



Trust Sometimes, Be Trustworthy All the Time

Kol Nidre – 5777 – Rabbi Zoë Klein

Opening Rap

I am contemplating the one percent, but I want to prevent the presumption that I meant the same one percent over which conventional contenders for president frequently dissent and resent. That's not my intent, nor is it, for us, time well-spent. I'm lamenting a different one percent, that fragment of contaminant that corrupts the whole movement, that one bad apple that spoils the whole barrel. When you are trusting and receptive and a segment is deceptive, that one lying percent, that vile speck, that defiles the rest. In the present tense, on this day we repent, between heaven-sent instruments and shifts in government, representatives hell-bent on ascendancy, the descent of decency, the number of malcontents versus those who willingly consent to misrepresentation, to the extent that our nation is increasingly content with the fraudulent. Fakeness has become sacred and the actual is sacrificial on the altar of entertainment. The nonfactual, the amusing aggrandizement of character over the virtue of character's content. While we orient ourselves to enter the New Year, venting our discontent, weary of establishment, weary of the next newsworthy event, hiding in the basement, pacing on the pavement, spent, bent, dented, tormented, we must practice

discernment as we wrestle with that which is true and that which we only invent.

Speaking Truth

Back in '08 a presidential candidate, who was a successful attorney, a senator, much loved, was revealed to be having an affair, suspected of fathering a child with his mistress. He denied the affair. He denied that the child was his. He denied everything. Until he couldn't anymore.

At which point he said, "Being ninety-nine percent honest is no longer enough."¹

For that candidate, that one percent of dishonesty included an affair, a child he *did* father, paying an aide to pose as the father, and an attempt to falsify paternity tests.

"Being ninety nine percent honest is no longer enough."

Well, when is it enough? We live at a time when candidates for the position of Leader of the Free World speak, tweet, debate and are fact-checked in real time, and if their Truth-O-Meter score is 57 percent true or *mostly* true, much of the public is satisfied.

That's 43% magical-thinking story-for-hire leprechaun-unicorn liar-liar media-wire headline-hoarding pants-on-fire deception, which to many today, is apparently okay.

Steven Colbert calls it "truthiness."

Truthiness is a quality characterizing a "truth" that a person making an argument...claims to know intuitively "from the gut" or because it "feels right" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination or facts.

¹ John Edwards

² Ketubot 17a

³ Talmud 23b

⁴ Chaim Stern, Day by Day, p. 196

⁵ Rava

⁶ Jeremiah 17:7

⁷ You shall not keep in your pouch two different weights, one large and one small. You shall not keep in your house

We are a divided nation. Not between democrats and republicans or conservatives and liberals. We are divided between those who think with their heads and those who know with their hearts.

And that is dangerous.

It is dangerous to think you “know with your heart” without regard for truth. Some of the people who intend to hurt you the most, are masterful at earning your trust and getting your heart to believe.

How do we ever know the truth? We live in an era when more than speaking truth to power, we have to get power to speak the truth.

The Age of Phoniness

Years ago my daughter, who has beautiful curly hair, hated her beautiful curly hair. She wanted straight hair. So I took her to get a blow out. She was happy and looked sleek. The next morning she woke up, looked in the mirror, and the curls were back. With a blood curdling shriek she shouted: “It’s all a lie!”

I wondered how to console her, because she was kind of right. It is all a lie.

I recently baked a batch of homemade calzones. I was proud. They looked pretty good. I took a picture. I used Photoshop to add a summer filter before posting it. Now they looked *really* good. The weight listed on my driver’s license is true. When I was in my twenties. The hair color changes. Resumes are enhanced. Diplomas are doctored. Idols are airbrushed. Reality shows are staged. Profiles are pretend. “Based-on-a-true-story” simply means that the script was inspired by life on earth. We are living in Holden Caulfield’s nightmare. The Age of Phonies.

Everyone carries an iPhone, our portal into a hive-mind digitalism, where the stroke of a keyboard snowballs into an ephemeral impression, snowballs into a viral myth, snowballs into an un-curated encyclopedia of non-facts nonsense with enough buy-in and truthiness that it is permanently chiseled into the stone slab of our societal superego.

