

Speak to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. (19:2)

Rashi derives from the communal reference in the above *pasuk* that *Parashas Kedoshim* was recited *b'Hakhel*, at a public gathering of the entire nation, because, as *Rashi* explains, "Most of the Torah precepts are derived from it." *Ramban* explains that the foundations of all the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, are represented in this *parsha*. **Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita**, opines that the communal element of *mitzvah* observance is addressed in this *parsha*. While acknowledging that the Torah begins as a private, individual obligation between man and Hashem, we also embrace a communal aspect, a public obligation to Torah and *mitzvos* that extends beyond the individual. *Rav Belsky* suggests that the *mitzvos* addressed in this *parsha* relate in some way to the rules governing the conduct of a *tzibbur*, community.

I would like to focus on the *mitzvah* prohibiting cheating with weights and measures. The Torah writes, *Lo saasu avel b'mishpat*, "Do not carry out a miscarriage of justice with measures, weights and volume." We are enjoined to maintain accurate scales for measuring the various items we sell. From the perspective of the individual: each individual is prohibited from possessing faulty weights and measures. At the same time, the wider community is admonished to provide a suitable environment which not only disdains dishonesty, but underscores and encourages honesty and fair play.

It seems like a simple, sensible commandment, which should be accepted wholeheartedly by the community. Sadly, this does not seem to be the case. Can we really hold up our collective heads and declare that we hold financial integrity as a standard to which all members of our communities aspire? Can we say that not one member of our community ever acts in a financially reprehensible way- yet, in every other aspect is a well-known, highly-respected, religious, fully active and, even, influential member of our community? Can we honestly say that we regard theft as a sin which disqualifies an individual from being considered a full-fledged member of our community? Regrettably, we view financial mendacity-- and other forms of larceny associated with financial manipulation at the expense of the naïve and unsuspecting-- as nothing more than a character flaw due to one's moral weakness. Certainly, this is not a shortcoming which would warrant ostracizing the individual from the community.

Why are we so accepting? *Rav Belsky* explains that certain activities become acceptable only because, as we say in *Yiddish*, *Alle tuen azoi*, "Everybody does it." This really means that this type of behavior has become unobjectionable precisely because the community at large turns a blind eye to it. Thus, one can get away with it. This neither makes it right, nor renders the person "acceptable."

Yet, until the collective community takes a stand and rejects any form of dishonest interaction, the behavior will continue, and the perpetrators will continue to receive honoraria, while those who struggle to eke out an honest living will fall by the financial wayside. Shortly before the *parsha* of *Amalek (Devarim, Ki Seitzei 25:13)*, the Torah repeats the laws of just measurements. *Chazal*

derive from here that when one acts dishonestly with weights and measures, he will be visited by the likes of Amalek. Likewise, a society in which such behavior is tolerated – even considered passible - will be subject to the ravages of Amalek. We no longer may tolerate what has become termed as “acceptable *aveiros*.”