

JUSTICE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The pursuit of justice is an integral part of Judaism. Righteousness and justice are to be pursued through righteous means. Noble causes supported or achieved by questionable means no longer remain so noble. Since human justice is always tainted and influenced by preconceptions, prejudices, beliefs and societal pressures it can safely be said that there is no human court that can achieve one hundred percent true justice.

Yet the Torah bids us to pursue that almost unattainable goal. It is the Torah's policy to fully recognize the frailties of human beings and yet at the very same time not to compromise its spiritual standards for human behavior and values. The Torah sets for us goals and definitions. That we may be incapable of easily achieving those goals does not alter the obligation placed upon us to attempt to reach them.

True piety, justice and truth are absolutes that defy our systems of relative morality and changing societal norms and behavior. Yet it is obvious that we must have a clear definition of those lofty goals that we aspire to reach. The Torah sets very high standards for us in all areas of human life and behavior. We may not be able to live up completely to those standards permanently but a clear understanding and definition of what those standards are gives us the necessary frame of reference by which we may judge our life's activities and accomplishments.

Ignoring or watering down these standards in order to feel more comfortable with one's failings and weaknesses is a sure recipe for moral corruption and societal breakdown.

Judges and police - law and order - were to be established in all of the Jewish communities at all times. In most of the period of the long exile from our homeland, the Jewish society was a self-policing one, with or without the benefit of non-Jewish governmental authorization as the case may have been.

For most of this long period of time the justice system was entrusted to the rabbis, their courts and their decisions. Their verdicts were enforced by the norms of the society in which they lived. The rabbis respected the law of the land in all cases except where those laws were obviously discriminatory against Jews, opposed Torah laws or were patently unjust and evil.

Yet the rabbis opposed having disputes between Jews adjudicated in non-Jewish courts. With the creation of the State of Israel there now exist in our country dual judicial systems - that of the secular

court system and of the rabbinic court system.

Being courts composed of human beings, neither system has proven itself infallible in all instances. Yet for the most part all of us who live in Israel feel that we do live in a country that does aspire to a correct and moral system of law and order in our society.

As long as we do not compromise the lofty standards of the Torah regarding true justice we somehow are able to live with our society's shortcomings vis-à-vis those standards. The pursuit of true justice will always remain a goal in Jewish life.

Shabat shalom.

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com