Facts are old-fashioned.

“[Truth] is dead. And we have killed it. What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?”

Of course, I plagiarized that last thought. That was Nietzsche. I just substituted Truth for God. And when Nietzsche said in 1882 “God is dead” he was talking about how the advances of the Age of Enlightenment would lead to a rejection of universal moral law, the rejection of values, and here we are, on our festival of atonement, playing our sacred games, in the Age of Entitlement, the Age of Entertainment.

Confidence vs Trustworthiness

We’ve mistaken confidence for trustworthiness. When a leader is certain of his or her choices, even if there are no facts to back them up, people follow. Stiff-necked certainty is valued more than intellectual integrity. We have a culture in which leaders hardly apologize for anything. Similar to the ancient belief that sovereigns cannot change their minds lest they lose their status as demi-gods. Like Passover’s Pharaoh whose dogged posture brought plagues on his people and cost him his son, his wealth, and his army. Like Purim’s Ahasuerus who decreed the murder of all Jews on a particular date, and whose pigheadedness prevented him from annulling the decree. Rather, he issued a second decree empowering the Jews to preemptively strike at their neighbors. The deified dictator has blood on his hands, and there’s not enough water to clean them.

Our Torah, that shining vision that emerged out of the Iron Age, was concerned with the trustworthiness of Israel’s leaders. Torah outlines the parameters of kingship. In Deuteronomy 17 it is written:

“[The king you set over you] may not acquire many horses for himself...and he shall not take many wives for himself lest his heart go astray...and he shall not acquire much silver and gold for himself. And when he sits upon his royal throne...this Torah...shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear and respect the Lord his God...so that his heart will not be haughty over his brothers and so that he will not turn away from the commandments.”

Torah was trying to safeguard the people from an untrustworthy leader, one whose heart was distracted by women and horses and money, one who cared more for his own wealth and glorification than the wellbeing of the people. A leader must not be so high and mighty, that he, or she, is above all others, nor above the Law. The leader must hold this Torah to heart, maintaining respect for an absolute morality, for the highest Truth, for a living God.

Truth matters. And God is alive.

Lyin' Eyes

Lies don't go over so well in the Torah. Abraham wasn't exactly transparent when Isaac said, "Where's the lamb for the offering, Dad?" Abraham answered vaguely, "God will see to it, my son."

Jacob dressing up as his brother Esau to trick their blind father leads to animosity and bloodshed throughout the ages. Later in life, Jacob's own sons lie to him, when they say his son Joseph was torn to death by wild beasts, when in fact they had sold him to the Ishmaelites.

However the rabbis say there are times when the plain truth can be overly injurious.

In the Torah, Sarah is 90 years old when she learns that she is to have a child. She laughs, and says, "Am I to have enjoyment with my husband so old?" It's a funny reaction, actually. She seems less perplexed at the idea that at her age she may in fact carry a child than she is at the question of her husband's performance. God reports this to Abraham, but changes some of the details. God says, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'" That is not what Sarah said. She did not say, "Old as I am." She said, "Can my husband really give me enjoyment?" Big difference *God*...How could God get it wrong?

The rabbis say that this is an example of the priority of *Shalom Bayit*, keeping peace in the home. Every now and then, a small fib in order to preserve the peace of the home is good. In fact, Talmud gives examples of when it is preferable to lie. What does one sing before a bride? Even if she is lame and blind, one is to say how

graceful and beautiful she is.² Talmud says that if you are late to synagogue because of sexual relations with your wife, and people ask you why you were delayed, you should ascribe your tardiness to something else.³ A lot of you are late to synagogue. Some are apparently so engaged you don't show up at all. Makes me wonder.

I would argue that *shalom bayit*, peace in the home, is not about fibbing. It's not necessarily about dishonesty. It's about delivering honesty on a cushion of tenderness. You might think the bride is unattractive, but her partner doesn't, and when we learn to perceive through loving eyes, we are elevated.

Paul Simon as a song called Tenderness with the lyric: "You say you care for me, but there's no tenderness beneath your honesty. You don't have to lie to me, just give me some tenderness beneath your honesty." And yes, Otis Redding, I know you have a song too, and I agree that we should try some.

