

God's Justice

Upon setting out to create the world, God thought: If I create the world through My attribute of mercy, then sinners will be plentiful; if I create the world through My attribute of justice, then how will the world endure? I will create the world with a mixture of both attributes and hope that it will be able to endure.

—MIDRASH
GENESIS RABBAH

Human Justice

The words in Scripture “justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20) were interpreted in the following way by the Hasidic master Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin: When you believe that you are wholly just and need not strive further, then justice cannot be ascribed to you. You must constantly pursue justice and never stand still; and in your own eyes, you must always be like a newborn child who has not yet achieved anything at all—that is truly the pursuit of justice.

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We recite each line and the leader repeats it.

And so, let all crown You, Sovereign,
the ultimate arbiter of justice,

who probes all hearts on the Day of Judgment,
and reveals what is hidden, with justice;

*who is the voice of truth on the Day of Judgment,
and pronounces rules of justice;*

who is wise and acts lovingly on the Day of Judgment,
and remembers the covenant, while dispensing justice;

*who has compassion for all creation on the Day of Judgment,
and purifies the faithful with justice;*

who knows our thoughts on the Day of Judgment,
and overcomes anger with justice;

*who is clothed in righteousness on the Day of Judgment,
and whose forgiveness of wrongdoing is a hallmark of justice;*

who is revered in praises on the Day of Judgment,
and exonerates us as an exercise of justice;

*who responds to those who cry out on the Day of Judgment,
and demonstrates mercy in justice;*

who discerns all mysteries on the Day of Judgment,
and holds close those who serve God with justice;

*who has compassion for the people Israel on the
Day of Judgment,*

and guards those who love God, with justice;

and who upholds those who trust wholeheartedly in the Divine,
on the Day of Judgment.

*L'vokhein l'avot b'yom din l'goleh amukkot ba-din.
L'doveir meisharim b'yom din l'hogeh dei-ot ba-din.
L'vatik v'oseh hesed b'yom din l'zokheir b'rityo ba-din.
L'homeil ma-asav b'yom din l'taheir hosav ba-din.
L'yodei-a mahashavot b'yom din l'khaveish ka-aso ba-din.
L'loveish tz'dakot b'yom din l'moheil avonot ba-din.
L'nora t'hilot b'yom din l'solei-ah la-amusav ba-din.
L'oneh l'kor'av b'yom din l'fo-eil rahamav ba-din.
L'tzofeh nistarot b'yom din l'koneh avadav ba-din.
L'raheim ammo b'yom din l'shomeir ohavav ba-din.
L'tomeikh t'mimav b'yom din.*

We recite each line and the leader repeats it.

וְבָכַן לָךְ הַכֵּל יִכְתִּירוּ
לְאֵל עוֹרֵךְ דִּין
לְבוֹחוֹן לְכָבוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְדוֹבֵר מִיִּשְׁרִים בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְוִתִּיק וְעוֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְחוֹמֵל מֵעֲשָׂיו בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְיוֹדֵעַ מַחְשָׁבוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְלוֹבֵשׁ צְדָקוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְנוֹרָא תְהִלּוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְעוֹנָה לְקוֹרְאָיו בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְצוֹפֵה נִסְתָּרוֹת בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְרַחֵם עָמּוֹ בְּיוֹם דִּין,
לְתוֹמֵךְ תְּמִימָיו בְּיוֹם דִּין.

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ARBITER OF JUSTICE עוֹרֵךְ דִּין. This short *piyyut* by Elazar Kallir (the Land of Israel, 5th–6th century) contains the first enunciation in the liturgy of the major High Holy Day theme of God as the judge of the world.

VOICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS לְדוֹבֵר מִיִּשְׁרִים Isaiah 33:15, where the phrase refers to a righteous person (and not God). In the mind of the poet, righteous behavior is godly behavior.

WHO IS WISE AND ACTS LOVINGLY ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT לְוִתִּיק וְעוֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד. The Hebrew word *din*, translated here as “judgment” or “justice” depending on the context, is one of the most heavily weighted words in the

Jewish tradition. It usually connotes God’s quality of strict judgment and the insistence on holding us to high standards of behavior. Indeed, this *piyyut* begins with an imposing, even intimidating tone, but soon the theme of God’s compassion enters. God’s judgment is then depicted as tempered with love and therefore redemptive.

WHO REMEMBERS THE COVENANT WHILE DISPENSING JUSTICE לְזוֹכֵר בְּרִיתוֹ בְּדִין. In the Book of Exodus, when God is enraged at the people Israel after the golden calf episode and declares an intention to destroy them, Moses reminds God of the covenant that God had established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and God relents (Exodus 32:13). Thus, reminding God of the covenant supports the argument that the people Israel must be judged for life in the coming year.

EXONERATES US לְסוֹלֵחַ לְעַמּוֹסָיו. Literally, “forgives the carried ones.” This is a reference to Isaiah 46:3, which uses a maternal image to describe God’s relationship with Israel (“carried since the womb”).

HOLDS CLOSE THOSE WHO SERVE GOD WITH JUSTICE לְקוֹנֵה עֲבָדָיו בְּדִין. More literally, “who acquires servants via justice.” When we act justly, we serve the Divine.