

Mishlei 16-11

Commerce

Key Concepts

Hashem wants every person to maintain the highest standard of integrity in his business dealings. This means being truthful about the product he is selling and being honest about the money he is giving in exchange. Unfortunately, many people are tempted to view a business deal as an opportunity to take advantage of inside knowledge and to treat a customer as fair game. They forget that a failure of business integrity is equivalent to stealing another person's property.

To emphasize the importance of integrity in business, Mishlei advises us to think of Hashem as being actively involved in every transaction. Nothing is secret from Him. Even the instruments of commerce that we use to negotiate and complete the exchange ultimately belong to Him.

Thus, not only the act of deceiving someone by means of false measuring and weighing, but even the making or possession of inaccurate measures and weights is repugnant to Hashem. The person who manufactures false weights or takes other steps to cheat or mislead his counterparty is defying Hashem's justice and is committing blasphemy.

Exploring Mishlei

(יא) פֶּלֶס וּמֵאֲזֵנֵי מִשְׁפָּט לַה' מַעֲשָׂהוּ כָּל אֲבָנֵי כִּיס:

A scale and just balances are Hashem's; His is the workmanship of all the measuring weights in the pouch.

This proverb talks about the involvement of Hashem as an active participant in every business transaction. His role is emphasized by presenting Him as the ultimate owner of the instruments used to weigh a product that is sold by weight. A person who prepares and uses instruments to mislead and cheat a customer is creating a chilul Hashem (desecrating the Name of Hashem).

Learning Mishlei

(יא) פֶּלֶס וּמֵאֲזֵנֵי מִשְׁפָּט לַה'
מַעֲשָׂהוּ כָּל אֲבָנֵי כִּיס:

A weighing scale and just balances are Hashem's — פֶּלֶס וּמֵאֲזֵנֵי מִשְׁפָּט לֵה' — His is the workmanship of all the measuring weights in the pouch of standard weights — מְעִשָּׂהוּ כָּל אֲזֵנֵי כִּיס.

Additional Insights

The basic approach used here in interpreting this proverb is based on the writings of Rav Shamshon Rafael Hirsch. A series of additional insights illuminating this proverb are presented below. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources at the end of the segment.

(1) This proverb illuminates the careful justice with which Hashem governs the world. Reward and retribution are meted out to each person in accordance with what they deserve. Despite the complexity of every situation, it is as if everyone's actions and their circumstances were precisely monitored with complex measuring instruments.

(2) An alternate meaning of פֶּלֶס is a compass used to measure the distance between two points on a map. Hashem not only measures the weight (or significance) of a person's deeds. He measures the quality of his middos (behavioral traits) to judge what he has achieved in his moral and ethical development.

(3) Whenever a person makes a decision by weighing the considerations involved he should not rely on himself but should look to Hashem's help in reaching a just and fair conclusion.

Sources

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this segment are listed below.

(3) - רלב"ג

(1) - רש"י, מלבים

(2) - מלבים