

What is Your Truth?

Text Study prepared by Rabbi Judith Edelstein

1. *Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not answer against your fellow as a lying witness.*

- Exodus 20:13

2. *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel used to say: On three things does the world stand: On justice, and on truth, and on peace. As it is said (Zecharia 8:16): "Judge with truth, justice, and peace in your gates."*

- Pirkei Avot, 1:18

What do these two texts tell us about the role of truth in the nascent stages of Judaism?

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3. *The Holy One of Blessing hates three types of people: One who says one statement with their mouth and means another in their heart; one who knows testimony about another person and does not testify on their behalf; and one who observes an evil matter performed by another person and testifies against them alone. Their testimony is meaningless, as they are the only witness; consequently, they merely give the individual a bad reputation.*

- Pesachim 113b

Why would the Holy One of Blessing hate the type of people described above? What type of person are you? How do you react to others who fall into the categories above?

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4. *And Sarah laughed within herself, saying: 'After I have grown old shall I have soft skin, and my husband is old?' And God said to Abraham: 'Why does Sarah laugh, saying: Shall I indeed give birth, for I am old? (From Genesis 18). The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: "Great is peace, for even The Holy One of Blessing alters the truth for its sake. Sarah originally says, "And my husband is old!" And in the end, God tells Abraham that Sarah said, "And I am old!"*

- B. Talmud Yevamot 65b

How do you understand this text about God's position in light of number 3? What is your stance?

5. *The seal of the Holy One, Blessed be God, is truth [emet].*

- Shabbat 55a:12

The Lord your God is Truth.

- Conclusion of the *Sh'ma*,
Siddur Sim Shalom, 1985

What is the seal? How can God be the truth?

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6. *“Swinging back and forth, the arc described by the pendulum is truth. If you stop the pendulum, anywhere along the arc, and you say, this point here at the zenith, say right here, that’s truth, or if you stop it down here at the midpoint, and say, that’s the truth, you’re wrong. You’ll always be wrong. Because the truth is the pendulum, and you know this because you’ve lived and you’ve experienced life and all of its struggles. And you know that it is always a pendulum, and it is always in motion.”]*

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1907-197

How has “truth” changed for you as you have grown older and had more life experiences?

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7. *Since bribery blinds the wise and no person can see their own faults, how are we to get to the truth? Since we have an interest in whatever we think about, surely, we have already forfeited our impartiality at the outset?*

The answer is that the bias never entirely obscures the truth. Even after the yetzer has persuaded a person to accept the false way as true, they still know in their heart of hearts that the true path is "truer" than the other one. One accepts falsehood as a substitute for the truth, not as truth itself. The inability of the yetzer to obscure truth completely is a direct outflow of the Creator's loving-kindness to us. Every human being thus has the faculty of determining in their own heart where the real truth lies.

- Strive for Truth! Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler

What practices enable you to determine the truth within yourself?