

YOUR GENIUS FOR HELPING

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And when you make a sale to your fellow Jew or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow Jew, **you shall not wrong** one another. (Vayikra 25:14)*

you shall not wrong: *This means wronging through money- Rashi*

It is too tempting not to just transcribe excerpts from the Mesilas Yescharim's words on this important subject of taking advantage of and damaging one's fellow monetarily.

"Consider the question of deceit. How easy it is for a person to deceive himself and fall prey to sin. On the surface it seems proper to him to attempt to make his wares attractive to people and to profit by his efforts, as it does to use "sales talk" on the prospective purchaser to render him more receptive... But if he does not analyze and weigh his actions carefully, he will bring forth thorns instead of wheat, for he will transgress and fall victim to the sin of deceit about which we have been warned, (Vayikra 25:14), "Let not a man deceive his fellow."... Our Sages have said (Bava Metzia 60a), "It is forbidden to paint old vessels to give them the appearance of new ones. It is forbidden to mix the fruits of one field with those of another, though the latter be just as fresh as the first...If you ask yourself, "How is it possible for us in our dealings not to attempt to favorably incline the prospective buyer towards the object to be sold and its worth?" know that there is a great distinction to be made. Whatever effort is made to show the purchaser the true worth and beauty of the object is fitting and proper, but whatever is done to conceal its imperfections, constitutes deceit, and is forbidden."

The Mesilas Yescharim seems to be tying the hands of the profiteer. At the same time he is offering a very practical clue for business success. Rabbi E. E. Dessler explains in his Essays on Kindliness that there is a big misunderstanding about how the entrepreneurial spirit truly works. Many tend to think that the way to accumulate wealth is to win even at another's expense and to exploit people's vulnerabilities.

Sure this opportunistic approach can score big once in a while. People have gained fortunes going about their business like that. Sometimes, in the short run, it just might work that way. However it may be a case of "the operation was successful but the patient died", or "he won all the battles but he lost the war". The Mesilas Yescharim zeros in on just this point. What then is the long term plan for the ambitious man who wants to "make it big"?

Rabbi E. E. Dessler spells out a simple formula. The way to fortune is by giving and being a giver! It is just the opposite of the common notion. He gives the example of the Chofetz Chaim who had a

grocery store. He was careful to offer only quality products and he tilted the scale in favor of his customers, but not because it was a gimmick or a scheme but rather as a Torah duty. Of course everyone wanted to come to his store. He ended up limiting his hours so as not to infringe on other stores but people nevertheless waited for his store hours. Eventually he closed his store altogether so as not to harm other store owners.

What was his unique brand of salesmanship? How was he able to attract people to his store? The only answer is that people trusted him and they knew that he was interested in giving them and servicing them honestly. It was not all about what the world calls the "bottom line". The top line is providing a good and better service.

If someone wants to be successful therefore as a Doctor, the best way is to be a good and caring doctor. There is always room for an extra honest car mechanic in the world. A good teacher makes certain the children are accomplishing and the parents are satisfied. That guarantees long term employment. Customers return again and again and recommend others when they feel benefited and they have a good experience.

This is the tried and true way to build in business. Business is not an exercise in "the survival of the fittest". Ultimately, only the good survive! Proper ambition, therefore, is to see how you can employ **your genius for helping!**