

## A STUDY GUIDE

### Jewish Teachings About Truth and Justice

Developed by  
Rabbi Shlomo Einhorn,  
Yavneh Academy  
in partnership with JUDJ,



As we prepare for Passover, our thoughts naturally go to the idea of freedom and deliverance. But we are reminded that we cannot live in a truly free and just society without the one most important element: TRUTH. Truth leads to justice, which leads to peace. But how do we navigate the perils of living in a society where there is no common understanding of what is truth and what are lies? To give you food for thought at your Seder, we are pleased to offer this Study Guide and Seder Supplement to enhance discussions at your Seder table.

Let's get  
analytical

### What's the nature of the prohibition?

### Is it about damage to one's own character, or hurting someone else?

This study guide is dedicated to David Rubin's father, Chaim Sussman (Noam) Ben Nachum Halevi, a man who always understood truth and was guided by justice.

# For FREEDOM, there must be JUSTICE

## The Signature of G-d is truth...(Tractate Shabbat 55a)

Pesach commemorates the redemption of the Jewish people from slavery. In addition to physical servitude, the sources describe a deeper level of tyranny. The famous Kabbalist R. Isaac Luria, known as the Arizal, notes the word Pesach can be broken into two words, *Peh* (mouth) and *Sach* (speaks). The Jewish people in Egypt couldn't even express themselves properly due to the oppression of the Pharaoh. True freedom must include the ability to see the facts as they are. **What happens when a government creates an environment where the line between truth and lies becomes blurred?**

### Sefer Chassidim

(47) Even a nodding or shaking of the head in a manner that creates a false impression is prohibited.

## The Big 9 The Classic Cases

Rabbeinu Yonah  
(Sha'arei Teshuva,  
Shaar 3:178-186)  
lists nine categories of  
perpetrators of falsehood

1. One who through dishonesty causes a financial loss.
2. A falsehood that does not directly harm another, but creates a situation that makes it likely.
3. One who does not cause money to be lost, but through lying causes one not to gain.
4. One who relates events in an inaccurate manner that will impact negatively on the listener.
5. One who makes a promise to another with the intent of reneging.
6. One who promises sincerely but later does not live up to his commitments.
7. One who tries to secure the gratitude of another person.
8. One who takes praise for qualities not actually possessed.
9. Getting pleasure from the dishonesty.

### Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishna

Justice is the role of true and effective leadership. That role needs to use both the elements of truth, an intellectual perspective, and peace, an emotional perspective, to be holistic.

### Rama (Responsa 11)

Lying must bow to the cause of peace and harmony.

### R. Zalman Sorotzken Oznaim LeTorah to Shemot

To teach that even though, at times, to lie is permitted, one should really try to avoid it.



Rav Sorotzken was a great Jewish leader in both Pre-War Poland and Post-War Israel who sought ideas and policies to promote Judaism.

## When is it permitted to lie?

Honesty is a character trait. While speaking truthfully is very important, one must find the proper balance and at times, bend the truth in order to preserve peace. The focus is less on the act lying but on being an honest person. Sometimes this requires one to be proactive and speak up on false matters. Other times, it means balancing honesty with other values.

Based on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik,  
*Reshimot Shiurim, Shevuot 31a*

R'Ilai says in the name of R'Eliezer ben R'Shimon that one is allowed to lie for the sake of peace, as it is written by the brothers lying about what Yaakov said. R'Natan says it's a mitzvah to lie. (Yevamot 65b)

וא"ר אילעא משום רבי אלעזר בר' שמעון מותר לו לאדם לשנות בדבר השלום שנאמר (בראשית נ, טז) אביך צוה וגו' כה תאמר ליוסף אנא שא נא וגו' ר' נתן אומר מצוה. (יבמות סה:)

