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Some of the things Jesus emphasized in his teachings stand as strong warnings to those who belong to the community of faith. Jesus made statements about not lapsing into prideful judgmentalism, and becoming centripetal in one's thinking. Jesus taught that our attitude toward other people—outsiders, even sinners—must be like God's.

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As the topic for this Bible study, I have chosen *Midah KeNeged Midah*, which means “measure for measure.” A longer version of this mishnaic Hebrew idiom is במידה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו (Bamidah she'adam moded ba, modedin lo; m. Sotah 1:7, Codex Kaufmann), which may be translated “by the measure that a man measures, they measure to him.” In Jewish literature the rabbis often referred to this principle simply as מידה כנגד מידה (*Midah KeNeged Midah*). In English, people say, “What goes around comes around,” or “He reaped what he sowed.” These two pithy sayings express the same idea. Moreover, most of us have witnessed circumstances where the principle seems to have operated perfectly. Consequently, even today *Midah KeNeged Midah* remains part of modern western thinking.

I will start with several simple examples from the Bible in order to demonstrate that, as a principle, *Midah KeNeged Midah* has a biblical basis. The rabbis who lived centuries after the last book of the Old Testament was written did not invent *Midah KeNeged Midah*. They certainly furthered the development of the idea, but they did not first suggest it. *Midah KeNeged Midah* is a very old concept that finds expression in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern literature other than the Bible. In the Old Testament, examples of this principle appear in nearly every book.

Consider Exodus 22:22-24: “The foreigner do not oppress, and do not mistreat him because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” The verses continue: “Any widow and orphan you will not oppress, and if you oppress them...I will become angered, and I will kill you with a sword. And your wives will become widows and your sons will become orphans.” This passage contains a typical example of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. Here God warned the Israelites through the prophet Moses that if they oppressed the widows and orphans, God would exact punishment by making their wives widows and their children orphans. In other words, if Israel mistreats its widows and orphans, God will visit the oppressors' families and make their married women widows and children orphans, so that they will experience the same hardships that they had inflicted on others.

Apart from the principle of *Midah KeNeged Midah*, I find this passage interesting because it represents one of a number of verses where God identifies with the socially oppressed. In Evangelical-Charismatic preaching and teaching this subject has not received sufficient attention. Perhaps we have recoiled away from this subject because of an immature response to liberal Christian groups whose “gospel” has become defined almost exclusively in terms of social work and relief efforts. An ideal model would be for us to have a high view of Jesus' lordship coupled with a clear vision for the expansion of his kingdom. Such a vision would include, out of

necessity, an enduring burden for the poor. When a person mistreats the oppressed, it is as if he or she has mistreated God himself. The Bible expressly states that God is the defender of the down-trodden, and he does not remain indifferent to their sorrows and suffering.

Let us look at another example in Judges 1:5-7. The Israelites had just overcome their enemies in battle. In the course of the fighting, they had pursued Adoni Bezek and captured him. To punish this enemy king, the Israelites cut off his thumbs and big toes, to which he replied, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.” Here is an excellent example of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. This king had amputated the thumbs and big toes of other kings he had captured, and now the Israelites meted out the same punishment to him. Perhaps the Israelites knew about Adoni Bezek’s past cruelty. Nevertheless, the wretched king himself interpreted this as God’s justice. God repaid him with exactly what he had done to others.

A third example may be found in Obadiah 1:15: “The day of the Lord draws near on all of the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.” This represents quite an explicit statement of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. Just as the nations have done, it will be done to them. In other words, the nations will reap what they have sown.

Let me offer a final example from the Old Testament before we address post-biblical texts. I find this example particularly interesting because it affects New Testament theology. In Deuteronomy 32:21 Moses is depicted giving a lengthy exhortation to the Israelites. (Lengthy exhortations by Moses are characteristic of Deuteronomy.) Verse 21 says, “They have made me jealous with that which is not a God, they have angered me with their vanities.” Note God’s solution to the problem: “Therefore I will make them jealous with those who are not a people and with a foolish nation I will provoke them.” By running after false gods, the Israelites provoked God to jealousy. In fact, the Hebrew verb *kinuni* carries the idea of jealousy between a man and wife. If we read about the *Sotah* (a woman suspected of infidelity, cf. Numbers 5:11-31) in rabbinic literature, *kinuni* is used in reference to the husband when he suspects infidelity or has feelings of jealousy about his wife. Here, the Israelites provoked God to jealousy through their idolatrous practices. How will God respond? *Midah KeNeged Midah*: He will make his people (i.e., the Israelites) jealous with those who are not a people (i.e., the Gentiles).

