

*For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Luke 7:1-2*

In this passage about the "measure you use," Jesus is using a classic rabbinic form of reasoning called *midah keneged midah* (mee-dah kah-NEG-ed mee-dah) - literally meaning, "measure corresponding to measure." This idea comes up throughout the Old Testament and is found in the words of Jesus as well as Paul. Understanding this expression and the logic behind it can give us insight on Jesus' words, with implications for how we should live.

The rabbis from before Jesus' time noticed that there was a pattern throughout the Scriptures that described how God dealt with sin, in that the consequences often fit the crime. Several places it says so explicitly:

*Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son." Exodus 4:22-23*

*Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. Exodus 22:22-24*

The concept that a person receives the effects of their sin back on themselves as punishment is understood to be a basic principle of God's kind of justice. It is fascinating to see how often this pattern is found in many other accounts, woven subtly into a story. For instance:

- Jacob deceived his father Isaac into giving him the birthright by substituting himself for his brother, taking advantage of his father's blindness. In the same way, he was tricked when Leah was substituted for her sister on his wedding night and he couldn't see her! Genesis 27; 29:23-25
- Haman was angry with Mordechai for not bowing down to him and he built a gallows to have him hanged. He ended up being forced to lead Mordechai on a horse to honor him, and being hanged on his own gallows! Esther 5:9,14; 6:11, 7:10

We might call this "poetic justice," but when we realize that it is really taking place, we see that the events aren't random, they are being controlled by God.

In the story of Jacob, it shows us that God didn't condone Jacob's deceitfulness, but let him suffer the consequences of a sin much like what he himself committed.

In Galatians 6:7-8, Paul also talks about paying the consequences for the choices we make:

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

We know that much of the time this is true – if we're dishonest, we'll get caught by our own lies, or if we are hateful, we'll find ourselves being hated too. It's true that generally, what goes around, comes around in this life.

So it might be tempting to assume that all problems in this life come from *midah keneged midah* – God is giving us our just deserts for some sin in the past. However, both the Old and New Testaments disagree with this.

In fact, the Scriptures flip the idea of *midah keneged midah* on its head sometimes. Take the case of the poor person coming to us for help, we might refuse help because he got into trouble from his own bad choices.

But the Scriptures say:

*He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor, Will also cry himself and not be answered. Proverbs 21:13*

We shouldn't be hard on those who are suffering, even if it is because of their own sins. We all are sinners, and God does not deal with us as we deserve. We should help those who don't deserve it because God helps us when we don't deserve it.

*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Luke 6:37-38*

Edited from an article by Lois Tverberg, Measure for Measure