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Despite the lovely sentiments and the feelings of tenderness which the Shofar, soon to be sounded, will stir in each of us, the fact is that the major virtue which the Shofar-blowing should evoke in us is not pity, not love, not sympathy, not goodness, not humility; rather, it must move us so that we can face up to the greatest and most difficult virtue of all: Truth. The great Maimonides explained the meaning of Shofar as a summons to face up to Truth when he described the effect Shofar should have as: *וְהָיָה כְּשֶׁיִּשְׁמַע אֶת הַשּׁוֹפָר יִזְכָּר וְיִתְחַנֵּן וְיִתְחַנֵּן וְיִתְחַנֵּן* "Arise, ye who slumber from you sleep, and rouse you from your lethargy. Scrutinize your deeds and return in repentance. Remember your Creator, ye who forget Eternal Truth in the trifles of the hour..." So that the challenge of Rosh Hashanah is one of acquiring Truth and using it as the measure and standard of all our activities. Indeed, the verse we recite before Shofar sums it up: ROSH DVARCHA EMESS, Thy chief word, the beginning of all, the only story worth telling, the only message worth delivering, the only sermon worth preaching is: Truth.

Of course, that is going to sound rather unoriginal to most of those here today. Naturally the Rabbi is for Truth. Who is against it?

And yet there is something terrifically urgent about this insistence upon Truth. For we must understand this too: that the test that most men, aye even most men of good will, apply to their behavior is not "Is it true or not true". There is a different criterion, and one with which Judaism cannot agree.

Allow me to explain by referring to an historic event which occurred, according to Tradition, 5,714 years ago, this very day. That was the day Adam was created, and the day in which he also experienced the greatest crisis to befall him. Adam, and his wife Eve, were placed in the Garden of Eden, the real Paradise, and were permitted by G-d to do whatever they wished and to eat from all the trees in that luxurious garden. Only one thing did G-d forbid them: He did not allow them to eat from the EITZ HA'DAAS TOV VA'RA, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were not permitted to differentiate between what is Good and what is Bad. What a curious prohibition! Here was a man, we are told, who received G-d's commandments, and yet must not tell apart Good from Evil. Here was Adam, created in the very Image of G-d, and yet he was not able to distinguish between TOV VA'RA! Here

was G-d, who created Man higher than animals, who ~~gave~~ commanded study and intellect, who gave a Torah, who sanctified morals and ethics, and this same G-d forbids Adam to eat of the EITZ HADAAS TOV VARA, to learn about Good and Evil.

Our classical Jewish commentators were highly perplexed by this story. Many explanations were offered to "set straight" this very important allegory about the beginnings of humanity and its moral conscience, some more plausible and some less plausible. One of the finest of these explanations, and one which has much bearing on our twentieth century, is that offered by the Spanish commentator, Rabbenu Bachya Ibn Asher. He points out that certainly Adam and Eve were higher beings, that certainly G-d had no desire to hide from them the Truth, ~~for~~ G-d does not like ignorance. We must remember, he wisely writes, that the Tree of Knowledge was not the knowledge of EMESS VA'SHEKER, Truth and Falsehood - for Adam and Eve were already acquainted with Truth and its importance - but it was EITZ HADAAS TOV VARA, the knowledge of Good and Evil.

*also by
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in the 37th!*

What is the difference between Truth and Good? Why, a world of difference! TOV VARA, Good and Evil, in its original sense, refers to physical well being, to a subjective approach. That is, is it good for me, or is it bad for me. When a Man asks whether a particular course of action is good or bad, he means; will it increase my margin of profit, make me healthier, be pleasant for my family, satisfy my desires, and will I have to pay tax on it. When, however, man takes himself out of the picture, and thinks only of whether it is right, is it moral, is it legitimate, is it proper, will it offend my neighbors and humanity, is it decent, no matter what it costs me, then he is not using the measuring rod of TOV VARA; then he is working with EMESS VASHEKI. Let a man be interested in himself, and he asks is it Good or Bad; let him be objective, sincere and unselfish, and he asks is it in accordance with Truth, or isn't it?

