As we prepare for Passover, our thoughts naturally go to the idea of freedom and delivery. 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?

R. Balbin Soratsken
Oznaim LeTorah to Shemot

R. Balbin Soratsken is a great Jewish leader in both Pre-World War II Poland and Post-War Israel who worked passionately to promote Judaism and political education in both places.

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 on the act lying but on being an honest person. Sometimes this requires one to be proactive and speak up on matters of faith. Other times, it means balancing honesty with other values.

Based on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik,
Rabbenu Chinanim, Shevet 31a

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.

R’ Elia is the name of R’ Elazar ben R’ Shimon that one is allowed to lie for the sake of peace, as it is written by the brakhamah on the head in a manner that creates a pleasant atmosphere (Seder shel Pesach 10:6b)

For FREEDOM, there must be TRUTH

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 Jewish people in Egypt couldn’t 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?

For JUSTICE, there must be TRUTH

Passover is Our Story of Freedom

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Seifer 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:

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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.

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### R’Eliezer says in the name of R’Eleazar 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)*

### A STUDY GUIDE

Jewish Teachings About Truth and Justice

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

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Justice for Democracy
Jews United for

For **Justice,** there must be **Truth**

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.” 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)

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. Onkelus translated these words as “Truth, truth you shall pursue” – the profound way.

What is the meaning of Justice in the Jewish tradition?

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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 Torah begins and ends with justice.”**

Exodus Rabbah 30:19

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.”


**Passover is Our Story of Freedom**

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**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?

**Jews United for Democracy & Justice (JUDJ)**

Jews United for Democracy & Justice (JUDJ) is a broad coalition of Los Angeles Jews committed to upholding the principles of democracy, justice, and equality that anchor the American ideal. JUDJ speaks with a Jewish voice, focusing on issues bearing on fairness and freedom for all in the challenging times we face. For more information about JUDJ, please go to www.judjla.org, or write to us at judjlainfo@gmail.com

This Seder Discussion Supplement was developed for JUDJ by Tobi Inlender & Janice Kamenir-Reznik.

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.

“[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”