Honesty plus tenderness equals trust.

Maybe we are inherently untruthful. We all learn to lie at a very young age. Cross-culturally every human being tells the very same first lie when some nosey nudnik interrupts our playtime and asks, "Did you make something in your diaper?" and we take a moment to calculate the risks and rewards, our discomfort against our self-determination, and answer, "No."

The Chassidic rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk was born in 1717. As he grew, he became more and more confident that he would merit eternal life. He said, "When I arrive at the gates of Eden, they will ask me: Did you learn enough Torah? I will say: No. Then they will ask: Did you pray with enough fervor? I will say: No. And then they will ask: Did you fulfill the other commandments as you should have? I will say: No. Finally they will ask: What of your good deeds? I will say: I had none. And then they will say: What an honest man! Come in!"⁴

Even in paradise, an honest person is a rare find. But honesty isn't a backdoor to forgiveness. Just because one decides to tell the truth after committing innumerable

² Ketubot 17a

³ Talmud 23b

⁴ Chaim Stern, Day by Day, p. 196

secret sins, doesn't mean the gates of atonement just burst open. It doesn't mean you have become a trustworthy person because after years of denial you now say, "I made a mistake," although it's a start.

The Emotional Bank Account

Marriage and Family Therapist Sheri Meyers writes that trust is the belief that "I am safe. You are safe. The world of us is safe."

To rebuild trust, she writes that one has to be "dependable, consistent, responsive and comforting." She suggests when the relationship feels like it's stuck and struggling, remember to stop and ask yourself the following question: "How would love respond?"

Rebuilding trust requires a lot of understanding, humbleness, and stamina. Alan Morinis writes, "A heart cannot hold both fear and trust at the same time. When we cultivate trust, we inevitably loosen the grip fear holds onto our heart. Cultivating trust, love becomes possible."

Steve Covey introduced the idea of the Emotional Bank Account. He taught that we create a personal "emotional" bank account with everyone with whom we have a relationship. This account begins on a neutral balance. Over time, we make deposits and withdrawals. But instead of units of monetary value, we deal with emotional units. These emotional units are centered on trust. When we make emotional deposits into someone's bank account, their trust in us grows. And as a result, our relationship grows. If we can keep a positive reserve in our relationships, by making regular deposits, there will be greater tolerance for our mistakes and we'll enjoy open communication with that person. On the contrary, when we make withdrawals and our balance becomes low or even overdrawn, mistrust develops. When we break our promises to others, we make major withdrawals from their Emotional Bank Accounts. Also, not arriving on time, not following through, not attending to the little things, or living up to the words we speak. We make mistakes. That's part of life and learning. When appropriate, sincere apology keeps Emotional Accounts in the positive, allowing you to maintain the balance.

It is hard to trust once your trust has been broken and the Emotional Bank Account is raided and empty.

Nasata v'Natata

In the Talmud, Rava, who lived around the year 300, said: At the hour you enter heaven for judgment, they will ask you, “*Nasata v'natata b'emunah?* Did you deal honestly with people in your business?”⁵

The first thing? Really? Not about your piety, your charity, your relationships, your scholarship? But about your trustworthiness in the marketplace?

There are systems in this world, many, where dealing honestly with one another is not a high priority. Where girls are offered jobs overseas and then are lost in the sex trade. Where bribes corrupt organizations and obstruct every avenue toward justice. Where everyone and everything is for sale, and no one is safe.

We are a network, a symbiotic relational push-and-pull give-and-take system. We are all on the same boat, and if I drill a hole under my seat it affects you. We are connected. Everything depends on trust.

Every time the light turns yellow and we step off the curb, we trust that cars are going to slow to a stop. Every time we make a deposit in a bank, we trust that our money is safe. Every time we enter our credit card number, our social security number, we trust it will be used correctly. Every time we get a root canal, we trust the professional holding the drill. Every time we drop our kids off at school we trust that they are in caring hands. Every time the mechanic tells you what is wrong with your car, every time the contractor says “we’ve encountered a problem,” every time you hire a dog sitter, every time you click here, every time you step out of your home, every time you knock on a door and say trick or treat, every time you turn the corner to capture a rare Pokémon, every time you accept a drink at a party, every time you receive a diagnosis you are trusting others to be honest and tender and not take advantage of you.

