

Justice and Mercy

Torah

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 (*rachum*) and gracious (*chanun*), slow to anger (*erech apayim*), abounding in kindness (*chesed*) and faithfulness (*emet*), extending kindness (*chesed*) to the thousandth generation, forgiving (*noseh*) iniquity (*avon*), transgression (*pesha*), and sin (*chet*); yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity (*avon*) of 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 (*salachta*) our iniquity (*la’avonenu*) and our sin (*ulchatatenu*), and take us for Your own!”

Exodus 34.5-7 JPS

“Know therefore that only the LORD your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps his covenant and mercy to the thousandth generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments but who instantly requites with destruction those who reject Him, never slow with those who reject Him, but requiting them instantly.” Deuteronomy 7:9-10

Prophets

With the loyal [merciful], You deal loyally [mercifully], With the blameless hero, blamelessly. With the pure, you act in purity, And with the perverse, you are wily.

II Samuel 22:26-27

God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out. This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. 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 God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please, Lord, take my life, for I would rather die than live.”

Jonah 3:10 -4:3

With what shall I come before the Lord,
 and bow myself before God on high?
 Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
 with calves a year old?
 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
 with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
 Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
 the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
 And what does the Lord require of you
 But to do justice, and to love mercy [chesed],
 And to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6.6-8

Writings

All the Lord's paths are mercy [chesed] and faithfulness [emet] for those who keep the decrees of His covenant.

Psalm 25:10

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy [chesed]. The LORD is good to all, and His compassion is upon all His works.

Psalm 145:8-9

“Be like Me; as I repay good for evil, so do you repay good for evil.”

Exodus Rabbah 26.2, A. Cohen trans.

Talmud

During three hours of each day God sits and judges the whole world. When God sees that the world is deserving of being destroyed because of the prevalent evil, God arises from the throne of justice and sits upon the throne of mercy.

Avodah Zara 3b, A. Cohen trans.

“This is my God and I will adorn Him” (Exod. 15.2). Is it, then, possible to adorn God? Yes, by resembling him; as he is compassionate and gracious, be also compassionate and gracious.

Mechirah 37a, A. Cohen, trans.

Though nine hundred and ninety-nine angels attest for a man’s conviction and only one angel attests for his defense, the Holy One, blessed be he, inclines the scales in his favor.

Kiddushin 61d, A. Cohen trans.

Not like the attribute of the Holy One, blessed be he, is the attribute of man. When a man is conquered he grieves; when the Holy One, blessed be he, is conquered, so that he averts his wrath and can display mercy, he rejoices.

Pesachim 119a, A. Cohen trans.

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart" (Lev. 19.17)--it is possible to think that (all the Torah requires is) you should not curse him or smite him or slap his face; therefore the text adds "in thy heart," the intention being to forbid hatred which is in the heart.

(Sifra., in Cohen, 49, p. 215)

Judah ben Tabbai said:[When you are a judge] don’t play the advocate’s role. When the litigants stand before you, let them appear to you equally culpable. When they leave you, having accepted judgment, let them look equally blameless to you.

Pirke Avot 1.8

Don’t judge your fellow human being until you have reached that person’s place. [Hillel]

Pirke Avot 2.4

There were ten generations from Adam to Noah to prove the patience of God. Although all those generations provoked God, only then did God bring the Flood upon them.

Pirke Avot 5.2

Midrash

“These are the generations of the heaven and earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.” (Gen. 2.4)It may be likened to a king who had empty vessels. The king said, “If I put hot water into them they will crack; if I put icy cold water into them they

will contract.” What did the king do? He mixed the hot with the cold and poured the mixture into the vessels, and they endured. Similarly said the Holy One, blessed be He, “If I create the world only with the attribute of mercy, sins will multiply beyond all bounds; if I create it only with the attribute of justice, how can the world last? Behold, I will create it with both attributes; would that it might endure!”

Genesis Rabbah 12.15, A. Cohen trans.

To walk in all his ways (Deut. 11.22)—i.e. the characteristics of the Holy One, blessed be he as it is said, “The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Exod. 34.6); and it is said, “Whosoever shall be called by the name of the Lord shall be delivered” (Joel 2.32). But how is it possible for a man to be called by the name of the Holy One, blessed be he? As the All-present is called compassionate and gracious, so be you also compassionate and gracious, and offering free gifts to all. As the Holy One, blessed be he, is called righteous (Ps. cslv.17), be you also righteous; as he is called loving (ibid.), be you also loving.”

Sifre Deuteronomy 49:85a, A. Cohen trans.