

Now I know that G-d is the greatest of all deities; through their very plots, He rose above them. (18:11)

Yisro was overwhelmed with the miracles Hashem wrought against the Egyptians. *Rashi* explains that what impressed Pharaoh most was the *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, aspect of the punishment the Egyptians received. *Ki ba'davar asher zadu aleihem*, specifically in the very plot which they (the Egyptians) had intended for them. The Egyptians attempted to use water as the weapon of destruction. Instead, they themselves drowned in the Red Sea. In other words, it was not "simply" that Hashem punished them "any old way." No! He turned the tables on them. The water which was supposed to drown the Jews – drowned the Egyptians.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, questions *Rashi's* exposition from its source, the *Talmud Sotah* 11a. *Chazal* say: *Havah nischakmah lo*, "We must deal wisely with them." The Egyptians were plotting to do away with the *Moshiyan shel Yisrael*, the one who would be the Jews' savior. Apparently, they knew that Hashem punishes *middah k'neged middah*, deriving this from the punishment meted out to the generation of the Flood and that which was administered to the people of Sodom. They asked, "How shall we destroy him? With fire? We know that Hashem employs fire as a punishment. [So that will not work.] Shall we use the sword?" The Egyptians knew that they needed to choose a form of destruction which Hashem would not use against them. Since He is committed to punishing *middah k'neged middah*, if they would select a weapon which Hashem would not employ against them, they would be able to eradicate the savior of the Jews and not worry about repercussions. "Let us employ water. Hashem promised never again to destroy the world through the medium of water." They did not know that Hashem would not destroy the entire world with water, but an individual nation, He would destroy. Alternatively, He will not bring water against them, but they could fall into a pre-existing body of water, like the Red Sea.

This is the meaning of, *Ki badavar asher zadu aleihem*, "Specifically through the very plot which they intended for them." This is like one who is cooking a pot of hot water, and he falls into it. The pot that he was preparing became his own executioner. Interestingly, on that same page, the *Talmud* relates that three advisors were involved with Pharaoh concerning that fateful decision: *Iyov*, *Yisro* and *Bilaam*. Thus, *Yisro* was quite aware of Hashem's method of *middah k'neged middah*. If so, why was he so impressed with *Krias Yam Suf*, the Splitting of the Red Sea? What added insight did he receive as a result of this miracle?

Rav Heyman explains that *Yisro* became aware of a new understanding concerning the depth of the *middah k'neged middah* principle. During the Flood, everyone drowned in the fiery waters. In his commentary to *Parashas Noach*, *Rashi* elucidates the measure for measure aspect of the Flood punishment. Hashem has said, *Rabbah roas ha'adam ba'aretz*, "Man's wickedness on earth was increasing." (4:5) Coinciding with this, we find, *Nivkeu kol maayanos Tehom rabbah*, "All the wellsprings of the great deep burst forth" (*Bereishis* 7:11). The Flood waters raged for forty days and nights, which coincides with the forty-day gestation period during which a child is formed.

Through their adulterous liaisons, the people of that iniquitous generation troubled Hashem to create *mamzeirim*, illegitimate children, which take forty days to form. Last, as their sins were often carried out with heated passion, they were judged through the medium of fiery waters.

Hashem visited His punishment on Sodom *middah k'neged middah*. The *Zohar HaKadosh* enumerates a number of parallels between Sodom's sin and the punishment that they received, one of which was taking away their lives as punishment for refusing to give *tzedakah*, charity, which is the lifeline of the poor. Both of these punishments have one thing in common: Every sinner was punished equally, despite the fact that some sinners were worse than others. Yet, they all drowned together, or were destroyed by the fire and brimstone that Hashem rained upon the Sodomites.

The drowning of the Egyptians represented a completely new *hanhagah*, manner of acting, from Hashem. At this point, the Egyptians were divided into categories; their evil categorized and their punishment commensurate with their individual sins. Some Egyptians sunk like lead, not floating down needlessly, while others went down like stone, being battered before they sunk to the deep. The last group, the most egregious Egyptians, went down like straw, being thrown around in the water for a while before finding their resting place at the bottom of the sea. Yisro saw not only *Hashgachah*, Divine Providence, but he was also privy to *Hashgachah Pratis* – individualized, personalized Divine Providence.