

JUST JUSTICE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The pursuit of justice is a tenet of any wholesome society. The Torah defines that principal in a clear and unambiguous way. "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof righteousness, righteousness thou shall pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20) The Torah tells us not only to seek righteousness but to pursue it. It seems to tell us to chase justice with vigilance and fervor, but the words of the verse amplify the pursuit of righteousness more than righteousness itself.

The Torah repeats the word righteousness. It does not repeat the word pursue. Would it not have been more appropriate to stress the word pursue rather than the word righteousness? Second, what does "righteousness, righteousness" mean? Isn't one righteousness enough? What is double righteousness?

Further, shouldn't we double our efforts in its pursuit Shouldn't the Torah have said, "Pursue, Oh pursue, righteousness" instead of telling us "Righteousness, righteousness though shall pursue"? Isn't the pursuit of righteousness the main goal? Doesn't the Torah want to stress the passionate pursuit of righteousness? Obviously the double expression, "righteousness, righteousness" contains a poignant message.

Veteran news reporter David Brinkley surveyed the Washington scene back in September of 1992 and reported a very interesting event.

Washington, DC derives a great portion of revenue from traffic tickets. In fact, \$50 million a year is raised from tickets for moving violations, expired inspection stickers, overdue registrations and of course the inescapable plethora of expired parking meters.

A traffic officer was on a Washington curb writing a ticket for an illegally parked car. As he was writing the ticket, a thief had the audacity to come by with a screwdriver and steal the car's license plate.

The officer did not stop him. He just waited until he finished. Then he gave the car another ticket for parking on a public street with no plates.

Sometimes justice is overwhelmed by the pursuit of it. The Torah tells us what type of righteousness to pursue not just plain righteousness but rather -- righteous righteousness. There is just justice and there is a system of laws that often goes out of control. The Torah exhorts us not only to seek justice but to pursue a just justice.

It is said that during the 1930s, when the saintly Rabbi Yisroel Meir haCohen of Radin, better known as the Chofetz Chaim, was in his 90s, he wanted to live the last years of his life in Eretz Israel. However, he was unable to obtain a Polish passport because the Polish government required him to produce either an official birth certificate, or bring forward two witnesses who were there at his birth! All of that was in pursuit of an unjust code of law. The Torah tells us this week to be vigilant in the pursuit of righteousness, but it also tells us to be righteous in its pursuit as well!

Mazel Tov to Dov & Danniella Teitz upon their marriage this past Monday from all your Chaveirim of Mesivta Ateres Yaakov

Good Shabbos
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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