

You shall not have in your house diverse measures, large and small. A whole and just weight you should have. (25:14,15)

Simply put, one may not keep faulty or dishonest weights in his possession, because it might result in cheating others in a business transaction. What about cheating oneself? Where does the “double standard” fit in? The Torah writes in *Vayikra* 25:17, “Do not deceive another person.” The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, distinguishes between the actual law, prohibiting one from deceiving others, and the law’s severe implication: Self-deception. Having two sets of measures – one for myself and one for others, – can lead to a serious “double standard.”

We are quick to condemn, to repudiate and rebuke – when it involves someone else. Do we maintain the same standard of weights and measures when it involves us, our spouses, our children, our *shul*, etc.? How many distinguished people and wonderful organizations have been destroyed from “within” as a result of double standard and self-deception? Being quick to find fault with the actions of others, but having a blind eye concerning one’s personal activities, fosters a state of hypocrisy which only leads to self-destruction.

People often tend to hold favorable views of their abilities in a variety of social and intellectual domains. Regrettably, these views are the result of serious over-estimation on the part of the person. This is called self-deception. It is the process of misleading ourselves to accept claims concerning ourselves to be true or valid, despite this not being the case.

One of life’s greatest self-deceptions is in the area of time. We have convinced ourselves that we have no time. When it comes to learning – we have no time. Our children need us – we have no time. Our spouses need us – we have no time. Everyone claims to be busy earning a living. Thus, Torah study, which is the staple of Judaism, is left wanting. This does not mean that people do not have valid excuses – in their own minds. Are these excuses, however, self-deceiving?

There is a famous episode that took place with the *Chozeh, zl, m’Lublin*. He once accosted one of his *chassidim* running in the street to the marketplace. “Come with me to the *bais ha’medrash* to study Torah,” the *Chozeh* appealed to the man. “No, *Rebbe*,” he answered, “I cannot afford the time.” “Are you that busy that you have no time to learn?” the *Rebbe* asked. “I have to earn a living and every minute is valuable,” the man replied – in a hurry. “What for?” asked the *Rebbe*. “What do you need the money for?” The man offered the natural and logical response: “I have to make a living for my children.” When the *Rebbe* heard this, he no longer belabored the issue, appearing satisfied with the response.

Twenty years later, the *Chozeh* was “again” walking on the street when he chanced upon a man rushing by him. The *Rebbe* was persistent and a dialogue similar to that which had occurred twenty years earlier ensued with this man. Same questions – same responses – all for the children.

Suddenly, the *Rebbe* looked deeply into the man's eyes and said, "Wait, I know you! I had a similar encounter with your father twenty years ago. At that time he, too, told me that he was too busy to learn because he was earning a living to support his children. And now you tell me that you must earn a living for **your** children. When, Almighty G-d, will I meet that one unique human being for whom all the generations have been laboring so incessantly?"

We deceive ourselves by thinking that our material ventures take precedence over our spiritual pursuits. Yes, we must earn a living – but since when does our commitment to Torah learning take a backseat to our material activity? We have deluded ourselves into believing that we need "this" and "that"; our children must go "here" and "there." Everyone has heavy schedules which demand physical expenditure, but, at a certain point, we must declare emphatically, "Enough is enough!" We think that we cannot do it. That is the self-deception talking.

An anecdote related by the *Chafetz Chaim* has certainly gone the rounds, but this charming story conveys a powerful message that is well worth repeating. *Chazal* teach that the Torah flourishes only for one who is willing to die for it, literally *meimis atzmo aleha*, "kill himself over it." The *Chafetz Chaim* commented on this with a story concerning a poor Jewish couple who lived in Lithuania. They opened a small grocery store in a village which was entirely non-Jewish. They worked hard and long hours to eke out a meager living. Since there was no *shul* in town, the husband would make his way to the *shul* in a nearby village.

The husband made every effort to return home as soon as possible, since coming late meant that his wife would be left in the store all alone. You know how things are; soon the *elan* of the store had worn off and his *geshmak*, satisfaction, in learning increased to the point that he did not want to rush back to the store. He came at the very beginning of the services and would hang around for a few moments after *davening* to learn a little. As time went on, he began arriving earlier in *shul* and learning later. A few months later, he began coming to the *shul* even earlier to recite *Tehillim*, as others his age were doing. He remained in *shul* a little longer, since he now also studied *Mishnah* and *Talmud*. The spiritual satisfaction that he garnered was incredible. As the *Yamin Noraim* loomed closer, he attended services even earlier, so that he could recite the *Selichos* supplication with the proper *kavanah*, intentions. The synagogue was slowly becoming his home, and he even was spending *Succos* in the *shul*! It seemed like a utopian situation. The husband spent a good part of his day in *shul*, while his wife fended for their material sustenance in the grocery store. This made the wife distraught, because she was spending the greater part of the day by herself in the store. She let her husband know that she was upset.

The next evening after the husband had once again returned to the store sometime in the late afternoon, he said to his wife, "I have something important to discuss with you." Anyone who has ever heard this preface to a conversation usually becomes anxious. It usually does not precede good news. The wife was visibly upset and she asked, "What is wrong?" The husband said, "Nothing is wrong. I do want to talk to you about something important. You know, sooner or later, we are both going to our eternal rest. Since I am several years older than you, the odds are that I

will precede you in death. Now tell me, what will you do when I am no longer here? How will you support yourself?”

The mere thought of her husband's death brought the poor woman to tears. She regained her composure and replied to the question, “I guess I will continue with the store and do whatever I can.”

“In other words,” her husband continued, “you will be able to continue to make do without me.”

“Yes,” she replied, “If I have no choice, I will have to go it alone.”

“In that case, I must ask you for a favor. I hope to G-d that we both continue to live for a very long time, but as long as I live I want you to consider me “dead” every morning for a few hours and that you are all alone in the world. This way I will be able to spend time in the *bais ha'medrash* learning Torah.”

When a man is prepared to “die” for Torah, it will “live” and thrive within him. We have to have “down” time daily when we are “dead” to the world, when our only pursuit is Torah. By “dying” a little every day, we are actually going to catalyze greater life – a deeper, more thoughtful, inspirational life. Thus, we will realize that all of those areas in our life's endeavor in which we think we are indispensable, we actually are not. Life goes on. If we do not act now, we will close the deal later. If Hashem wants it to happen, it will happen. We should stop deluding ourselves into thinking that it all revolves around us. One day we will not be here – and it will still continue to revolve.