

BAD WEIGHTS WEIGH HEAVILY

by Nechama Stampler

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Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, as you left Egypt...

Rashi: [The preceding verses deal with the commandment to keep accurate weights. The topics of weights and Amalek are juxtaposed for a reason. The Torah teaches that] if you lie about measures and weights, you should expect to see incitement by the enemy. A pair of versus in Mishlei allude to the same idea. One pasuk² says, "Weights of deception are the abomination of Hashem." It is followed³ by "Iniquity comes, and is followed by disgrace."

Maharal: You may be puzzled by the connection between deceptive weights and the attack of Amalek. There would seem to be many infractions of the Torah that could be punished by such an attack. Don't be. There is something particularly destructive about using inaccurate weights, which should resonate with any believer. The world around us balances countless opposing forces, all of them working against each other. Because they are present in a Divinely ordered balance, an ordered, functioning world emerges from all the chaos. We are aware - or any thinking person should be aware - that disturbing that balance often produces catastrophic consequences.

Hashem expects that we should see in our own lives and relationships a bit of the larger, Divine scheme. Cheating on the use of measures should remind us of what we owe to a G-d who is so exacting in putting together our world, and how quickly life would disintegrate if He were a bit "off" in how He measured and apportioned things. Thus, besides the social evil of the theft, the use of deceptive weights strikes at our belief in a Creator Who fine-tuned His world.

Part of that fine-tuning determines that there are boundaries and limits to the activities of hostile and conflicting governments. Enemies are kept from annihilating one another, when Hashem wishes there to be relative peace. When a person acts as if exactitude is of no importance to him, on some level he evidences that Hashem's precision does not impress him. Appropriately, Hashem lifts the restraints that He imposed upon the enemy. Freed of those restraints, the enemy attacks.

We can extract another remarkable approach from an observation and comparison Chazal make between gilui arayos (illicit relations) and inaccurate weights. "The punishment for deceptive weights is more severe than that of arayos. The Torah references the latter with the word ha'eil; ⁴ regarding

weights, it uses the word eileh.⁵ The additional letter heh at the end of eileh serves to intensify it,⁶ indicating that it is more difficult and severe.

The gemara explains that inaccurate weights are more severe than arayos (which is one of the three infractions for which a person must give his life rather than transgress) in regard to teshuvah. Deceptive weights cheat an entire public. It is not possible to ascertain which people were cheated, and how much is owed to each. That makes full teshuvah impossible, since the wrong cannot properly be corrected.

It would seem to me that the gemara mentions only one example of ways in which deceptive weights are more difficult than arayos. There are others; I will mention one.

The two infractions share a common element. Both of them deal with precise boundaries set by HKBH, whereby He says, "This much, but not further." Those borders and restrictions describe the order for the running of the world that His wisdom deems proper. He does this in legislating whom we may and may not marry, recognizing that some matches overstep some bounds, even if the reasons for those limits are not obvious to us. He does not tolerate deviation from His model. Similarly, He does not tolerate deviation from the measures and weights that are represented to a consumer.

The misrepresentation of weights is more severe in a sense. Arayos, of course, have little to do with measurement and precision. Violating their prohibition is a terrible sin, but it is a rejection by the sinner of only one specific injunction. Weights, on the other hand, have no purpose other than to represent accuracy. Distorting them turns the entire enterprise of precise representation on its head, as if to repudiate the very concept of a world whose boundaries should be dictated by the Will of G-d.

A nation or community capable of such a severe breach will be met with the severity of enemy that also reckons very little with the Word of G-d or the specialness of His people.

Sources:

1. Based on Gur Aryeh, Devarim 25:17; Chidushei Aggados, Bava Basra 58B
2. Mishlei 11:1
3. Mishlei 11:3
4. Vayikra 18:27
5. Devarim 25:16
6. Rashbam, Bava Basra