⁵ Rava

Everything depends on trust, however, collectively we have an increasing sense of betrayal. A fear that it's all rigged anyway.

There is great mistrust between people and the politicians who are supposed to represent them. Great mistrust between communities and the police who are supposed to protect them.

We are suspicious that we are being "gaslit," manipulated into questioning our sanity. Politicians regularly saying, "I never said that," even though we've heard the tapes. Police saying, "it didn't happen that way," even though we've watched the videos. The repetitive denials even of that which has been captured on film or tape are designed to chip away our trust in ourselves, and like Ingrid Bergman in the 1944 film *Gaslight*, we worry that our accurate observations are actually wrong. And we might be insane. We are encouraged to dismiss scientific data. We no longer trust our FBI, our attorney general. We fear everything is rigged.

We are weary of trusting. Every time the light turns yellow, we assume that cars are going to speed up to try to beat the red light. We are suspicious of banks, learning of unauthorized accounts in our names. We are weary from every time we were told by doctors and dentists, "This won't hurt at all," and it hurts. We are suspicious when we go in for an oil change and the mechanic says we need a new radiator. We have been betrayed by companies that have labeled their food kosher or organic when they are not. By merchants who sell diamonds that are fake. By being overcharged and scammed.

Trustworthiness

We crave leaders who are trustworthy. Leaders who will work to restore and rebuild trust, who are "dependable, consistent, responsive and comforting." Who are understanding and wise. Who have pure "hearts of service."

Trustworthiness means I believe the world of "us" is safe. I believe you won't hurt me. That you won't abandon me. That if you send my child to war, it is for a noble reason and you will protect them. That there is as much transparency as public safety will allow. That you know where we are going and I won't be left behind. That you recognize my inherent worth, even when I'm disabled. That you recognize my inherent beauty, even when I'm deformed. That you treat me with

dignity no matter my income, race, gender, sexuality, or citizenship. That I merit your care. That you will discern without bias.

We've mistaken confidence for trustworthiness, when confidence is just one's own measure of one's perceived grandness, while trustworthiness is the universal measure of a good person.

“Nasata v'natata b'emunah? Did you deal honestly with people in business?” That's what our tradition says is the first question we are asked in paradise. What if that was the only question that was explored in the debates? Have you dealt honestly? Are you trustworthy? What Torah, what Law, do you hold against your heart that reminds you every day of an absolute morality, a highest truth? That is more precious to you than the accumulation of lovers, horses and money?

In God We Trust

On our dollar bill it reads: “In God we trust.” The touchpoint of our entire network of exchange reminds us that we are bound to a trusteeship with God, that our life is our true asset, our breath is our capital, our soul is our fortune.

God leases everything to us. The Torah is the Deed, which we seal with our good deeds, and our good deeds inspire other good deeds, and accumulate interest. For some God-knows-why reason, God sees trustworthiness in us, and God appoints us the trustees. And we are renewing that trusteeship right now in the Book of Life.

In the book of Jeremiah it is written: “Blessed is the person who trusts in God for he shall be like a tree planted by waters...it shall not be anxious in the year of drought, it does not cease to yield fruit.”⁶

In Judaism trust (*bitachon*) and faith (*emunah*) are related. Maimonides says that one first needs faith in order to trust. Faith that there's something more than this, that somehow I am part of something bigger than me, faith that though the reason is hidden, it exists. Faith that although I don't have control over everything, there's a purpose.

⁶ Jeremiah 17:7

On the dollar bill there are also scales, stamped over the number. During the gold rush, assayers would put the nuggets brought to them by prospectors on one pan, and weights on the other.

Equal Weights and Measures

The Torah is very insistent about our use of equal weights and measures.⁷

It is the basis of a stable and just economy. On Wall Street and on Main Street and on your street.

Lady Justice is blindfolded as she holds the scales. She is not biased when weighing innocence and guilt. Ron Wolfson wrote, “The underlying notion of helping others is the call for justice in the world to right the scales, to bring up those brought low and be compassionate toward others.”

