

May God Guide You

While I was waiting to board a plane, I met a friend who was both an engineer and real estate dealer from a family skilled in developing and trading real estate. "It's been a long time since I saw you last," he began, "Where have you been?!" He continued by saying that he stays up-to date with my articles, especially the real estate ones, but he strongly objects to my view on amending the building code laws. Whereas he and the heirs he represents never violate the law, while his neighbors break the law and reap higher profits as a result, therefore he believes they must be punished severely. I tried to calm him, but it was as if I poured oil on the fire. I replied that I too followed the law, and I support the application of the law and removal of violations, but we have to enable people to remove their offenses, and not to punish them and crush their houses. We want to get the grapes, not to kill the guard. (This idiom is used in a context where one needs to focus on an intended goal without making it unnecessarily complicated.) Therefore, legal realistic deadlines must be set for removing the violation. For example, an entire illegally built floor cannot be removed in fifteen days. The rental laws must also be adjusted to include a mechanism for evacuating and then removing leased premises which are in violation. This is because, by the rental law, the presence of the tenant is a major obstacle against the removal of the violations, and this does not prevent from determining a fixed price amendment for the tenant. But our friend objected to my view because he simply believes that the violator has to manage himself and take responsibility for his mistake by negotiating a settlement with the tenant to leave, and that anyone who bought a violating property should have done his due diligence. In other words, as we say in Kuwaiti, "*qalatik*"—"Serves you right." I was going to explain to him the liabilities which the law places on the banks, because many of these violating properties are mortgaged to these banks, especially in the case of those who finance through lease-to-own type products.