The Apostle Paul added a layer of significance to this verse when he alluded to it in his epistle to the Romans. In the Septuagintal translation of Deuteronomy 32:21 and Romans 11:11 the same Greek verb appears. That Greek verb is παραζηλώσαι (*parazaelosai*; cf. GNT 3rd ed., p. 560). Paul wrote Romans 11 to help Jewish and non-Jewish believers in the church work toward a mutual understanding of their new relationship to one another and to the larger broader Jewish community. Paul himself did not fully comprehend the relationship of the early church to the pre-rabbinic Jewish community. Should we expect to understand more than Paul did? What does Paul offer as a final conclusion? “For God has shut up all in disobedience that he might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways!” (Rom. 11:32-33) We as Christians must live with the tension that God’s unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways sometimes generate. Being westerners, children of modernity, and citizens of the technological age, we are people who traffic in data and answers based on that data. Being timely is more important than

being accurate. Our culture conditions us to prefer having some answer, rather than living with the tension of not having an answer. This cultural phenomenon plays itself out in theological discussions, too.

In Romans 11:25 Paul used the word “mystery.” When I encounter a mystery in the Biblical text, what is my duty? Am I required to explain it? No, my job is to be obedient. Paul says here that we are to stimulate jealousy among the Jews. We who were once not a people, a foolish nation, are to arouse emotions of jealousy. During the time of Paul’s ministry, Jews were preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven to other Jews (Acts 19:8, Acts 20:25, Acts 28:31). Jews were speaking to other Jews about Jesus. It was an intra-Jewish event. By the beginning of the second century a much different situation had developed. The church had become overwhelmingly non-Jewish. What was Paul’s advice to non-Jews who accepted Jesus’ lordship? Paul hoped that they would arouse jealousy among the Jewish community. God had made a foolish nation a precious people alongside the Jewish community.

In Deuteronomy 32:21 the Israelites provoked God’s jealousy with that which was not a God, and, therefore God promised to provoke them with “those who are not a people,” whom Paul identified as Christians of non-Jewish descent. That is our job description. It is not a very flattering one, since in the verse we are described as “foolish.” The parallelism in Deuteronomy 32:21 suggests a link between idols, i.e. false gods and us, i.e. a false people.

When we interact with the Jewish community, we ought to ask ourselves, “Is my conduct of such an order that it would arouse jealousy?” In other words, is the manner in which I live a favorable witness to the resurrection of Jesus? Are people seeing my good works and blessing God for them (cf. Matt. 5:16)? Do my Jewish friends and acquaintances utter a prayer of thanksgiving to God for pouring out his spirit on a once foolish, uncircumcised person? When interacting with the Jewish community, perhaps we need to follow more closely Paul’s good advice.

Sadly, down through the centuries, Christians have not taken to heart what Paul wrote. Christian literature, both ancient and modern, both Catholic and Protestant, contains insensitive and at times abusive remarks directed against the Jewish people and their faith (cf. W. Whiston’s ed. of Josephus, p. 31 and J. Lightfoot on Mt. 8:30, p. 168. Also RTB, p. 23 and *JerPers* no. 51 and R. Wilken, *John, Chrysostom and the Jews*). Certainly, Paul would have protested against “the wild branches” demeaning “the natural branches.”

Let us move forward in time and consider an example from the Apocrypha. The apocryphal book Tobit belongs to the Catholic Bible. I have a high view of scripture—the bigger the canon, the better. I embrace the Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox canons. I would encourage any serious student of the New Testament to read an English translation of the Apocrypha and the Septuagint. The writers of the New Testament sometimes quoted from the Septuagint. It served as the canon of the early church. Its canonical status remained predominant until Jerome translated the rabbinic canon from Hebrew to Latin. His Latin translation became known as the Vulgate. Centuries later, the Reformers further helped undermine the Septuagint’s prestige in the West. In the wake of the Reformation, Protestant scholars began to prefer the Hebrew Masoretic text of the Old Testament, which the rabbis had canonized over the Septuagint and Vulgate.

