

5779

Have you ever done something, positive or negative, that came back to you later in the same form? Perhaps you helped someone when they truly needed you, and that same person was able to help you when you were in similar circumstances? Or maybe you committed a minor transgression against another person, and later found yourself suffering the same thing soon after? In rabbinic parlance, this is known as *middah keneged middah*, measure for measure. The sages believed that the actions we put into play will come back to either reward or punish us in the future.

In parshat Vayeishev this week, there is a particularly interesting case *middah keneged middah* involving Judah, one of Joseph's brothers and a son of Jacob. In fact, the episode occurs right in the middle of the longer story of Joseph, seeming to interrupt it. Here is a quick retelling of the story: Judah's son Er marries a woman by the name of Tamar; Er dies; Judah then has his second son, Onan, marry Tamar; Onan dies; Judah then promises his youngest son Shelah as a husband to Tamar, but when Shelah grows up, Judah never calls. Tamar feels cheated out of a child, disguises herself and fools Judah into conceiving that child with her himself. There is more to the story, as we'll hear on Shabbat morning, but the process of measure for measure plays out here: Judah refuses to arrange a marriage that will fulfill Tamar's right to have a child with one of Judah's sons, so he ends up becoming the father of that child himself. Having broken faith with Tamar, Judah's transgression is revisited upon him in exactly the way that he broke that faith.

Moreover, the clothing which Tamar dons is the means by which she fools Judah, just as at the beginning of the Joseph story, Judah and his brothers use Joseph's blood stained coat to fool their father Jacob into thinking Joseph has been killed. And, immediately after the Tamar incident, Joseph is accused by his master's wife of dallying with her, with his cloak as evidence of wrongdoing. In each of these episodes, a garment is the means by which someone is fooled into believing something other than the truth.

The Torah is teaching us that our actions, good or bad, will come back to us, that we should take care with our interactions with others, lest we transgress against them and end up paying for our sins in the same way that we make others pay, and that we should watch what we wear.

Shabbat shalom and Hanukkah same'akh,
Rabbi Pivo