Can you be trusted to use honest weights and measures when judging others? How about when judging yourself? Some people are easy on themselves, taking their own good intentions into consideration, while they are hard on others. Some are easy on others, and much harsher on themselves.

Being Trusting vs Being Trustworthy

Too much trust can be dangerous. We would be foolish to trust everyone. But trustworthiness is not dangerous. To be on time, respect boundaries, act with sincerity, deliver honesty with tenderness, create safe environments, keep confidentiality, these are what make you trustworthy, sought after, admired and adored.

Success depends on how much you’ve cultivated other people’s trust in you.

A person should not trust everyone. Hopefully you have a community of people you do trust, friends, handy people, medical people, teachers, dog-walkers,

⁷ You shall not keep in your pouch two different weights, one large and one small. You shall not keep in your house two different measures, one large and one small. You shall have a full and honest weights and measures, in order that your days will be prolonged...for whoever perpetrates such injustice is an abomination to the Lord, your God.
– Deuteronomy 25:13-16

advisors, clergy. And as you expand the circle of people you trust, I encourage you to look outside your demographic. If you are in a new job, look to a retiree for advice and mentorship, one who you don't see as a threat, but who has a wealth of wisdom and success to relay. And if you are of an age where you find yourself saying, "Kids these days!" and "We are doomed!" look to a millennial who can tour you through the changes and show you it's not as scary as it seems.

You should not trust everyone. But everyone should find you *trustworthy*. The goal isn't to trust everyone because not everyone is worthy of your trust. The goal is to be *trustworthy*, that your legacy be good and proud and just.

If everyone finds you trusting, you are vulnerable to being played for a fool.
If everyone finds you *trustworthy*, you are beloved and a precious jewel.

If everyone finds you trusting, there will be bottles that say "drink me" and cakes that say "eat me" and ads that say "buy me" aplenty with little good to show for it.
If everyone finds you *trustworthy*, there will be people who always want to be with you, who will seek your guidance and wisdom, who will entrust you with their dreams and stories, and you will have an abundance to show for it.

At the hour you enter heaven for judgment, they will ask you, "*Nasata v'natata b'emunah*? Did you deal honestly with people in business?" Rava did not say trust everyone. He didn't promise that everyone *else* will have honest weights and measures. He said *you* need to be trusted. You have to have honest weights and measures.

We look at ourselves in the mirror. Do we say, "It's all a lie," weighing ourselves against the false measures presented by our glossy, materialistic world, shallow and fragile as the mirror itself? (She likes her curls now, by the way.) Or do we take the time to bolster our trustworthiness, exercise compassion in that heart, excise judgement from that mind.

Ask yourself, can you be trusted? Some of us can be trusted to be total blockheads every time we speak. Some of us can be trusted to take a wrong turn at every fork. Some of us can be trusted to ruin every opportunity. That's not the trustworthiness I mean. Rather, can you be trusted to keep those who depend on you safe? Can you be trusted to do no physical harm, and to do as little emotional harm as is possible?

Ask yourself, can you trust yourself to make decisions that are healthy for you? Can you trust yourself to keep yourself safe, to do yourself no harm? To not beat yourself up for every self-perceived short-falling, to resist constantly comparing yourself to others, to be good to yourself and grateful for who you are and where you are? And if you are disappointed in yourself, and the path to lifting yourself up seems too slippery and steep, can you consider “How would love respond?” and try a little tenderness?

In this new year, may our leaders merit our trust through their words and their actions. May trustworthiness become a value that once again matters, a lot. May trustworthiness be our measure, more than confidence, charisma and quotability. May we invest the time in building our own trustworthiness, for a trustworthy person is a treasure to all. May the real time fact-checking Truth-O-Meter soon register 100 percent.

On this Day of Judgment, the angels are the assayers, and they weigh that which is precious in us, and they measure the reach of our deeds. Our property is our good name and it determines the acreage of our influence. Every time we default on a promise, we break a trust. But we have the chance to regain it, starting now. Today is all about taking an accounting of our deeds. This is your moment to open a new emotional savings account.

“Blessed is the person who trusts in God,” spoke the prophet Jeremiah. And blessed is the person in whom all can trust. May fear loosen its grip on our hearts, and love become possible again. Amen.