I am not making any value judgment. I am happy to have the Masoretic text as our canonical text. I am also happy to have the Septuagint and Vulgate as our canonical texts. From my perspective, the more canon the better. More canon, means more scripture, which leads to greater opportunity for generating profitable teaching.

Tobit 4:7 says, “Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you.” This represents another very simple example of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. It is also another example of God’s identification with the poor and socially oppressed. Turning away from a poor person is like turning away from God. The writer of Tobit understood God as identifying one hundred percent with the poor. Hence, according to him, God simply mirrors back toward us our treatment of them. Here we have (from a Protestant perspective) a post-Biblical, pre-rabbinic text that employs *Midah KeNeged Midah*.

The rabbis were excellent readers of the text. In fact, when reading the ancient rabbinic commentaries, I marvel at how closely the rabbis read their Bible. As a general principle, they reflect in their commentaries the same trends or tendencies that they saw in the Bible. Thus, just as *Midah KeNeged Midah* is found throughout the Bible, it is also found throughout the literature of the rabbis. The rabbis noted the obvious examples of *Midah KeNeged Midah*, a few of which we have just surveyed. Yet they found scores of other examples, some of which are very subtle. They delighted in finding the more obscure examples of a principle like *Midah KeNeged Midah*. They loved mining the Bible for all of its richness.

Consider the following rabbinic examples of *Midah KeNeged Midah*, where I will give half of the equation, so that the reader may supply the other. How did God ultimately punish Pharaoh and his army? He drowned them (Ex. 14:28). Why were the Egyptians punished by water? The answer may be found in Exodus 1:22: The Egyptians had drowned the infant sons of Israel in the Nile. Do Christians read the Bible in a manner, so that this application of *Midah KeNeged Midah* emerges clearly from the narrative? Have the rabbis interpreted the text responsibly? Upon hearing their interpretation, we respond, “Yes, that is right.” The rabbis have forced us to go back and reflect on the Biblical narrative. By forcing us back to the text, they have succeeded in large measure to achieve what they set out to accomplish—to compel the community of faith to re-think continually the biblical text.

The rabbis faced great challenges in their day to ensure that the Bible remained a living text. They had to compete with the Roman circus and the theater just like we must compete with football and MTV. We could learn a lot from the rabbis by noting the way in which they successfully kept the Bible a meaningful, relevant book among the Jewish people. They did an excellent job for which they should be applauded.

Consider another example. I will give half of the equation, and the reader may give the other. When Samson met his demise, he was blinded (Jdg. 16:21-28). The Philistines put out his eyes. How does this example of *Midah KeNeged Midah* work? The second part of the equation may be found in Judges 16:1, where in the story of Delilah, Samson *saw* her. In other words, he lusted with his eyes, so ultimately he was punished through that with which he sinned. Is this responsible interpretation? Or have the rabbis gone too far? In the end, they have forced us to re-read the story of Samson.

Consider a third example. What caused Absalom's untimely death? While fleeing on a donkey, he rode under a tree and one of the limbs caught his hair. Why did he meet his demise through his hair (2 Sam. 18:9)? Absalom had beautiful hair (2 Sam. 14:26), and the rabbis claimed it to be the seed of his pride, which eventually blossomed into open rebellion against his father, King David. Have the rabbis stretched the text, or is this a responsible interpretation? Perhaps before answering that question, we need to go home and read that story again.

Is there any biblical personality who seems to defy the principle of *Midah KeNeged Midah*? The rabbis viewed *Midah KeNeged Midah* as a principle that God had built into the operational structure of the universe (Jubilees 4:31). Can we think of anybody who seems to circumvent this principle?

Please turn to Deuteronomy 9:20-21: "And the Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him..." The verse speaks about Aaron, the brother of Moses, the brother of Miriam, the high priest, a leader of the people, the maker of the golden calf. Is Aaron a saint or something less? The New Testament has little to say about Aaron. Acts 7:41 mentions that the Israelites "made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands." Does Acts 7:41 agree with the details of Exodus 32?

