

Elul 2022

Week 1 Primary Source Text

Tomer Devorah, Ch. 1

הָאָדָם רָאוּי שְׁיִתְדַמֶּה לְקוֹנוֹ וְאֵז יִהְיֶה בְּסוֹד הַצּוּרָה הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה צֶלֶם וְדְמוּת, שְׂאֵלוֹ יִדְמָה בְּגוֹפוֹ וְלֹא בְּפַעֲלוֹת הָרִי הוּא מְכַזֵּב הַצּוּרָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ עָלָיו צוּרָה נָאָה וּמַעֲשִׂים כְּעוֹרִים. שְׁהָרִי עֵיקַר הַצֶּלֶם וְהַדְּמוּת הָעֲלִיּוֹן הֵן פְּעֻלוֹתָיו, וּמֵה יוֹעִיל לוֹ הַיּוֹתוֹ כְּצוּרָה הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה דְמוּת תְּבִנִית אֲבָרָיו וּבְפַעֲלוֹת לֹא יִתְדַמֶּה לְקוֹנוֹ. לְפִיכָךְ רָאוּי שְׁיִתְדַמֶּה אֶל פְּעֻלוֹת הַכֶּתֶר שֶׁהֵן י"ג מִדּוֹת שֶׁל רַחֲמִים עֲלִיּוֹנוֹת. וְרִמּוּזוֹת בְּסוֹד הַפְּסוּקִים (מִיכָה ז) מִי אֵל כְּמוֹךָ. יְשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנִי. תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת. אִם כֵּן רָאוּי שְׁתִּמְצָאָנָה בּוֹ י"ג מִדּוֹת אֱלֹהִים. וְעִכְשָׁו נִפְרַשׁ אוֹתָן הַפְּעֻלוֹת י"ג שֶׁרָאוּי שְׁתִּהְיֶינָה בּוֹ.

It is fitting for a person to resemble their Creator and in so doing be considered in the secret [sod¹] of the Highest Form, [both] in image and likeness. For if a person is similar in body but not in one's actions, they (one's actions) deceive the Form [tzura]; and they will say about such a person, "A lovely form, but ugly deeds." As behold, the essence of the Highest Image and Likeness is [God's] actions. And what will it benefit a person to have the structure of one's limbs be similar to the Highest Form, but not resemble the Creator in one's actions? Therefore, it is fitting that one [ensures their actions] resemble the actions of the Crown [Keter], which are the thirteen highest traits of compassion [rachamim]. And they are hinted to in the secret [sod] of the verses (Micha 7:18-20), [beginning with the following phrases:] "Who is a power like You;" "He will takes us back with compassion." "You will give truth to Jacob." If so, it is fitting that these thirteen traits [also] be found in a person. And now we will explain the thirteen [categories of] actions that are fitting to be with a human being.

Michah 7:18-20

מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ נִשְׂא עוֹן וְעִבֵּר עַל־פְּשָׁע לְשִׂאֲרֵית נִחְלָתוֹ לֹא־הִחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוּ כִי־חָפַץ חַסְדֵּךָ הוּא

Who is a God like You,
Forgiving iniquity
And remitting transgression;
Against the remnant of His people,

¹ A Kabbalistic term, referring to a principle or foundation of Kabbalistic theology.

[God] has not maintained wrath forever
Because He loves graciousness!

יְשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלַח בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם כָּל־חַטָּאוֹתֵם

He will take us back with compassion;
He will cover up our iniquities,
And will hurl all their sins into the depths of the sea.

תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתֵּינוּ מִיְמֵי קֶדֶם

You will give truth to Jacob,
Lovingkindness to Abraham,
As You promised on oath to our ancestors
In days gone by.

Study Questions:

1. According to Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (RaMaK) in this text, why should a person grow in their *middot*? How would you define *middot tovo*t – positive traits?
2. Why should one's actions reflect *middot tovo*t? Does the intention mentioned here resonate with you? Why or why not?
3. In what way do you see a person's true nature being defined by their actions?
4. What does it mean to be created *b'Tzelem Elokim*, in God's Likeness? How might an awareness that you are created in God's Likeness inform your spiritual path?
5. How can these lessons inform your Elul focus and preparation for the High Holidays?