

# A NICE DISGUISE

by Rabbi Label Lam

*You shall not keep in your pouch two different weights, one large and one small. You shall not keep in your house two different ephah measures, one large and one small. Rather, you shall have a full and honest weight, [and] a full and honest ephah measure, in order that your days will be prolonged on the land which HASHEM, your G-d, gives you. For whoever does these things, whoever perpetrates such injustice, is an abomination to HASHEM, your G-d. (Devarim 25:13-16)*

Here is a fascinating explanation I saw recently, written up by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky. It bears repeating because the implications and applications of this idea are relevant and manifold.

The Kli Yakar points out a seeming redundancy and inconsistency in the verse. First the Torah expresses a prohibition against having in one's possession both "large" and "small" weights and measures. Then the Torah commands that one should have "full and righteous" weights and measures. The terrible conclusion is that; "It is an abomination before G-d, all who do these, all who act corruptly."

It's not apparent what is wrong with keeping both, "small and large" weights. It is the "small" weight is the tool used to "shortchange his customers". The large weight is probably and fair and honest weight. What else would he use it for if it was larger than the required weight? Would he cheat himself? There should only be a prohibition against the "small" weight! Therefore the mandate to have "full" and "righteous" weights would be redundant. "Full" would include the honest weight. So what is added by the demand that it be "righteous?" "All who do these" refers to the dishonest use of weights and measures, as criminal activity. So what has the Torah added with "all who act corruptly."

The Kli Yakar begins his explanation by agreeing that the "large" one refers to an honest weight, and the command of "full and righteous" is the demand that one not only be honest - with a "full" honest weight, not shortchanging his customers - but to be righteous, going "beyond the letter of the law," providing "a little extra."

He then references a similar verse in Mishlei (20:10) which has similar textual difficulties. "A weight and a weight, a measure and a measure (implying having different sized weights) - an abomination before G-d are also both of them." If they are both dishonest, why use the language "also?" They are simply both dishonest!

Rather, the verse refers to two different weights or measures, one which is honest and one which is

dishonest. We are being taught that the honest one is ALSO an abomination, for it is the facilitator that enables the person to get away with cheating customers with the dishonest one. If a storekeeper had a weight with which he was shortchanging a customer, this customer would come home, discover he had received less than what he had paid for, and he would bring the storekeeper to court.

The storekeeper might defend himself with the claim that some of the produce must have fallen out of the bag after the customer left the store, or was lost after he got home. But if the court would receive a number of similar complaints it would become apparent that this storekeeper was shortchanging his customers.

What is the "solution?" The storekeeper also maintains an honest set of weights, and many customers are served honestly with them. When a customer who was cheated comes to court to complain, the storekeeper can now defend himself with the claim that the shortage happened after she left the store. And to verify that claim, he offers to bring all the satisfied customers who always received the full amount due them.

If the court will send an investigator to check the weight, the storekeeper will show the honest weight, proving that he does not cheat anyone. In conclusion, says the Kli Yakar, the honest weight is just as much an abomination as the dishonest weight, for it is the honest weight that enables the criminal to get away with his dishonest dealings. His honest dealings are therefore a mode of cover-up, a mask of sorts, to help him select his victims in **a nice disguise**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).