Why did God punish Aaron by forbidding him to enter the Promised Land. Is it because he oversaw the construction of the golden calf? No! It was because Aaron disobeyed God along with Moses at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:24). For that he was punished with the same punishment which Moses received. Both were forbidden to cross the Jordan River (Num. 20:12). But was Aaron punished for the golden calf? No! Were the people punished? Yes! By whom were they punished? Moses called out, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!" Who gathered around Moses? The Levites rallied around Moses. In other words, the clan of Aaron meted out the punishment. Something is very odd.

I am reminded of another story where Miriam spoke against Moses (Num. 12). Was only Miriam involved? No! Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, but the Lord smote only Miriam with leprosy, and she had to wait outside the camp seven days. Nothing happened to Aaron. He merely watched his sister turn white as snow. Aaron presents a challenge for biblical expositors whether they be ancient or modern.

In post Biblical Jewish literature much effort was expended to deal with Aaron's apparent immunity from the principle of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. The sages and their successors, the rabbis, tried to reconcile Exodus 32, Numbers 12 and Deuteronomy 9:20-21 with God's treatment of Aaron. They had two options for bringing Aaron's case in line with the demands of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. Either he was punished and we simply need to find the mode of punishment in the text; or contrary to what appears in the biblical narrative at first glance, Aaron did nothing wrong, and in reality conducted himself in a noble way. The second approach, what I will call the whitewashing of Aaron's character, emerged as the prevailing solution in rabbinic literature (Leviticus Rabbah 10:3 – parable). As we already saw in Acts 7:41, Aaron was not singled out for any misconduct. In his speech, Stephen implied that the blame rested with the Israelites. The record of Stephen's speech is consistent with the rabbinic trend of removing culpability from Aaron.

Taking a biblical principle like *Midah KeNeged Midah* and pushing its application to the limits is characteristic of rabbinic interpretation. The rabbis enjoyed pushing the “exegetical envelope” to the point of bursting. Let me give two examples where they pushed the limits of *Midah KeNeged Midah* to the very edge.

In Numbers 12:15, Miriam’s sudden case of leprosy caused the entire camp of the Israelites to hold up for seven days. In fact, the rabbis claimed that God himself, the Divine presence, the ark of the covenant, the priests, the Levites, the Israelites, and the seven clouds of glory all waited for Miriam—a rather impressive waiting list! The rabbis viewed this as an example of *Midah KeNeged Midah*, namely, that all of the parties named above, God among them, waited for Miriam when she had leprosy. They waited a week for Miriam to become ritually pure.

What noble deed had Miriam done that warranted everyone waiting for her? The answer may be found in Exodus 2:4. After Moses’ Mother had set him afloat in the Nile, Miriam waited to see what would happen to her infant brother. Here we discover the toehold in the text which allowed the rabbis to apply *Midah KeNeged Midah*. Since Miriam waited for Moses, the savior of Israel, God and the Israelites waited for her. Is this responsible interpretation or has the “exegetical envelope” been ruptured? Indeed the limits have been stretched to the point of bursting. Nevertheless, we have been driven back to the text and forced to reexamine it.

Allow me to give one more example from rabbinic literature, one of which I am particularly fond. First, however, I will need to give some background information. In a talmudic text about a sage named Abba Hilkiyah, who was the grandson of Honi the circle drawer, we find the following story.

Once the Rabbis sent to Abba Hilkiyah a pair of scholars that he should pray for rain. When they came to his house they did not find him at home. They went to see him in the field and found him ploughing the ground. They greeted him, but he did not heed them. Towards evening he was picking up sticks of wood and, on his way home, carried the sticks on one shoulder and his cloak on the other. The whole way long he did not put on his shoes, but when he had to cross the water he put them on. When he came across thorns and shrubs he lifted up his garments... (Ta’anit 23 a-b; Malter ed., p. 346).

Notice Abba Hilkiyah’s behavior regarding his shoes and garments. He was very conscious about damaging them or subjecting them to unnecessary wear and tear. Later in the story, the pair of scholars questioned Abba Hilkiyah about his behavior regarding his shoes and garments. He replied, “The entire way I could see [what I was stepping on], in the water I could not see...the one [a scratch on the skin] heals up, the other [a tear in the garment] does not heal up.” From this story we gain a glimpse into the daily life of Jews in antiquity. Apparently, garments and shoes were not as easily acquired as they are today. Consequently, people were more conscious of the manner in which they treated them.

