

Mishlei 11-01

Integrity

Key Concepts

People can reach their full potential only when they live at peace and cooperate with one another. Since human physical needs are complex, Hashem has encouraged specialization of crafts and methods of production. Through the practices of honest commerce, people are enabled to exchange what they have produced so that each person has access to a variety of goods and services.

However, effective commerce depends on personal integrity and trust. If an individual violates this trust by falsifying the weights and measures that are used in conducting trade, he is betraying Hashem's plan for the development of society.

Exploring Mishlei

(א) מאזני מרמה תועבת ה' ואבן שלמה רצונו :

(1) Deceptive balance-scales are an abomination to Hashem, but a perfect weight pleases Him.

This proverb describes Hashem's reaction to dishonesty in building and maintaining instruments of measurement, such as balance scales and weights. On the surface the proverb is a succinct restatement of the corresponding verses in the Torah (Devarim 13:15):

(ג) לא יהיה לך בכיסך אבן ואבן גדולה וקטנה : (יד) לא יהיה לך בביתך איפה ואיפה גדולה וקטנה : (טו) אבן שלמה וצדק יהיה לך איפה שלמה וצדק יהיה לך למען יאריכו ימיה על האדמה אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך :

13. You shall not have in your pouch a weight and a weight — a large one and a small one. 14. And you shall not have in your house a measure and a measure — a large one and a small one. 15. A perfect and honest weight shall you have, a perfect and honest measure shall you have, so that your days shall be lengthened on the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you.

However, the fact that Shlomo HaMelech was led to restate these laws in the form of a proverb indicates that he wanted us to be aware of the underlying qualities of character (*middos*) that promote the observance of these laws. Not only

that, we are being alerted to the implications of these *middos* in other areas of life. Thus, the laws of weights and measures are actually a *mashal* to broad areas of human behavior.

Learning Mishlei

Deceptive balance-scales — מאזני מרמה
are an abomination to Hashem — תועבת ה'

because their falsehood denies the quality of truth which is the foundation of Creation. Also, it violates the trust that is essential for people to live together in peace.

A perfect weight that is totally accurate — ואבן שלמה
pleases Him — רצונו

for it accustoms people to integrity in their relationships.

Additional Insights

INTEGRITY IN COMMERCE

(1) The use of correct weights reflects a commitment to truth and justice, which Hashem has established as the basis of human interaction. Thus, false weights are a betrayal of Hashem. (רשר"ה)

(2) Not only is it repugnant to Hashem to practice deception and theft by means of false measuring and weighing, even the making or possession of inaccurate measures and weights is hateful. (רשר"ה)

(3) Acquiring or maintaining the ability to perform any sin is in itself repugnant to Hashem, even when no sin is being done. (בני שלמה)

INTEGRITY IN SPEECH

(4) When a person is in a position where he can influence a decision, he has a special responsibility of choosing his words carefully and speaking honestly. If he has a habit of distorting the truth it is as though he is a merchant who maintains deceptive balance-scales. (רבינו יונה)

(5) When a person has a decision to make he should not rely on guesswork, but on carefully collected evidence and testimony. It is like a merchant who weighs the goods for a transaction. He must use accurate instruments. (המאירי)