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4th Year Practicum Iyyun:
The 13 Attributes of G-d (Shelosh Esrei Midot)

The Kol Nidre service is expansive, containing far more liturgy than I can recite in this limited, 60-minute period. This forced me to think critically about which liturgy I felt was most important to present and emphasize. The Reform approach to condensing liturgy often begins with eliminating repetition. Thus, as the 13-Attributes of G-d—Shelosh Esrei Midot—are reiterated 4 times in this section of the Erev Yom Kippur service, one might expect that I would only choose to recite them once. I, however, very deliberately chose to include all 4 repetitions of the prayer. In my mind, a practicum is not only meant to serve as a sampling platter providing a small taste or flavor for every prayer, it is also meant to convey the essential intent and overarching themes of the text. In my perspective, enumerating G-d's attributes is the core of this service and is precisely why "Adonai Adonai" is sung so many times.

You might believe that the focus of Yom Kippur is self-reflection and repentance—and you're not wrong—but this view is somewhat narrow. This perspective on YK neglects to focus upon the party we have wronged and are appealing to: in this case, G-d. Furthermore, our incentives for repenting must be more than mere self-preservation. One does not desire forgiveness from someone they do not respect or want to keep in their lives. Repentance occurs when we truly desire the love and companionship of the party we have wronged. Repentance is both a means of redeeming and improving ourselves and also maintaining the bond and respect of our relationships.

So, what qualities do people most admire and look for in others, and are these traits that G-d exemplifies? In a friend, mentor, or partner, I look for compassion, trust, understanding, but—perhaps most importantly—also someone who challenges me to become a better version of myself.

Jewish liturgy imagines an anthropomorphized G-d. The irony is that while we are told that people are "created in the image of G-d", we in fact have created G-d in our image. For so many, the best way to conceive of a divine entity is to have it reflect what is tangible and known.

As such, our liturgy tells us that G-d is patient, slow to anger in order to give people ample time to reflect upon their actions, is honest and true to his word, does not tempt people towards wrongdoing, remembers the best in people and allows that to overpower the negative. G-d's most notable attribute, however, is that he is merciful towards sinners.

Although there are "13" attributes designated to G-d's character, the majority of these attributes are merely permutations of "mercy". We specify that G-d is merciful to ALL types of sinners: those who sin and are likely to sin again in the future, to those who are not deserving of his mercy, to people who are mediocre in character, giving them the benefit of the doubt, those who sin because it is "in their nature", those who sin for the sole purpose of

provoking or hurting G-d out of spite, and those who sin unintentionally, out of ignorance or thoughtlessness.

This last one really sticks with me, because it reminds me of a quote my brother taught me growing up: "Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity" (Robert J. Hanlon). When I first heard it, I had to process for a moment, so here's our collective moment to comprehend....we should never assume that someone has wronged us intentionally, always give people the benefit of the doubt. The world does not revolve around us. Rather than being upset that that person cut you off in traffic, suppose they didn't see you: a dangerously bad driver perhaps, but not a rude, aggressive stranger. They didn't respond to your text? They're having anxiety about their upcoming practicum and are not focused on their phone. Though telling myself this does not necessarily mean it's true, it nonetheless provides me with a glass-half-full perspective on my interpersonal relationships.

On Yom Kippur, while we take time to view ourselves honestly and critically, attempt to make reparations, and change for the better, we take comfort in knowing that we are made in G-d's likeness and that if we have the capacity to forgive so too will G-d be forgiving.

In this practicum I repeat G-d's 13 attributes 4 times, each with a different musical setting. My intention is that everyone will be able to find one setting that resonates with them. This connection can represent the reflection of Divine attributes we try to see and emulate in ourselves.