Keeping this background information in mind, we will examine 1 Samuel 24:4 and 1 Kings 1:1 to see if we can discover how *Midah KeNeged Midah* applies to these two verses. In 1 Samuel 24:3 we read that Saul entered a cave to use as a bathroom. What did David do as Saul was relieving himself? He sneaked up and clipped his garment. Here is the proof from the biblical text that David had a low regard for clothing. He had been the type of teenager who walked on the road with his sandals on, went through the thickets without lifting his robe, and when he arrived home his Mom would say, “What have you done to your clothes!” That was the type of young man David was, and according to *Midah KeNeged Midah*, he paid the price later in life.

As an old man King David had a problem. According to 1 Kings 1:1, his clothes no longer kept him warm. Why? Because he did not have a high regard for clothing as was demonstrated by his damaging of Saul’s garment. These are wonderful verses for mothers to use when trying to teach children to treat shoes and clothes with more respect.

Moreover, look at 1 Samuel 24:5-6. How did David feel after doing this dirty deed? He felt guilty! He must have heard his mother’s words echoing in his head, “Take care of your clothes!” In verse 5 somebody said to David, “Today the Lord your God has given you your enemy into your hand.” If David had accepted the advice of those around him, he would have killed Saul. So why should he feel guilty about clipping Saul’s garment? I could understand feeling guilty about killing Saul, but clipping his robe? I think that it had something to do with his mother. I am simply suggesting that the biblical text itself offered the rabbis an opportunity to make a clever and delightful application of *Midah KeNeged Midah*. No matter how odd a midrashic interpretation may sound, almost always a toehold exists in the text.

Applying the principle of *Midah KeNeged Midah* in a mechanical manner can lead to problems. In the world of the sages, *Midah KeNeged Midah* came to be viewed as a principle built into the order of the universe. The widespread acceptance of the principle meant that it was sometimes recklessly applied.

Several years ago, Randall Buth preached before the Narkis Street Congregation in Jerusalem, Israel a delightful sermon from the *Parashah Re’ey* (Dt. 11:26-16:27). One of the points he made in his sermon had to do with poor people (see *Sermons from Narkis*, 44-45). In the Torah we find the following paradigm: If we are obedient to God, we will be blessed and not experience want. But then Deuteronomy 15:7 says, “If there are any poor among you.” We must be careful not to slide into a type of thinking that reasons that a person suffers poverty because he or she deserves it. Yet as Buth pointed out in his sermon, the Bible commands us to be generous to the poor. God commanded the Israelites to extend an open hand to the needy (Dt. 15:8).

We who are God’s people should be open minded, non-judgmental, generous people. Consistently applying *Midah KeNeged Midah* in a mechanical manner and avoiding the temptation of being critical and judgmental are mutually exclusive options. We must be very careful to guard our thinking and not allow ourselves to apply recklessly *Midah KeNeged Midah*

In Avot 2:6, Hillel apparently made a remark while passing by some water and seeing a corpse floating in it. He said, “Because you had drowned others, they drowned you, and those who drowned you, will they themselves be drowned.” Interestingly, Joseph Hertz in his excellent

commentary (p. 34) wrote, “Hillel seems to have known the person whose skull it was, and he had been a brigand.” Why did Hertz, the distinguished Chief Rabbi of England, offer that little comment? If Hillel had not personally known this man, he would have recklessly applied *Midah KeNeged Midah*. To paraphrase Jesus, all who live by the sword, will die by the sword. But, it is not correct to assume that all that die by the sword lived by the sword. There is a subtle, but significant difference between these two propositions. Human nature works against our efforts to keep that subtle difference in focus.

In Matthew 6:12, an excerpt from the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus said that his disciples must forgive others in order to be forgiven by God—*Midah KeNeged Midah*. Thus, Jesus endorsed and employed this principle. When we forgive others, God forgives us. When we show mercy to others, God shows mercy to us. When we are gracious to others, God is gracious to us. When we bless others, God blesses us. Each of these represents a responsible application of *Midah KeNeged Midah*.

