

## Introduction to *Va'ad* #1: Truth and Integrity

By R. Avi Fertig, Director of Mussar

*Notes for Presentation*

*(These notes are offered to Kallah attendees to support the live teaching which suffered from technical issues. As notes they are not intended to be read as a finished essay.)*

We have now arrived at the heart of our program - your Mussar *va'ad*, the small group of study and practice which as we shall see is the greatest vehicle for walking our *path of truth*.

We will now move from exploring our general theme to the more specific focus of truth with ourselves.

The goals of this introduction is are to:

(1) **to open the topic of your vaad:** "Truth and Integrity." We will not study the sources you will encounter in your *va'ad* - that you will do with the guidance of your facilitator and with each other- my goal is to bring your focus to the specific topic of Truth and Integrity through a Mussar perspective.

(2) **to briefly explain why the va'ad is the perfect vehicle** to engage in walking your path of truth through a Mussar perspective.

***Paraprosdokians*** (such a strange word that Microsoft Word doesn't recognize it!) (Winston Churchill loved them): figures of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected; frequently humorous.

1. Where there's a will..., I want to be in it.
2. The last thing I want to do is hurt you... But it's still on my list.
3. If I agreed with you..., we'd both be wrong.
4. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit . . . Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
5. Winston Churchill: People occasionally stumble over the truth..., but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing has happened.

Here's my own (and I mean it seriously!):

I believe with 100% certainty that there is absolute truth in the world... and I know with the same certainty that I will never know what it is!

*So how do I walk the path of truth if I can never be certain what the truth is?*

Here's a similar challenge I'm faced with all the time:

My wife, Estie and I have been blessed with 6 children, from 25 – 7. They so often say to me, as they are getting older, Abba, what do you want me to do?

My answer is always the same:

*I do not have any specific plan; I want you to do what you want, and I want you to do it well, to the best of your ability, and with absolute integrity. I want you to discover and reach your potential!*

One of the great challenges of parenting is how to provide guidance, wisdom, and experience and love, while you give our children the freedom and space to reach their own individual potential. I simply do not know any other way.

I. How do we apply a Mussar perspective to living truthfully? Let's learn something "new" about truth:

A Mussar perspective is

- Individual and dynamic- process oriented...
- Individual to your own path and process oriented- moving towards being better.

## **Midrash on truth... Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 8:5**

אמר רבי סימון, בפעם שפא הקדוש ברוך הוא לבראת את אדם הראשון, נעשו מלאכי השרת פתים פתים, ונחבורות חבורות, מהם אומרים אל יברא, ומהם אומרים יברא, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים פה, יא): חסד נאמת נפגשו צדק ושלום נשקו. חסד אומר יברא, ומהו גומל חסדים. נאמת אומר אל יברא, ומהו נשקו. צדק אומר יברא, ומהו עושה צדקות. שלום אומר אל יברא, דכוליה קטטה. מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב (דניאל ח, יב): ותשלך אמת ארצה, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, רבון העולמים מה אתה מבזה תכסים אלטיכסיה שלך, [רשי- חותמת שלך]

[ענה ה'] תעלה אמת מן הארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים פה, יב): אמת מארץ תצמח.

**"kulo shekarim"** - not a surprise that the world is full of sheker- falsehood... and no surprise that we each think we have "the truth" and the other is mistaken.

I encourage you to bring an open heart, a curious mind, and be willing to really listen.

## **Min Ha'aretz Yitzmach**

Essence of truth is that it grows from the earth; it is a process of actualizing potential- of taking the raw wisdom and values of Torah and expressing them in my way, becoming and being partners with the Creator in expressing God's will into existence.

There is no truth in potential. There is no longer “absolute” or “objective” truth aside from the Creator of all existence; truth becomes the process of my very human dedication and commitment to actualizing the values of Torah and Mussar into the world with complete integrity and no ulterior motivations.

The space of Mussar is the individual process of *bringing out truth*.

One Example: *chesed shel emet* = kindness for no ulterior motives (to find favor, to feel better about yourself, even to grow - is the not a pure intention of chesed!)

This can be true of all middot - to bring out the value of the *middah* in the right time, right place and with perfect integrity and purity of intention.

Truth and integrity become inter-related;

- the three letters *alef-mem-taf*; beginning middle end. DYNAMIC, PROCESS ORIENTED, WITH INTEGRITY.

**The problem we run into, being human, is personal biases and selfish motivations.**

A source in this past week’s parasha (Mishpatim 23:7-8): Literally, speaking to judges but the Baalei HaMussar based on the Talmud, expand to everyone:

מְדַבֵּר שִׁקְרָה תִּרְחֹק וְנָקִי וְצַדִּיק אֶל-תִּהְיֶה כִּי לֹא-אֲצַדִּיק רָשָׁע:

Distance yourself from falsehood; do not bring death on those who are innocent, and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer.

וְשֹׁחַד לֹא תִקַּח כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יְעוֹר פְּקֻחִים וַיְסַלֵּף דְבָרַי צְדִיקִים:

Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the wise/clear-sighted and distort the words of the righteous.

Personal biases blind us- and they are more difficult to discern than bribes from others.

The work of Mussar is to become aware of our personal biases and selfish motivations and to gain the skill of acting and living according to our deepest values without our biases and selfishness blocking the way.

### Making it easier

Blessing after receiving Aliyah: *asher natan lanu torat emet vchayei olam natah b'tocheinu*;

We bless//acknowledge the One Above Who Has Given us a Torah of Truth and Planted Eternal life Within Us

The truth is within us, in our deepest essence! The truth is planted deep within - and our challenge is to have this inner truth animate our thoughts, our words and our actions- to have it “sprout from the earth.”

II. If Mussar journey is personal, individual - why do it in a *va'ad*?

- When we have a safe space, others can help us to see our personal biases- what blinds us does not necessarily blind someone else
- It's hard work! - we need support; the enormous benefit of connecting with others on this level
- Hearing/listening to different perspectives and experiences with the same struggles is so helpful- truth emerges from different perspectives! We study in *vaadim* so that truth can emerge from different perspectives on how to bring our truths to light.

The Vaad= The perfect Space to struggle with and apply truths in our lives

Recent board meeting: The TMI Community: what we are all about:

The TMI community seeks the truth that emerges from collective individuals honestly striving to assimilate and apply the truths of our tradition

Must remain personal/individual

- Must remain honest seeking
- Must remain dynamic- forward moving

It's not an easy path; but it is a path of truth!

“Walking the Path of Truth: Seeking Emet in our Lives”

Together and as individuals we ask: How can the truths of our tradition apply to me? How can they be more a part of my life in walking and seeking truth?

Your *va'ad* will explore a Mussar definition of truth and how these Mussar perspectives can help you to live your truths with greater integrity.

[R. Wolbe on truth being a discovery:] For many these ideas will be very new, for others it will be a chance to remind ourselves of what we know well but might have forgotten in our lives... listen well and participate!

You will be led by a fantastic team of highly experienced facilitators. I am very grateful that we have such talented and dedicated leaders in our community.