

May 15, 2009

Shabbat Shalom!

As banks, corporations, retailers, the government and citizens continue to deal with the current economic situation, two verses from the Torah reading for this Shabbat (Behar/Bechukotai) present us with a reminder of how people should treat one another in the financial and business arena and on the professional and personal levels. Leviticus Chapter 25, verses 14, declares, "When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy property from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another." After several statements about setting a fair price, the passage states again in verse 17, "Do not wrong one another, but revere your God." These comments, which originally referred to ancient real estate sales, were expanded to cover all types of commercial transactions, especially related to overcharging. The Etz Hayim Commentary notes that the rabbis extended this concept to wronging a person with harmful words. The rabbis taught that a customer should not even ask a merchant/retailer the price of an item that he or she had no intention of buying. The feelings of both the seller and the buyer were important in the Jewish tradition.

The overall theme of the Torah reading for this week points to creating a society of equals, a community that maintains balance and fairness for all people, as much as possible. Let us continue to strive for this goal in all that we say and do.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry K.