In Matthew 7:1-2a, Jesus applied *Midah KeNeged Midah* in reference to judging and giving charity: “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged.” Matthew 7:2b continues: “By your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” Here Jesus essentially paraphrased the Hebrew idiom that I quoted at the beginning, “*Bamidah sheadam moded ba, modedin lo.*”

A most significant passage for evaluating Jesus’ method of application of *Midah KeNeged Midah* is Luke 13:1-5. Luke alone recounted a remarkable incident about some who reported to Jesus about the Galileans “whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Jesus responded, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans? Jesus then added a second example about a tower that had fallen in Siloam. (Today tourists visiting The City of David can see the base of the Hasmonean Tower, which may have resembled the tower to which Jesus referred.) Jesus said, “Do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell were worse culprits than all men who live in Jerusalem?” In the light of the culture and context, what Jesus said challenged his audience because many of them viewed sickness or tragedy as the consequence of wrong doing. Jesus was cautioning against the temptation of assuming that the victims of the tower’s collapse had done something wicked, so as to deserve a violent death as a form of divine punishment. Jesus warned not to entertain such thoughts. “Do not think that these Galileans were worse than any other Galileans!” Sweeping, general applications of *Midah KeNeged Midah* are theologically immature and irresponsible. The principle has limitations, and when Christians apply it recklessly, they run the risk of scarring people emotionally. Illness and tragedy may befall any of us, not because we deserve it, but because we live in an imperfect, unpredictable world. Hence, Jesus’ call to repent now, lest we unexpectedly face our creator today (Flusser, *Jesus*, pp. 101-102).

How did Jesus apply the principle of *Midah KeNeged Midah* in his teachings? This is a good opportunity to introduce a principle that I have formulated for interpreting Jesus’ teachings. I call it the principle of “what-I-don’t-want-to-hear,” or, for broader application, the “what-we-do-not-want-to-hear” principle. This principle is useful for interpreting the synoptic Gospels, because although some sayings of Jesus are difficult to understand—even more are difficult to obey. When reading the synoptic Gospels, I have noticed that Jesus often said what I would rather not

hear. So, if we read a teaching of Jesus, and our response is, “My human nature resists that,” or “I don’t want to hear that,” our interpretation is probably more or less accurate.

Some of the things Jesus emphasized in his teachings stand as strong warnings to those who belong to the community of faith. Jesus made statements about not lapsing into prideful judgmentalism, and becoming centripetal in one’s thinking. Jesus taught that our attitude toward other people—outsiders, even sinners—must be like God’s.

So here is an opportunity to apply the principle of what-we-don’t-want-to-hear. Jesus’ teachings suggest that the principle of *Midah KeNeged Midah* may be applied only when it challenges our human nature. When does it challenge our human nature? When we must extend mercy to those who deserve none. When we forgive those who do not deserve forgiveness. When we give to those who do not deserve help. These are the things that we would rather not hear. Nevertheless, when we show mercy, forgive, and give charitably, God acts the likewise toward us.

After seeing tragedy befall somebody, we must be careful not to assume that that person deserved such “divine” retribution. Our human nature promotes such self-centered thinking. Yet Jesus taught to abandon that mode of thinking, because if we really believe that a person deserved some misfortune, then our willingness to offer assistance will be undermined. Our duty is not to judge, but to be a conduit for God’s healing, hope and redemption in an imperfect, hurting world.

For Jesus, repentance today remains a priority. That is the point of Luke 13:1-9. Pilate in an outburst of cruel rage could have had anybody killed. The tower that collapsed could have fallen on anybody who happened to be passing by it. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus once said, “Repent one day before death!” His disciples replied, “How does a man know when he will die?” R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus smiled and said, “That is good reason to repent today” (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 15).

Jesus used similar teachings to communicate that if we do not live to see the awesome return of the Lord, we certainly will face our creator at death. I am reminded of the words of Akaviah ben Mahalel, “Remember three things and you will not fall into sin: Whence you came, thence you are going, and before whom you will give an account. Whence did you come? From a little putrid drop. Thence are you going? To the place of worms and maggots. Before whom will you give an account? Before the King of Kings” (m. Avot 3:1).

Offering an incisive comment on Luke 13 about recklessly applying *Midah KeNeged Midah*, Jesus suggested that anyone, God forbid, may expire today and face one’s creator. If the imminence of that reality (or the return of the Son of Man) remains before us, then our thinking and conduct should be radically different from that of other people.