

# HONESTY IS THE DIVINE POLICY

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig*

With the Torah's discussion of the mitzvah (Divine command) obligations of one Jew to another, the Children of Israel are charged with their essential life's mission: to foster a loving relationship with the Divine by emulating His attributes. When instructing emulation of G-d's truth, the Torah tells us, "Distance yourself from a false word" (Shemos/Exodus 23:7). It was insufficient to merely write "Do not lie" when it extolled the attribute of honesty. The Talmud (Shavuos 31a) cites numerous cases in which one does not lie but his actions are prohibited because they are either misleading or their silence prevents the truth from coming out. Those acts are prohibited because the Torah did not merely say "Do not lie," but told us to actively distance ourselves from the untrue.

When describing the difference between truth and falsehood, the Talmud (Shabbos 104a) notes the differences between the words of true and false. The three letters that spell the Hebrew word for truth, "emes", are the first, middle, and last of the Hebrew alphabet, and all have two legs upon which to stand (like a capital A). The letters are far apart from each other because the truth is not easily found in this world; nevertheless, truth, like the letters that comprise its name, stands forever strong and unwavering. The three letters for "sheker" - falsehood - in contrast, stand on one leg each (like a P) and are close to each other. Falsehood is unstable, easily toppled, but very common and easily found. Maharal (1) notes that removal of the first letter of "emes", aleph, which as the first letter of the alphabet has a numerical value (2) of one, the smallest numerical value, would leave the word "mes", meaning dead. If one deviates from the truth even one iota they have removed themselves from the everlasting reality and even though the majority is still true, the totality is false.

Rabbi Yehuda Zev Segal (3) was once riding an English intercity train. He started his trip in the economy section and paid the conductor his fare, but when rowdy fellow passengers disturbed him he moved to the first class car. Rabbi Segal expected the conductor to come through again, at which time he intended to pay the difference for the upgraded seat. Rabbi Segal reached his destination without seeing the conductor again. He went to the station ticket agent to pay the difference and the agent told him it was not necessary to pay. Not satisfied, Rabbi Segal went to the stationmaster and paid the extra fare. Why was he so driven to tender the funds that had already been forgiven?

Because Rabbi Segal understood that the minutiae of the mitzvos are not senseless and are not a burden. Just as the art connoisseur appreciates the exquisite detail of a masterpiece, so, too, a mitzvah connoisseur, the Jew who strives to utilize every mitzvah to foster his loving relationship with the Divine, appreciates that going above and beyond to act with honesty and emulate G-d's

truth is a special opportunity to elevate and strengthen his loving relationship with the Master of the Universe.

*Have a Good Shabbos!*

(1) acronym for Rabbi Yehuda Loewe; 1526-1609; Chief Rabbi in Moravia, Posen and Prague; one of the seminal figures in Jewish thought in the last five centuries, he authored works in all fields of Torah

(2) known as gematria, every letter of the alphabet is assigned a numerical value; the first nine are the units 1 through 9, the next nine are the tens 10 through 90 and the final four are the hundreds 100 through 400

(3) previous Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of the Manchester Yeshiva; 1910-1993; renowned for his creation of a structured system for the study of laws of restraint in speech

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