

# WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND!

*Should Israel be criticized for using “disproportionate force”?*

## **Disproportionate Force**

One of the central complaints we hear in the media against Israel is that Israel used “disproportionate force.” Yes, it’s okay for Israel to react, the media told us, but only in proportion. Instead, claim the “objective observers” from before October 7th and afterwards, Israel “ran amok” and broke all the rules.

This is actually a well-established idea. Even in the Torah, we see the concept of *midah k’neged midah*, or measure for measure—what a person gives is what they ultimately receive.

One of the most famous examples of *midah k’neged midah* is in the story of the Exodus. At the Splitting of the Sea, G-d drowned all the Egyptians in the water. But why did G-d need to bring them all the way to the sea? He could have killed them in their own homes, as He did with the Plague of the Firstborn. Rashi explains: “With water did they imagine they would destroy [the Jews], and with water they were destroyed.” Since Pharaoh had ordered every Jewish baby boy to be thrown into the Nile, attempting to wipe out the Jewish people through water, the Egyptians met their end in the water, *midah k’neged midah*.

The Plague of the Firstborn is another example from the Exodus story. In that plague, G-d specifically struck down all of Egypt’s

firstborn sons. But why the firstborn? What did they do more than the rest of the Egyptians? Why not target the youngest in each family, or the women—why specifically the firstborn?

The answer is found in the Torah itself. When G-d sends Moshe to confront Pharaoh, He instructs him to say: “This is what G-d said: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn. I say to you, ‘Send out My son so he may serve Me.’ But if you refuse, I will slay your firstborn son.’” In other words, G-d is saying, “If you harm My firstborn, I will repay you with yours.” *Midah k'neged midah*.

## **Evil Talk**

But the Exodus isn't the only place we find *midah k'neged midah* in the Torah. This principle shows up in many places.

Take the example of the *metzora*—a person with *tzara'as*, often translated as “leprosy” but actually an entirely different condition, not the modern Hansen's Disease. The Torah says that until the *metzora* is healed, he or she must live outside the camp. As it states (Vayikra 13:46), “He shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

Now, this raises a question: there are other types of impurity, but the Torah doesn't require isolation outside the camp for any of them. So why is the *metzora* singled out for this?

The answer is found in the nature of *tzara'as* itself. The condition was caused by *lashon hara*, negative speech or gossip. We learn this from the story of Miriam, who spoke critically about her brother Moshe and was afflicted with *tzara'as* as a result. Rashi explains the connection: “Why is the

*metzora* made to live alone? Because since he separated husband from wife and friend from friend with his words, he, too, shall be separated.” In other words, because he caused isolation and division among people with his gossip, he’s punished with isolation. Once again, *midah k’neged midah*—measure for measure.

But *midah k’neged midah* isn’t only about negative consequences. In fact, it’s even more powerful when it comes to rewards for good deeds. The Rebbe frequently cited the Talmudic teaching (Sotah 11a), “A good measure is always more abundant than a punitive measure.”

This principle means that when a person does good, the reward is not only fitting but is even greater than the act itself. The Torah is full of examples of people being repaid *midah k’neged midah* for their good deeds, multiplied many times over.

## **Burial for Burial for Burial**

And now, we return to this week’s Torah portion.

In this parsha, we read about the passing of our Patriarch Yaakov and how his son Yosef personally took charge of every detail of the funeral and burial, despite being the ruler of Egypt. The Mishnah tells us that because Yosef, who was greater than his 11 brothers, honored his father by taking responsibility for his burial, he was repaid measure for measure, *midah k’neged midah*. He merited that Moshe, who was even greater than him, would later take responsibility for his burial. As Rashi explains, “The measure he took to bury his father with great ceremony was the measure applied to him when he was buried with great

ceremony”—by none other than Moshe Rabbeinu.

Though Moshe had plenty of staff who could have carried Yosef’s casket, he chose to do it himself. Despite being a busy leader, Moshe honored Yosef personally, bringing Yosef’s remains out of Egypt. This act was a direct reward from Heaven to Yosef, repaying him *midah k’neged midah* for the respect he showed his own father.

But it doesn’t end there. The Mishnah goes on to explain that Moshe himself received a reward *midah k’neged midah*. Who buried Moshe Rabbeinu? The Torah tells us that it was none other than G-d Himself who handled Moshe’s burial. Rashi explains, “The measure he took to bury Yosef was the measure taken to bury him... for none but G-d Himself undertook his burial.”

In this way, we see that the principle of *midah k’neged midah* is powerfully applied not only in times of consequence but even more so in moments of honor and reward.

## **Miriam**

But we have one more positive example of *midah k’neged midah* in the Torah.

We mentioned the story of Miriam, who was punished with *tzara’as* for speaking negatively about Moshe. The Torah (Bamidbar 12:15) tells us: “Miriam was quarantined outside the camp for seven days. The people did not travel until Miriam was brought back.” Picture this: the entire nation of Israel paused and waited until Miriam could rejoin them. They could have left

her behind with a few people and continued moving; after all, it would have taken the whole nation far longer to keep stopping and starting than it would have taken Miriam to catch up later. But no—they all waited for her.

Why? Rashi explains, “This is the honor given her by G-d for the hour she waited for Moshe when he was cast into the Nile River.” When Baby Moses was placed in a basket and set afloat, Miriam stayed by the river to watch over him. Because of this, she was rewarded measure for measure, with the entire Jewish nation waiting for her.

Examples of *midah k'neged midah* like this run throughout the Torah, demonstrating that actions are met with proportional responses, whether with reward or consequence.

We see this concept today in America’s justice system. Minor infractions don’t carry extreme penalties, and serious crimes like intentional murder result in the highest penalties. This proportional response is *midah k'neged midah*.

## **In Conclusion**

So, one might ask: Why does Israel use a level of force that seems greater than what Hamas used against it? Shouldn’t there be “measure for measure”?

But those who criticize Israel’s actions misunderstand—or perhaps don’t want to understand—a simple truth: Israel isn’t interested in “punishing” Hamas, nor is it seeking revenge. Israel doesn’t thirst for vengeance. What Israel wants is clear and simple: peace, calm, and security. Israel’s goal is to end the

rocket fire and eliminate the constant threat of kidnappings and murders. This is the sole purpose behind these military actions.

That's why Israel uses the necessary force to put a stop, once and for all, to these terrible terror attacks. And, as we're seeing, in many ways, the recent efforts by the IDF are, with G-d's help, working toward that goal.

We all pray that the soldiers succeed in their missions and return home safe and sound. As King David said, "May G-d give strength to His people"—for when there is strength, "G-d will bless His people with peace." True peace is found only when there is security.