

AS EASY AS 1-2-3

by Rabbi Label Lam

Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities which HASHEM your G-d gives you for your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert judgment, you shall not respect (show favoritism to) someone's presence, and you shall not accept a bribe, for the bribe will blind the eye of the wise and make just words crooked. Righteousness- righteousness shall you pursue, so that will live and possess the Land that HASHEM, your G-d, gives you. (Devarim 16:18-20)

The welfare and strength of the any society is resting squarely on the justice system. If there is no justice there is no peace. If there is no peace then law and order are in danger of disassembling into anarchy. Then the whole of societal fabric unravels. Everything starts with justice- discipline which leads to peace. There is, however, one other key linking ingredient.

The Mishe in Pirke' Avos says, "The world is maintained by three things, by justice, by truth, and by peace." Since it says three things and we can all count to three we are meant to learn that all three are needed for a stable society. The more all three ingredients prevail the more stable the community-family- individual. The less these factors are really at play, the less stable is and the more volatile and at risk is that entity. Some may have all three. Most have one or two at best and a few live with almost none but you can bet not for long.

The question is- how does this odd trio dance comfortably together? Sometimes truth contradicts peace and peace may compromise justice. Who wins the day- justice or truth or peace?

Many years ago I was learning in Manhattan with a fine fellow, a real estate manager, with a heart of gold. One week he breaks down and unburdens himself telling me of a problem that's piling up inside him and in the drawer next to him.

He described to me in more detail than I'll include here how he manages a small piece of real estate for his elderly retired mother who resides in Florida. From this apartment that he oversees she's able pay her own way. He shared with me how a nice couple with a baby had been living there for the past six months and decided to make Aliya and go to Israel. He agreed to let them break the lease and go because he appreciates the idealism of what they are aiming to do. Where's the conflict?

After they moved out already he went to inspect the apartment It was in shambles. Garbage bags with food had not been disposed of and the place had become infested with crawling creatures. A

few light fixtures had been crudely removed and there were cosmetic repairs required all over the place. The rent deposit was a meager \$1,500.00, and he needed more than \$3,000.000 to get things back to working order.

Now comes the problem part of the problem. He opens a drawer in his desk and there is a stack of letters from the husband from place of immigrant absorption in Israel demanding in letter after letter, day after day, "for the sake of the peace process send me my rent deposit!" This poor guy was so conflicted. He such a softy he couldn't not hear their plea but as a businessman he couldn't send it either. He asked me what I think he should do!

As it turns out we had just learned that Mishne at the of the 1st Perek of Pirke' Avos...On three things the world is maintained...So I advised him all three can be satisfied as follows. Write a nice letter back and explain, 1) "The Emes - the truth- is the apartment was trashed! It cost me double the rent security to rehab it back to a livable - rentable standard. 2) The Din-the legal fact I believe is that not only do you not get the deposit back but you owe me another \$1,500.00! 3) But for the sake of the "peace process" here's a check for \$400.00!" **As easy as 1-2 -3!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.