

The Dee

Pirkei Avot Project

**אִף הוּא רָאָה גִלְגֻּלַת אַחַת שְׂצָפָה עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.
אָמַר לָהּ, עַל דְּאֲטַפְתְּ, אֲטַפּוּךְ. וְסוֹף מְטִיפִיךְ יְטוּפוּן:**
Moreover he saw a skull floating on the face of the water. He said to it: because you drowned others, they drowned you. And in the end, they that drowned you will be drowned.

This Mishna is the third quotation from Hillel in this chapter. On the most basic level, this Mishna is telling us that Hashem runs the world in absolute justice. Therefore if you see a dead man's head floating in the river, we can assume that this man drowned others and therefore he was punished in the same way. In addition we can assume that the people who drowned him, will also drown in the future. This principle of Hashem's ultimate justice is known as "*mida keneged mida*" – the way we relate to the world around us, is the way it will eventually relate back to us. However, have we never seen wicked people enjoying life? Have we never seen righteous people suffering? Can the moral message of this Mishna really be true in spite of these difficult questions?

Briefly introduced here are four answers that I believe are all correct and could be expounded upon in great detail.

1. We do not know exactly what everybody does in their private life, therefore we can't judge who exactly is righteous and who is wicked.
2. We do not know if this is real suffering as it might be for the good. In the same way enjoyment of life in some cases could bring about very negative outcomes.
3. We believe in "gilgul neshamot", meaning that our bodies did not have a previous life, but our souls have had a previous life in a different body. Maybe in this lifetime a person is getting a reward or punishment for things he did in his previous body. Possibly in his previous life he behaved differently to the way we see him behave today.
4. As part of Hashem's ultimate justice system, part of a punishment for a wicked person is to get rewarded in this world for his few good deeds in order to arrive in the world to come as totally negative. The opposite too is possible, that a righteous man as part of his reward can suffer in this world in order to arrive in the world to come totally positive.

Discussion Questions:

Have you ever seen someone get exactly what they deserve? What made you think that they deserve this?

Which one of the four answers presented above seems most logical to you?

Do you know of a fifth answer?

Idea by Rav Shlomo Kimche

לעילוי נשמת:

לאה בת רפאל הכהן וציפורה

מאיה אסתר בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

רינה מרים בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה



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