

# Measure for Measure

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Commenting on this verse, **“When a man from among you (Mikem) brings an offering to HaShem.”** (Lev. 1:2), HaRav Yosef Hayim of Baghdad writes in his book, Ben Ish Hai Derashot, the following.

*“The word “Mikem” (from among you) appears to be superfluous... Yet, it appears to me, with the help of Heaven that it is written, “And You HaShem are merciful for You reward each man according to his actions” (Psalm 62:13). Earlier Rabbis have interpreted this verse in the [following] way.*

*As we know there are a number of things forbidden to us. Yet, the evil inclination instructs man to regard them as permitted, and [thus] we fail to recognize [them]. Now how can one repent and express sorrow over one’s sins all the while when one is unaware of them? Thus does HaShem act towards us with mercy. He sends to us sufferings corresponding to that, which we have blemished, Midah K’neged Midah (measure for measure). By this does one come to realize his blemish, when he sees that sufferings have befallen him, of a similar nature to that which he blemished. Then will he realize that he committed a specific sin, and will repent and thus be healed.*

*This is why it is written, “And You HaShem are merciful” this so as to enlighten man’s heart which is oblivious to that which he lacks. For HaShem compensates the man with punishment and sufferings according to his blemished actions, measure for measure. Thus when a man sees that sufferings have come upon him, measure for measure, he becomes aware of his lack and blemish and does teshuva, showing regret for what he has done. (Up until here are the words of the earlier Rabbis).*

*We thus find that HaShem acts with man measure for measure. In this way can a man draw close to the Holy One, Blessed Be He. The evil inclination is thus not able to push one away by causing him to stumble over some forbidden act, making him think it permissible and thus causing his fall.*

*This is why [the above verse] says, “When a man from among you (Mikem).” The word Mikem (spelled Mem Kaf Mem) is the Reshei Tevot (capital letters) of Midah K’neged Midah (measure for measure).*

*This is the reason for the measure for measure rule, that one should not lack knowledge; rather one should continuously draw close to his heart and look therein. With this then there will be hope that the man himself will be the Korban (sacrifice) to HaShem, meaning that he will always be close (Karov) to HaShem and have the fear of G-d in his heart. Then the evil inclination will not be able to push him down or cast him away by making him think that the forbidden is (G-d forbid) permissible.”*

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen, in his Sefer Pri Tzadik (Parashat Vayikra) asks the following question; being that our holy Torah is eternal and applicable for all times, how then do we apply these lessons about korbanot (Temple sacrifices) to us today?



Rabbi Moshe Haim Luzzato (the RaMHaL) in his Derekh HaShem explains in detail (the Kabbalistic principles found in the Zohar) that our physical world is merely but a reflection of higher dimensional planes, which we religiously refer to as the spiritual realms. While many of us accept the existence of these realms as a definite matter of our faith in Torah and the Sages, nonetheless, there has arisen among us so-called “religious/Orthodox” Jews who, for whatever reasons, tend to doubt the realities of spiritual existence. While many will not admit to holding such views, nonetheless, many certainly act as if they do.

We must understand that when the mystic, be it a Kabbalist or Hasid speaks about the spiritual worlds, he is not referring to some “other places” out there somewhere beyond the Hubble Telescope. No, the spiritual worlds are clearly described by the Ba'al Shem Tov (SBST Va'ethanan 69) as being the realms inside of man (accessed by the meditating mind). Thus, the spiritual worlds of the mystic are none other than the realms and recesses of the human mind, psyche, and soul.

Indeed, we human beings are composite entities. We are made up of different parts, all of which exist simultaneously within us, yet often in conflict with one another. According to the Kabbalists, the universe (the macrocosm) and man (the microcosm) equally are made up of four worlds. Now, within man these “worlds” are none other than the four aspects of humanity, which we can define as our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual components. **The mystical metaphors so prevalent in Kabbalistic and Hasidic literature when properly deciphered provide for us a profound understanding of human psychology. They teach us how we are to evolve (Mitaken) ourselves into higher spiritual beings.** I use the word “evolve” not to give credence to secular, anti-religious pseudo-science, but rather to accurately describe our present state and need for spiritual growth and maturity.

Rabbi Yosef Hayim, in the above section from his Sefer Ben Ish Hai, Derashot, makes clear reference to this spiritual-physical balance, with reference to the teachings of our Sages on the topic of Midah K'neged Midah (measure for measure). In modern day western society, with America at the pinnacle, we are keenly aware that there appears to be a serious lack of justice at both the levels of the individual and of society at large. We read in the headlines how some people are literally getting away with murder (and a number of other serious crimes).

It is this level of interpersonal and inter-racial hostility that motivates all manners of crimes, be they ethnic in origin or otherwise. We here in the United States are certainly not immune. Granted, Jews have been targets of anti-Semitic attacks, but large-scale violent episodes the likes of which are common in Europe are rare here. This cannot be said about other certain elements of the American community at large.

Certain groups suffer in great numbers from a variety of social ills. Yet, my intent in raising these points is not to comment on them socially or politically, but rather to remind us of the great spiritual rule: Midah K'neged Midah. In modern terminology, we might rephrase this as saying, “what goes around, comes around.” Or as it is written in Pirkei Avot, “in accordance to the effort so will be the reward.” “What you put in is what you get out - measure for measure.” We do not necessarily see this occurring, but rest assured Heaven is keeping track of the accounts and the time will indeed come, on an individual and society basis, to pay back what is due.

