

A PASSION FOR JUSTICE-JUSTICE

by Rabbi Label Lam

You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that HASHEM, your G-d, is giving you, for your tribes, and they shall judge the people [with] righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show favoritism, and you shall not take a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts just words. **Justice, justice shall you pursue**, that you may live and possess the land HASHEM, your G-d, is giving you. (Devarim 16:18-20)

Justice, justice shall you pursue: Seek out a good court – Rashi

There is a mandate here to have a vital court system at every level of society and a way to discover and enforce doing the right thing. The double expression of justice-justice shall you pursue sounds a bit bizarre because the emphasis should be on the pursuing. "Pursue- pursue justice! Justice, justice shall you pursue: Seek out a good court." Using the verb makes the process a valued action that requires investigative energies. However, the verse puts the double accent on the "Justice-Justice shall you pursue!" The goal must be extreme in its surgical approach. Seek all you want but if JUSTICE is not precisely in the center of the center of the target then all the sound and fury generated by effort becomes by default an exercise in the vague art of distorting truth.

Justice is not an easy thing to discover! It requires a laser focus! Why is that so? Go ask a Rabbi who knows all of the Jewish Code of Law- Hallacha and download the answer from his computer like mind! Well, now we find out that knowing the Code of Jewish Law certainly helps in rendering decisions but it is not sufficient! Why not?

The answer may lie in the meaning of the word for Jewish Law- Hallacha. It does not mean law. It has to do with going - the way. Why is the verb for going the root of the term for law? Life is always going. Situations change from moment to moment. Life is constant flux. The Sefer Yetzira which is reputed to have been written by Avraham Avinu divides reality into three dimensions. OLAM-SHANA-NEFESH! World, Time, and Soul!

These three continuously form new and original combinations until one situation is never quite exactly like another. The Kohain Gadol may enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. He may not go there on any other day. No other unqualified person can go there even on Yom Kippur. As the time shifts or the person factors changes or the place moves so the Hallacha differs.

Like this, situations and conditions may be similar but they are never exactly the same. Should this person put on Tefillin tomorrow? That should be easy enough. Who wants to know? Is he of Bar

Mitzvah age or not? Is tomorrow Shabbos? Does he have a severe stomach issue? Maybe he is really a she! Hmmm!

To appreciate the complexity of this ever fluid picture of our reality that Hallacha artfully guides and navigates us through on a moment by moment basis let us consider the following oddity as an example. In all the years I am going to Shul on Shabbos, and Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh, and Mondays and Thursdays when the Torah is read when three or more people are called up for an Aliya, this thing only happened once.

We were in Palm Springs at a Hotel for Rosh HaShana with 450 people and Dan ben Moshe was called up to the Torah. Two Israeli fellows strode to the Bima and stared at each other. Which one was the intended one?

There is a finite list of Jewish names and when combined with a father's name a new permutation is born. Now in the same synagogue on the same Shabbos it becomes an extremely rare occurrence unless you live in a town where everyone born during a certain period was named Yoel.

That judge, the one who is trusted as a decider of Hallacha has a profound challenge of matching points of comparison from once situation to another and applying precedent to cases that may seem similar but are not quite the same! Now that requires loads of knowledge, creativity, and mostly **a passion for justice-justice!**