

Mishpatim- Rachmanus in our Total Beings

Shemos 22:20-23 discusses the prohibition of causing any type of pain to widows and orphans. While it is forbidden to cause pain whether physical or emotional to anyone, the Torah underscores strangers, widows and orphans more often because such individuals are more downtrodden and are hurt more easily. So we have to be exceedingly careful with how we deal all downtrodden individuals. However, it is striking how the Torah states that if you torment widows and orphans, Hashem will punish us with the sword and make our own wives widows and orphans, Chas veshalom. Is this really *midah keneged midah*? After all, the ones affected did not do the tormenting. Moreover, the Torah specifically tells us in Devarim 24:16 that sons shall not be put to death for father's sins and fathers for the son's sins. Perhaps the verses can be understood a little differently. The actual punishment is that Hashem will kill us with the sword. Chazal saw all types of pains, both physical and emotional as a form of death. So if we give pain to widows and orphans who are more sensitive it is like killing them, Chas veshalom, in a lower form. So by sending the sword, Hashem is actually paying back the offenders *midah keneged midah*. The wives being widows and children being orphans is just a natural end result.

In general, these mitzvos teach us to be more sensitive and that is part of the total personality that the Torah trains us to build up within ourselves. At the end of the Laws of Slaves, the Rambam codifies that while there are many things that we can technically do to our Canaanite slaves that are cruel, nevertheless, we should not do them. This is because cruelty is found only among primitive people who worship idols. We are the children of Avraham avinu to whom Hashem gave the Torah. We, as children of Avraham, are supposed to exhibit only warmth and compassion to all. We are to emulate our creator. Just as he is Compassionate, so should we be. Indeed, the entire purpose of our Torah is not just to make us into machines that obey orders but to be integrating Hashem's ways of warmth and kindness into our total personalities. In the merit that we integrate Hashem's ways into our lives and be gracious and merciful, may we only receive Hashem's Berachos in our lives as well.