So that G-d, in ~~forbidding~~ the EITZ HADAAS to them, certainly did not want to impose ignorance upon them; quite the contrary, he wanted to preserve a wise integrity for them. He wanted mankind to learn to do what is right for its ~~own~~ sake, not only because it feels good and looks good and tasted good to man. And of

course, once Adam and Eve taste of the forbidden fruit, they find it beautiful and sweet. For they now have perverted Truth, and learned to use it only when good

for themselves. And such standards are always pleasant. Perhaps had there been a tree of TRUTH in Eden, its fruits would not have been "TAAVA LA'EINAYIM", beautiful and sweet, but the fruits of Truth would have been bitter. For true it is, that Truth oftentimes hurts. But it is Truth which G-d prefers. ROSH DVARCHA EMESS. The Only Story is - Truth.

No wonder, therefore, that in the entire body of Jewish culture, when we want to describe the Torah or Bible in the most glowing of terms we do not refer to it as HA'TORAH HA'TOVAH, the Good Torah, but as TORAS EMESS, the Torah of Truth. And, similarly, our great Prophets are referred to as N'VI'EI HA'EMESS, the Prophets of Truth. For what the Torah declared and the Prophets preached was not that every man do what is good for himself, but what is true for all men. ROSH... There is only one story, one message, one sermon - Truth.

If there ever was a century when that lesson of the supremacy of EMESS over TOV must be driven home, then that century is ours. For in our age more than in any other have men revealed the sin of their ancient forbear Adam, the tasting of the forbidden fruit, the subversion of Truth for selfish ends. There was a time when men lived by great ideals and died for noble principles. There was indeed a time when Good and Evil, in the sense we have been using the terms, were almost unknown. Socrates drank hemlock in ancient Athens because he would not be a good fellow; he preferred to be a truthful human being. When the great Rabbi Akiva clung to Judaism even at the expense of martyrdom, it was not to gain peace of mind and solace for his soul; it was an act of heroism in defense of G-d-given Truth. And, yes, even when that brilliant arch-heretic Elisha ben Abuyah rebelled against our traditions and faith, and risked excommunication, it was ^{Not} because he found Judaism true but too difficult to practice, it was because of his different understanding of Truth. Men thought about things in a different way, it was not always related to their own petty needs and selfish desires of the moment. The criterion was not TOV VA'RA, but EMESS VA'SHEKER.

How things have changed in our day! Cynics declare with Swineburne that "Man is the measure of all things", that there is no real Truth except as it

affects man's welfare. Reform Jews parade about a new Bible, Liebman's "Peace of Mind", according to which EMESS VA'SHEKER have been wiped out, and instead Man is told that it is quite alright to taste of the EITZ HADAAS TOV VARA, of fruits which bring psychological relief to modern man's puny mental and emotional make-up. The Laws of Mourning are good because they ease a mourner's mind. The Laws of Marriage should be scrapped because they stand in the way of indiscriminate lust. What a travesty of Truth! And then the entire drift away from real Judaism by the Convenience Cultists, those who would observe only what suits them best. Ah, the forbidden fruits. The most tragic result of man's setting up Good and Evil as standards of behavior instead of Truth and Falsehood, is, as the Serpent foretold, V'HYISSEM KE'ELOHIM", Man imagines himself a divinity, and begins fashioning a religion conceived by his own terribly inadequate brain. Man, once having tasted of them, knowing what is TOV VARA, becomes "KE'LOHIM", like a g-d unto himself, and creates his own religion, his own laws, his own dogma, all depending upon what is good or bad for himself. How important, therefore, on this Holy Day, to understand and repeat that ROSH...There is only one real story - Truth.

Furthermore, Truth to the Jew is more than an abstract ideal of religious belief. Truth is a way of life that must be followed in the most intimate details of existence. How wonderful would the modern home be, how the divorce rate would drop, and how much less would people need psychiatrists, if they would lead family lives predicated on EMESS, on sincere Truth, rather than each partner thinking only of his or her own TOV VARA. In the KSSUBAH, the marriage document read at the marriage ceremony, the husband promises "And I will ~~work~~ for, love, and support thee in the manner of Jewish husbands who work for, love and support their wives BE'KUSHTA, in Truth". A home built on TOV VARA, on selfish considerations, on brutality and lust and without sanctity, cannot last. Jewish husbands build their homes on EMESS, on Truth. Had Adam and Eve remembered that fact, and had ^{they} kept ^{their} ~~his~~ EMESS and not tasted of the fruits of TOV VARA, ^{their} his family life might have been different too. They would ^{have remained} still ~~having been living~~ in a Paradise, and there would have been no struggle

for supremacy between them. ROSH,...For there is only one story worth telling- Truth.

