

"JUSTICE, JUSTICE -- PLUS JUST A LITTLE JEWISH COMPASSION"

1. ^ב צדק צדק -- "justice, justice shalt thou pursue." All commentaries, beginning with Tannaim, from Middle Ages until modern days, are perplexed by the double noun, "justice, justice." Why do we never find

? אצל אצל, אצל אצל, אצל אצל, אצל אצל
(See Ramban, ad loc, for a list of answers until his time.) All the answers that have been offered are valuable. We shall consider three.

2. The most well known is contributed to Rabbi Bunim of Perszyscha. Pursue justice through just means. Not only the ends, but the means too must be kosher, must be just. Ends do not justify the means.

We Jews have long experienced the pain and humility of the violation of this principle. Every anti-Semite through history persecuted the Jews in the name of "higher" ends, that were supposedly just. Thus, the pure faith of Christianity; the pure faith of the prophet Islam; the purity of the Nordic race; the welfare of the working class. Therefore it is only right that we Jews, in this month of Ellul, think of our own lives and whether we use the proper means to achieve the proper ends. This is especially so for those involved in organization and congregational lives, where our ends clearly are just and desirable.

Yet, a note of caution: this is a general principle, but not an absolute. Whether or not ends justify the means depends on which ends and what means. Example: stealing bread from a rich miser in order for a family to survive; the "white" lie to enhance domestic peace -- according to Torah, God tells such a "white" lie in order to protect the integrity of the home of Abraham and Sarah. So in Halakha we have the principle of ^{אברהם וסarah} and yet ^{אברהם וסarah}. Still, as a general principle, it remains completely true: ^{אברהם וסarah}, just means for just ends; the ends do not sanctify the means.

3. Another interpretation (attributed to the Seer of Lublin): justice is never fully attained. Considering the complexities of life and society, when you think you have finally got it, there is always more to do. Absolute justice is like absolute truth -- beyond full human realization. We must therefore never be smug, self-righteous, self-satisfied. Holds true for country at large. We may be, as President Ford suggested, emerging from the "nightmare of Watergate," but the dream lingers on... There is still plenty to do. Justice shalt thou pursue -- and then there is still more justice left to pursue.

4. Finally, my own interpretation: each ^{דָּרֵשׁ} means something slightly different. Dr. Eliezer Berkovits in his book on biblical language maintains that ^{דָּרֵשׁ} denotes several different meanings. One is justice in the legal or juridical sense; and the other is closer to tzedakah, implying salvation, righteousness, compassion, love.

Hence, ^{דָּרֵשׁ דָּרֵשׁ דָּרֵשׁ} means pursue justice with a sense of compassion and warmth and concern and love. Justice -- but never with cruelty or impersonality. Justice -- plus just a little Jewish compassion and sympathy. We are to pursue ^{דָּרֵשׁ}, law, with ^{דָּרֵשׁ}, warmth. We are to achieve the objective ^{דָּרֵשׁ}, with the subjective ^{דָּרֵשׁ}.

By and large, the Jewish community, as organized in Federation and UJA, can be very proud of the ^{דָּרֵשׁ} in the objective sense of the needy, underprivileged, young and old. Often they combine the right end with the loving approach, as in JASA... At other times, as in the absorption of Russian immigrants, we are fulfilling the objective needs with a decided lack of subjective ^{דָּרֵשׁ} or warmth. If we find that, it is our sacred task ^{דָּרֵשׁ}, to pursue it, to be relentless, until we correct the situation.

However we interpret it, the end result is the divine promise: in order that you shall live, and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you.