This is why Torah Portion Vayikra is as important to us today as it was when we had the opportunity to offer physical sacrifice in Temple times. This week's Torah Portion teaches us what is necessary for us to do in order to receive atonement from HaShem for our intentional and unintentional misdeeds. It is clearly written in Torah, why HaShem has demanded from us to shed blood as a means to compensate for our wrong actions.

*“For the soul (Nefesh) of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to atone for your souls, for the blood will atone for the soul.” (Lev. 17:11).*

I challenge any of you to draw blood, have it analyzed by the most stringent of laboratory tests and find for me the component in the blood which we can call the Nefesh soul. The soul cannot be found in a laboratory simply because the soul is not something physical that can be detected or examined under a microscope. Nonetheless, the soul is in your blood. Otherwise, you would have no soul, your blood would have no life, and you would not be alive.

Blood and soul, soul and blood, there is a definite connection. Body and soul, soul and body, there is also a definite connection here. However, the connections do not stop here. There are also connections between physical to spiritual and action to reaction. This underlying connection is ingrained as an integral law of the physics of the universe. Deny it if you wish. Chose to live in opposition to it, if you can. Yet, just as you cannot ignore the law of gravity, no matter how hard you try, so too **you will not be able to avoid the law of Midah K'neged Midah. Somehow, somewhere at some time, what we owe will catch up with us** and unless we have made other arrangements with HaKadosh Baruch Hu to pay off what we owe, He will take back from us everything that we owe due to our wayward actions, feelings, thoughts and lack of spirit.

The other arrangements to which I refer are, of course, the matters and manner of teshuva, which are so eloquently discussed in Sefer HaTanya, Igeret HaTeshuva. I recommend studying it.

HaShem, in His mercy to us, not wanting us to continue on a wanton road has placed within us the spiritual component of humanity. While theologians can debate forever what this means to them, suffice it for us to understand this as did the authentic holy Mekubalim. The spiritual component within man is the still, soft voice of HaShem that we hear within us. This is the voice of our conscience.

*“And He called”* the verse says. This is a calling to each and every one of us, to remind us that we have a delinquent account in the Bank of Heaven. We have to make arrangements to pay, or the Supernal Creditor will come and repossess that which is owed him. Thus if the soul in the blood is due and not paid, then the soul in the blood will be collected. Whether one succumbs to an illness, accident or other misfortune; these only come upon us as Heaven’s way to collect our debt.

*Barukh Hu U’Barukh Shmo* (Blessed be He, Blessed be His Name) that He revealed to us the ways and means to compensate for our delinquent spiritual accounts. Granted, we have teshuva (repentance), tzedaka (charity) and if all else fails ta’aniyot (fasting). Yet, one aspect about teshuva must be remembered, we must never return to our mistaken actions, feelings, or thoughts. **We must act out our new course and be convinced emotionally and intellectually of our new direction. If not, then teshuva will be of no avail, for indeed, no real teshuva has been performed.**

Many today believe that by giving large amounts of Tzedaka one can be saved from mishap. Indeed, it is written in the Psalms that, “Tzedaka saves from death.” Yet, for how long? In other words, if a Jew wishes to consistently violate a mitzvah of Torah whether it is to violate the Shabat or simply to speak Lashon HaRa (slandering speech), how far will the Tzedaka go to offer a shield of protection against punishment? Indeed, is the one giving the Tzedaka doing so as a subtle attempt to bribe the HaShem into forgiving his sins, and to forgo his need to perform serious teshuva?

The voice of conscience cries out to us. Yet, it is all too often drowned out by opposing voices coming from our televisions, radios, movies, and music. Thus we have only the voice of our holy Torah that stands loud and clear. This is why we have our holy Shabat; it is our island and oasis in the middle of the hostile sea of the secular urbanized world.

On Shabat, the outer voices are silenced. On Shabat, we can go to Synagogue and hear the voice of Torah (as long as everyone is sitting and listening to the reading and not missing this golden opportunity by discussing wasteful matters, such as business).

HaShem gives us so many opportunities for self-improvement and spiritual growth. The Shabat is so sacred to us, for this is the time when we can hear most clearly the Heavenly Voice. When Am Yisrael sinned with the Egel HaZahav (Golden Calf), they lost a golden opportunity. According to the Ari'zal, if Am Yisrael had not sinned with the Calf, HaShem would have made Moshe Rabbeynu, right then and there, to be Mashiah. Yet, due to our sins, Midah K'neged Midah, HaShem ordained for us the long and bitter history of humanity.

We lost the golden opportunity with the first tablets of the Ten Commandments. The second tablets were indeed different in spiritual stature from the first (*reference Sefer Da'at U'Tevunah of the Ben Ish Hai, chapter 19*). The second tablets may be called our silver opportunity. Not as precious as gold, yet precious nonetheless. More regarding this matter is best left to be discussed in the sacred halls of the yeshivot of the Mekubalim.

For us, our golden opportunity comes back to us each and every Shabat. Even Moshe Rabbeynu, whose spiritual stature was lessened by the sin of the golden calf, had that level, which he had lost, restored to him on each and every Shabat.

We too have this opportunity, if we **pay heed to the voice of Torah conscience within us**. We must perform serious teshuva internally and externally, in all areas and facets of our lives: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. We must pay back our spiritual deficit before HaShem hands over our debt to the Heavenly collectors. We know what to do and how to do it. Now all we must do is simply DO IT. As Hillel said, "if not now, then when?"