have made an oath to the Patriarchs, therefore even if they are not worthy they shall receive their reward because they are the seed of the Patriarchs, therefore, even if they are not worthy they shall receive their reward because they are the seed of the Patriarchs to whom I have sworn. I will lead them, therefore, and direct them until they improve.'

So, too, should a man behave. Even when he meets with the wicked he should not behave cruelly towards them nor insult them but have mercy upon them saying: 'Even so, they are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Yaakov. If they are not worthy their fathers were worthy and upright and he who brings disgrace upon the children brings disgrace upon the fathers and I have no wish that the fathers be despised through me.' And he should conceal their shame and improve them as much as is in his power.

XIII From the days of old

This is a quality which the Holy One, Blessed is He, possesses with regard to Israel. When, for instance, the merit of the fathers has come to an end and they are unworthy in themselves what does He do? It is written: I remember for thee the affection of thy youth, The love of of thine espousals.' The Holy One, Blessed is He, actually recalls all the good deeds they have done from the day of their birth and all the good qualities with which the Holy One, Blessed is He, controls the world. From all these He creates a special property with which to show mercy to them. This quality embraces all others as the 'Idra explains.

So, too, should a man behave. Even when he cannot discover any plea such as those mentioned he should still say: 'Behold there was a time when they had not sinned. And in that time or in former days they were worthy.' And he should recall the good they have done in their youth and remember the love of 'them that are weaned from the milk, Them that are drawn from the breasts.' In this way no man will be found an unworthy recipient of goodness nor unworthy to be prayed for and to have mercy shown to him.

Until now, we have expounded the thirteen qualities by which man resembles his Creator. These are the qualities of higher mercy and their special property is that just as man conducts himself here below so will he be worthy of opening that higher quality from above. As he behaves, so will be the affluence from above and he will cause that quality to shine upon earth. Therefore, let not these thirteen qualities depart from the eyes of the mind and let not the verse depart from the mouth, so that it be a permanent reminder. And whenever there is the opportunity of exercising one of these qualities one will remember, saying to oneself: 'Behold, this depends on this particular quality. I shall not depart from it, so that the quality may not be hidden and depart from the world.'