

# ZERO TOLERANCE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

*"You shall not have in your pocket a weight and a weight -- a large one and a small one.. A perfect and honest weight shall you have." "For an abomination of Hashem, your G-d, are all who do this, all who act corruptly." Debarim 25:13-16*

The Torah is a book of truth and honesty. Moshe Rabenu related to the people that Hashem abhors crookedness to such a degree that even owning inaccurate weights and measures is forbidden. A Jew may not own two different weights -- one large and one small so that he can use the large one when he buys to secure more for himself and a small one so that he can deliver less when he is the seller. One standard -- the accurate one -- must be used.

The Hatam Sofer asks: Why does the verse say that Hashem abhors "all who act corruptly" if the verse already clarified that Hashem calls dishonesty an abomination. What does "all who act corruptly" add?

Some people feel that one must deal honestly so long as the other party to the transaction is dealing in good faith. But if the other side breaks the rules -- if he is not dealing straight -- then everything goes. David Hamelekh said in Tehillim [18:27] "With the pure you act purely, and with the perverse you act perversely." Furthermore, one might say, "What I am doing is done by everyone in my industry -- it is common business practice." The Evil Inclination will re-enforce your feeling that if "I don't play the game like everyone else -- I will not survive!"

This approach is incorrect. Although human judgment might rule that a tit for a tat is ok in business dealings the Torah calls this type of behavior "disgusting". It is not enough for the result to be positive -- the means to reach the result must also be up to the standards of honesty dictated by the Torah. Tricking, fooling or misleading -- call it what you like -- is crooked and abhorrent to Torah standards. Although one may be able to prove that he or she is not liable for stealing by the strict letter of the law -- still this person is crooked in the eyes of the Almighty. The Torah adds "all who act corruptly" to include the "innocent" who follow what "everyone does" as disgusting in the eyes of G-d.

Rabbi Yehudah Zayat shlit'a of Bnei Brak, made aliyah from Mexico to the Holy Land. He bought a gas station and opened for business doing all that he could to deal honestly with his suppliers and customers. But the industry was not as straight as Rabbi Zayat. The suppliers offered petrol that was watered down at a cheaper price than 100% gasoline. The inspectors were willing for a small fee to

set the pump meters so that 2/3 of a gallon showed up as a full gallon. Rabbi Zayat insisted on honest pumps and pure gasoline. His business boomed as the word got out to cab drivers and truck drivers that the Rabbi's gasoline was blessed. By him you had to fill up only once a week while by everyone else you had to fill up twice as often. Pressure from the competition, the suppliers and the inspectors made doing business very difficult for the Rabbi. He went to his Rabbi, Harav Greineman to ask advice. The Rav said: "There is no place for an honest man in a dishonest business." Rabbi Zayat closed his gas station and found another way to make a living. By the way, he subsequently opened a Yeshivah in Bnei Brak called Shetilei Zetim, which has grown over the years to over 1000 students ba'h.

The section immediately following the command to keep honest weights and measures recounts the attack of Amalek on the Jewish people upon their departure from Egypt. Why is this event told again -- forty years later -- and why adjacent to laws about honest dealing? Rabbi Shimon Schwab was very ill when two young businessmen from New York City drove up to Monsey, N Y to visit him. One asked that elderly sage: Rabbi, why is it our people are suffering so much in so many ways? Rabbi Schwab answered immediately: "Are we honest in our business dealings?" The Rabbi connected the troubles our people suffer with the dishonest ways we have learned to accept. The Torah say: "Keep honest weights and measures --if not -- remember the attack of Amalek." May we all clean up our acts and trade with others in a manner that is one hundred percent in line with the demands of G-d. Zero tolerance to dishonesty could lead to zero troubles for Am Yisrael --Amen.

Shabbat Shalom.

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