

Fraud

Fraud in business dealings carries the additional prohibition, above and beyond stealing, of "You shall not deal fraudulently..." Due to ill-practice, the prohibition of fraud has been forgotten by many common people. They do not know what fraud is, and refer to it as normal effort and clever mindedness. In truth, it is the cause of the world's deterioration and its cycle of poverty. This is the statement of the prophet (Yirmiyahu 17:11), "A person who achieves wealth without justice [will find] that it abandons him in the middle of his life." The word of G-d in the mouth of the prophets is true. If we see a man who acts corruptly, yet his wealth is intact, it is certainly wealth which remains with its owner to his own detriment. In accord with the verse (Devarim 7:10), "... and he pays his enemies to their face, (for their mitzvot and good deeds), in order to destroy them."

This is the general rule of fraud: It is not permissible to lie or to promote one's merchandise for some value that it does not

possess, to say that he bought it for a certain amount, or that he was already paid a specific price when that is not true. It is unnecessary to mention that one is not allowed to falsely beautify merchandise or to mix bad with good stock in order that it should look more appealing to the eye, (such that the "leprosy" lies beneath the surface), or to show one thing and deliver another. Needless to say, if a man acts fraudulently in matters of weight, volume, and measure, he is called corrupt, despised, despicable, loathsome, and an abomination. The punishment for false weights and measures is greater than that for illicit relations (Yevamot 21a). His endeavor will certainly not succeed, and his end will be disgraceful and appalling in this world, besides the punishment that awaits him in the World to Come. In conclusion, a person who acts in this way is a fool, for he toils for naught, and consumes his strength and his days in futility, only to acquire a "bad deal" for himself in Gehinom.

At the beginning of a man's final judgment he is asked (Shabbat 31a), "Did you conduct your business with integrity?" The person who trusts in G-d and conducted his business with integrity will be surrounded by the kindness of G-d and His blessing will bring him wealth. He certainly will not be lacking for bread, and his provisions will be attained in a permissible, satisfying, profitable, and honorable manner. Fortunate is he in this world, and good will be his lot in the World to Come! In truth, the desire for money blinds those who can see and makes a person allow himself illegitimate privileges. About such people the Sages of the Gemara (Eruvin 65b) said, "A man is recognized by his wallet..." A person must galvanize his intelligence to conquer his greed, and he must make an absolute resolve that in order to avoid being a wicked

person before G-d, he would risk dying of hunger. This is our obligation and this is what is proper for us. Especially since in total truth, those who seek G-d will not be lacking any good. The person who walks wholeheartedly with G-d will walk with security. This is a great general principle for all things that a man's soul desires and covets. Especially for money which is adored by him, and there is an evil inclination which shows him forty-nine ways "to purify the impure creature." Therefore, the man who fears G-d should uphold the rule of "Do not rely on your own understanding" (Mishlei 3:5), and he must go to a Torah scholar who will teach him the upright path, and he may not stray from the path onto which he has been instructed either to the right or the left.

There is also a concept of harmful words – which is more severe than monetary fraud. Our Sages commented (Baba Metziah 59a), "All of the gates in Heaven have been locked except for the gate of [someone who has been hurt by] harmful words." G-d Himself exacts powerful retribution. In this, too, many people have stumbled because they did not know the definition of harmful speech. The basic rule is that anyone who hurts his friend with words violates the prohibition of harmful speech. In order to know what words his friend finds painful, he should constantly fulfill the dictum of our Sages who said (Shabbat 31a), "That which is despised by you, do not do unto others."

Many common people conduct themselves in a foolish way: They hurt their friends in a joking or teasing way in order to increase wanton merriment. Behold, this is like a mocker who shoots fiery arrows. He will surely be punished in such a way that his merriment will be transformed into wretchedness! To the degree that a matter is hazardous, one needs to be very vigilant.

A person is likely to be sensitive, insulted, and hurt by even a casual conversation about him. And yet, he does not feel the pain of his friend. He thinks, "So what if I hurt him for the wrong that he committed against me? The law permits me to hurt him! If it is in jest, then there is no pain." Such is the erroneous thinking of people – "... and hilarity I said is praiseworthy." No man regrets his misdeeds because he does not consider it a wrongdoing. However, it is fitting to know that it was not permitted to hurt any person with words, even someone who hurt him, unless it is an open admonition motivated by love. But if he does it in order to exact vengeance, he violates the Torah prohibition of not taking revenge (Vayikra 19:18). Certainly, when the Torah (Vayikra 25:17) commanded that one should not harm his fellow with words, it did not need to mention a friend who seeks his benefit. Are we dealing with fools? But even if his friend hurt him, it was not permitted to repay him according to his wrongdoing. If it is in a joking manner, nonetheless, he jokes around with the blood of his friend, and it is considered mockery – about which the Sages said (Avoda Zara 18b), "The beginning [of its retribution] is suffering, and the end is total destruction." Therefore, a person must be cautious in regards to harmful speech, especially in regards to one's wife. Since her tears are near, so too is the punishment for her pain (Baba Metzia 59a). A person must constantly strive that the attitude of people always be favorable towards him. By doing so, the attitude of G-d will be favorable towards him as well.

