

Mishlei 20-23

Commerce – Duality

Key Concepts

The fraudulent use of false weights and measures in commerce that was last mentioned in Mishlei 20-10 is restated here in a slightly different form for emphasis. The association of this posuk with the discussion of retribution in the previous posuk (20-22) calls our attention to the fact that a vendor who has been cheated in business may be tempted to use false weights now to recover his loss, but any tampering with the scales is hateful to Hashem.

Exploring Mishlei

(כג) תועבת ה' אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן וּמֵאזְנֵי מִרְמָה לֹא טוֹב:

(23) *“Two different weights are an abomination to Hashem, and fraudulent weights are also not good, an abomination in His eyes.”.*

As in 20-10, Mishlei refers again the duality of the false stones, אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן, “a stone and a stone”. The two stones are similar, but different, serving as a metaphor for a deceptive person who presents different faces to the world, pretending to be one personality to some and a different personality to others.

Learning Mishlei

(23) An abomination to Hashem — תועבת ה' —
 is a stone and a stone — אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן
 and fraudulent scales — וּמֵאזְנֵי מִרְמָה
 are not good — לֹא טוֹב
 in the eyes of Hashem.

Additional Insights

[1] The mention of two different stones also rebukes those who have double standards, behaving piously when in the company of others, but sinning when alone. (הגר"א)

[2] Considering that we are talking about an offense that is deemed “an abomination”, why does the proverb end up by saying that it is merely “not

good"? It may be talking about the case where the vendor believes he was cheated and may therefore be justified in taking retribution. Even if this is only a suspicion of having been cheated, the mere fact that he suspects somebody of cheating him is "not good." (דעת סופרים)