

Ki Tetzei – Shabbat 29 August 2015

Perusing this week's Sedra, which includes within it a plethora of 74 different commandments, one could be excused for wondering exactly where to start. So I'll begin at the end. There are two commandments which at first seem to be completely out of place. However, whenever the Torah juxtaposes two seemingly random themes there is almost always to be found an explanation for their being placed side by side.

The Torah speaks about the prohibition of owning weights or measures that are not adjusted correctly. Notice the emphasis, the Torah not only warns against cheating ones neighbour, but any action that might potentially lead to fraud. Therefore even possession of incorrect weights and measures is forbidden even if one had no intention of using them. The Torah stresses the seriousness of deception with the following words; "For it is an abomination to the Lord your G-d anybody who acts fraudulently".

This is followed with the last ruling of the Sedra which is; to remember how the Amalekite nation attacked the Children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. The Torah highlights how this dastardly enemy came and attacked the weak from behind, with no fear of retribution from G-d for attacking Israel, even though the other nations of the world were shrinking away from confrontation.

So what is the connection between the two themes? Rashi makes the following cryptic statement; if you are untruthful about weights and measures be worried about provocation from the enemy. It is quite a statement that for the sin of possessing incorrect weights and measures there is this warning of being attacked by an enemy such as Amalek which has the potential to lead to the breakup of Israel.

Rabbi J.J. Hecht Z'L suggests a slightly different reading with a novel approach. He interprets "faulty weights and measures" as "confused and jumbled-up priorities in our lives". The Mishne in Pirkei Avot reads; "who is rich? the one who is satisfied with his portion." There are those who in their spiritual pursuits are happy in their own stagnation and never move forward, never grow. However when it comes to their physical and material lives they are never satisfied, always wanting more, striving for the bigger house, the fancier car, yet never finding true happiness and fulfilment in these pursuits. It is this that Rabbi Hecht suggests is a homiletic reading of "faulty weights and measures"- being unable to discern what are our values and being confused about what really matters- the spiritual goals in life. In a period of material instability the Sedra provides a timeless message to recognise what ought to be our true priorities in life.