



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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Reclaiming Truth in the Age of Noise

Parashat Matot and Masei effectively conclude the halachic sections of the Torah. Sefer Devarim primarily reviews halachot already introduced earlier in the Torah. With the halachic framework largely complete, the Torah now turns to explore how individual initiative can operate within—and even expand—that framework. The first section of Matot introduces a fascinating and empowering concept: the human capacity to generate personal obligations beyond the fixed mitzvot of the Torah. This extraordinary power enables us to create new issurim and bind ourselves to voluntary commitments.

Broadly speaking, there are two paths toward generating personal obligations.

A person can take a shevuah, binding himself to perform—or refrain from—specific actions. Alternatively, a person can pronounce a neder, associating otherwise neutral items with the domain of hekdeshe. Benefit from these quasi-hekdeshe items is prohibited just as one is forbidden to benefit from hekdeshe proper.

While introducing the halachot of shevuah and neder, the Torah provides a general instruction:

כָּכֹל הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה — “he shall do according to all that proceeds from his mouth.”

On a purely halachic level, this directive reinforces the legal binding force of verbal declarations such as a neder or a shevuah. However, this phrase gestures toward something broader and more profound beyond the halachic responsibility to keep an oath.

TRUST BEGINS WITH SPEECH

Beyond the legal framework, this pasuk underscores a broader moral expectation: to live truthfully and to honor our word. Even when our speech doesn’t assume halachic formality in the form of a neder or shevuah, there is deep value in remaining true to what we say. In matters of money, violating our word borders upon theft. But even when no financial harm is caused, failing to uphold our commitments is a breach of trust. Standing by our word reflects a larger aspiration: to live a life anchored in truth.

When people can’t be held to their word, trust crumbles—and trust is the foundation of all human connection. Without it,

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relationships unravel and communities fracture. A world without truth is a world of isolation, where language becomes hollow and no one can reach the other.

WHEN SELF-DECEPTION BECOMES HOME

Additionally, dishonesty stifles personal growth and arrests moral development. When we lose reverence for truth, we lose the ability to even recognize it. As Eric Hoffer observed, “We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves.” Once truth is abandoned, we begin scripting false narratives about who we are and what our lives mean.

Dishonesty is contagious. When we deceive others, we begin to dull our inner compass—our ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined. And once that boundary between truth and falsehood is crossed, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory of dishonesty, having lost our passport for return.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

There is a third frontier in the battle for truth: the realm of intellectual honesty. Intellectual honesty is indispensable if we hope to internalize and personalize the ideas and values we encounter—especially Torah. An honest thinker, when studying a text—even a sacred one—must ask: Does this make sense to me? Given my current knowledge and understanding, does this Rashi ring true? Does this pasuk, this Tosafot, align with my logic?

For the skeptic, this question is often the final stage—if it doesn’t make sense, it is discarded. But for the believer, who reads with reverence and submits his intuition to the authority of Torah, this is only the first step in the analytic journey.

When an idea doesn’t align with our



current understanding, the next question is how to rethink an idea to uncover its inner truth? How can I engage the wisdoms of those wiser and more learned than me who also grappled with these questions? And how do I recalibrate my assumptions when faced with the dissonance between my present outlook and this new layer of Torah insight?

Without the ongoing effort to reconcile our understanding with a Torah text or idea beyond our current grasp, Torah wisdom remains external—hovering above us rather than becoming part of us. A person may accumulate vast Torah knowledge, yet that knowledge can remain unanchored, never settling into the deeper recesses of the heart or fusing with the core of our identity.

To deeply root Torah within our being, we must *personalize* it. And to personalize Torah, it must make sense to *me*. That does not mean reducing Torah to our instincts or intuitions, but rather lifting our understanding until it meets the Torah’s light. A religious person doesn’t suspend intellectual honesty but sees it as the gateway to deeper inquiry and truer understanding.

TRUTH SET ASIDE

Often communities prioritize other values above intellectual honesty, sometimes at a

heavy cost. Every culture filters the range of ideas it exposes itself to. Some degree of intellectual insulation, with limited exposure to the full sweep of ideas, is a value that every religious culture aspires to.

However, some communities actively omit truth or set facts aside to better craft one homogeneous and “seamless” ideological narrative. While revisionism and selective memory may serve certain ideological or communal aims in the short term, we must ask whether the price—the erosion of intellectual honesty—is too steep. Does sacrificing “truth” for a more “streamlined” narrative ultimately undermine our ability to internalize and personalize Torah in a deep and enduring way? When we discourage intellectual honesty, do we cause more harm than good?