The importance of Truth above all other virtues, and the extent of its realm, were pointed out by our Sages in a Midrash as profound as it is quaint. R. Reuven reported an old saying that "The seal of G-d is ^{AN/c} ~~EMESS~~", Truth. And then he proceeded to show the significance of the three component letters of the word: -ALEPH is the first letter of the Alphabet, MEM the middle one, and TAV the last. Truth then, which is the very signature of G-d, is the beginning, the middle and the end of the entire Alphabet of Life. There is no facet of Life where Truth cannot be said to apply. Its reign is universal. In every nook and corner of existence Truth must infiltrate as long as Truth, once recognized, is used for its own sake and not for selfish purposes; EMESS, not TOV.

What are some of the great truths of Judaism? Sandwiched between two of our holiest prayers, the KRIAS SHMA and the SHMONEH ESREI, is this summary of some great reflections of EMESS.

EMESS SHE'ATA HASHEM ELOKEINU VEILOKEI AVOSEINU. It is true that You are the same G-d our ancestors worshipped. You, O G-d, have not changed, and neither shall we change the hallowed prayers offered up to you by your forbears throughout history. A Reform Rabbi in Cincinnati may shorten our Shomoneh Esrei, a Reconstructionist Rabbi in New York City may eliminate references to our chosenness, and a Conservative Rabbi in Brooklyn ^{who should know better} may erase mention of our sacrifices; but we shall follow our parents and grandparents and worship as they worshipped, for Thou has not changed. That is Truth.

EMESS ATA HU ADON LE'AMECHA. It is true that You, G-d, are the guide of Israel and control the destinies of our people. In You shall we trust, to lead them to ever brighter horizons. For you tempered them in the hellish fires of Buchenwalds and Dachaus, only to lift them to proud freedom and holy redemption. Not rationalism, not fate, not even Zionism has achieved this. Only Thou art our master. That is Truth.

EMESS ATA HU RISHON V'ATA HU ACHRON. You, G-d, are first, last and always. Religion with the Jew must not and cannot be a three day-a-year or even ten-day-a-year affair. It must be first, last and always. That is Truth.

When the famous Chassidic teacher, the SLONIMER Rebbe, once preached on Truth, he took as his text the verse from Psalms EMESS ME'ERETZ TITZMACH; "truth springeth out

of earth" and said, "Truth is right near you, on the ground. But you must bend down to pick it up". Let man bend down if he will have Truth. Let him bend his pride, crack the stubbornness of his ego, let him forget his own petty wants, and he can have the Truth. Let him remember that the one thing that often keeps a man from rising on high is the weight of his own body. Let man bend, let it even pain a bit, forgo a bit of the TOV, and behold! - The EMESS, Truth.

In conclusion, allow me to read to you a paraphrased passage from John Steinbeck's greatest work, his latest novel, "East of Eden" . :

"A child may ask, "What is the world's story about?" And a grown man or woman may wonder, "What way will the world go? How does it end and, while we're at it, What's the story about?" I believe that there is one story in the world, and only one, that has frightened and inspired us. Humans are caught - in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity, too - in a net of Truth and Falseness. I think this is the only story we have and that it occurs on all levels of feeling and intelligence. Virtue and vice were warp and woof our our first consciousness, and they will be the fabric of our last, despite any changes we may impose on river and mountain, on economy and manners. There is no other story. A man, after he has brushed off the dust and chips of his life, will have left only the hard, clean questions: Was it EMESS or was it SHEKER? Have I done well - or ill? We have only one story. All novels, all poetry, are built on this never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil. And it occurs to me that falsehood must constantly re-spawn, while Truth, while virtue, is immortal. Vice has always a new fresh young face; while virtue is as venerable as nothing else in the world."

At the challenge of the Shofar, with its thrilling and frightening encouragement, let us think upon the Only Story G-d asks of every man as he rises before the Divine Tribunal on this Judgement Day. Whatever the past, promises the Shofar, every man and woman can still return to G-d - with only the promise that from now on only EMESS not TOV VARA will be the standard of our lives. May G-d in His mercy accept that promise.

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Because that is The Only Story.