# For JUSTICE, there must be TRUTH

## Passover is Our Story of Freedom

Passover commemorates the redemption of the Jewish people from slavery. In addition to physical servitude, our sources describe a deeper level of tyranny. The Jewish people in Egypt could not express themselves honestly due to the oppression of the Pharaoh. For example, Moses did not ask Pharaoh to "let my people go," rather he asked Pharaoh to simply let the Hebrews leave for a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to G-d. Moses lied since it was never Moses's intention for the Hebrews, once out of slavery, to return to Pharaoh's rule. True freedom, it seems, must include the ability to see and state facts as they are.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "What the Torah is telling us...is the connection between freedom and truth. In Judaism, truth is the seal of G-d and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. **Where there is freedom there can be truth.**" Why, then, did G-d want the Jewish people to be free? In simultaneously receiving freedom from Pharaoh's enslavement and receiving Torah, what kind of society were we to create?

The answer can be found in the famous refrain "Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof," (Devarim 16:20), usually translated as "Justice, justice shall you pursue." The Jewish people were to create a just society, with truth and integrity as its foundation, for "Truth is the signature of G-d" (Tractate Shabbat 55a).

"[Some people] never rise beyond the level of misrepresentation, and actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue. How different from the temper of the true liar with his frank fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind"  
- Oscar Wilde, Irish poet and writer, "The Decay of Lying"

### HERE ARE 4 QUESTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR SEDER THIS YEAR

- 1 Pharaoh told the Hebrews that they could leave Egypt and then sent his army to recapture them once they left. How does Pharaoh's behavior compare with that of Moses in asking for three days to make sacrifices in the wilderness rather than asking to "let my people go" and leave Egypt for good? What is the same? What is different?
- 2 What are possible consequences when people in a community or society do not share a common understanding of facts?
- 3 Are there instances even in a free society in which it would be morally acceptable for leaders to lie?
- 4 Do you feel that in our free society there should be penalties imposed on social media outlets (i.e. Twitter, Facebook etc) for publishing lies? If so, does the nature of the lie make a difference? What would be the consequences of imposing these kinds of restrictions on free speech?



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## A PASSOVER SUPPLEMENT To Enhance the Conversation at Your Seder Table

Prepared by  
Jews United for  
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"The Torah begins  
and ends  
with justice."

Exodus Rabbah 30:19

What is the  
meaning  
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the Jewish  
tradition?

In our tradition, truth and justice are one. An important historical Biblical translation (Targum Onkelos) from 2000 years ago understands the mandate of Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof differently. Onkolus translated these words as "Truth, truth you shall pursue"; rabbis and scholars have commented that from truth comes justice and from justice comes peace. Rav Muna said: These three things [truth, justice and peace] are actually one. When justice is done, truth is served and peace is achieved, as it is written: "These are the things that you shall do; Speak every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." (Zechariah 8:16)

G-d makes a powerful statement by pairing freedom with the Jews' accepting and committing to live according to the Ten Commandments: **Freedom and truth are the underpinnings of a just society.** To thrive in freedom and create a just society, G-d demonstrated that there must be a common understanding of truth and meaning.

Yet today, based on the findings of a recent MIT study about fake news, the conclusion is that "social-media platforms do not encourage the kind of behavior that anchors a democratic government. On platforms where every user is at once a reader, a writer, and a publisher, falsehoods are too seductive not to succeed...In short, social media seems to systematically amplify falsehood at the expense of the truth, and no one — neither experts nor politicians nor tech companies — knows how to reverse that trend. It is a dangerous moment for any system of government premised on a common public reality."

— The Atlantic, March 8, 2018 Robinson Meyer, "The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News."

We dedicate this Seder Supplement to the cherished memories of Nachum Inlender and Dr. Lawrence Neinstein, who brought joy and meaning to our Pesach celebrations and healing to the world, each in his own unique and profound way.



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**Chasing down cheap clicks [is] at the expense of accuracy and veracity... Facts and reliable information are essential for the functioning of democracy — and the digital era has made that even more obvious."**

— Katharine Viner,  
"How Technology Disrupted the Truth"  
The Guardian, July 12, 2016

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