CULTURAL FOG

There is yet another battlefield on which truth must be defended—the broader cultural arena. Societies, like individuals, can drift from truth, lured by powerful myths and cultural haze. Cultural forces often cloud collective judgment, blurring the lines between truth and falsehood until entire societies lose their moral compass.

The Gemara in Sotah (42a) speaks of a *kat shel shakranim*—a faction of liars—who cannot stand in the presence of the Shechinah. This haunting image suggests that dishonesty is not merely a personal failing but can become a social affliction. The battle for intellectual honesty is not only personal or religious—it is civilizational.

THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM AND THE COLLAPSE OF CERTAINTY

The Gemara in Sotah (49b) teaches that in the era preceding the arrival of Mashiach:

“חוצפה יסג’... ואמת תהא נעדרת” — insolence will increase, and truth will disappear.

Evidently, the erosion of truth and the collapse of moral standards is the direct result of rising *chutzpah*. In this context *chutzpah* means more than irreverence. It refers to the unraveling of classic hierarchy and the collapse of authority.

In a structured, hierarchical society, values are clear and absolute, often embodied by those at the top—kings, sages, or kohanim—who should serve as moral exemplars. Ideally, a king rules with integrity, and a kohen lives a life of sanctity. Their behavior models the values of the society, which are then absorbed and imitated by the broader public.

But when hierarchy is dismantled and every voice carries equal weight, values become subjective and truth becomes unstable. The modern era has dismantled longstanding hierarchies—social, political, and religious. In their place, it has elevated the individual and championed the importance of personal expression. This cultural shift has birthed political freedom, economic mobility, and a world in which human dignity is protected.

Yet alongside these gains, something precious has been lost. The clear lines between truth and falsehood have blurred. No longer is truth anchored in an objective or absolute standard; it has become personal and fluid. Each person is entitled to *their own* truth, and in such a world, truth no longer transcends—it fragments. It no longer exists on a stable plain but is contextual, shifting from one perspective to another.

The internet has only accelerated this

collapse. A flood of content—fueled by algorithms, bots, and unfiltered voices—has overwhelmed our ability to discern what is real. The concept of truth has been destabilized.

As Yeshayahu (59:15) laments:

“אמת נעדרת, וסר מרע משתולל”— truth is gone, and one who turns from evil is deemed mad.

When truth disappears, moral clarity collapses. Values lose their foundation. Moral decisions can only be made against a backdrop of objective standards. Without truth, even goodness becomes incoherent. And once *emet* vanishes, righteousness no longer makes sense—leaving the one who resists evil to be mocked, while confusion reigns.

We are living, quite literally, through the prophecy foretold in the Gemara in Sotah—the collapse of hierarchy has eroded our grasp of truth. The rise of *chutzpah* or the replacement of social codes with rampant individualism has led to the disappearance of *emet*.

The redemption of our people—and of all humanity—must restore truth, and that restoration cannot be achieved by human effort alone. As much as we strive for truth—and we must—it will always remain just beyond our reach, both individually and collectively. The world cannot fully reclaim truth without divine intervention.

We long for *Mashiach* not merely for national purposes—to complete the resettlement of our land or to rebuild the Mikdash. We yearn for *Malchut Hashem*, so that society may once again be illuminated by the brilliance of divine truth.

As Dovid Hamelech asks:

מי יגור באוהלך, מי ישכון בהר קדשך? הולך

תמים ופועל צדק ודובר אמת בלבבו –

Who may dwell in Your tent? Who may abide on Your holy mountain? One who walks with integrity, does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart.

Truth is not just a moral virtue—it is the language of Hashem. And only through its restoration can the world be healed. We still await the day when *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* redeems a world lost in a house of mirrors—where illusion parades as reality and falsehood masquerades as wisdom. We await the moment when His light will shatter the illusions, and truth will no longer be concealed but will emerge clear and undistorted. ■



Rabbi Taragin's newest sefer entitled **"To be Holy but Human: Reflections upon my Rebbe, Rav Yehuda Amital (Kodesh)"** is now available at: mtaraginbooks.com and in bookstores

CORRECTION: Last week's Torah Tidbits article (Pinchas), entitled "A Land in Which Tradition Breathes and Changes Flow" incorrectly stated that according to one position in Chazal, Tzelaphchad was the blasphemer of Parshat Emor. The actual alternative position in Chazal is that he was among the Ma'apilim discussed at the end of parshat Shelach.

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