



# Integrity Sources

## 1 Midrash Yalkut Shimoni Bereshit 3

ילקות שמעוני על התורה ג'

The letters of truth each have two legs and the letters of falsehood only have one leg. All who act truthfully shall be established whereas all who act deceitfully shall not. The letters of truth are far apart from each other, whereas the letters of falsehood are close. The truth is hard to do whereas lies are always waiting to be heard.

אותיות של אמת בשתי רגלים, ושל שקר ברגל אחד; כל שעושה אמת – מקוים, ושקר אינו מקוים. אותיות של אמת מרוחקין זה מזה, ושל שקר מקורבין; אמת קשה לעשות, ושקר עומד אחרי און

*According to the rabbis, two important lessons can be learned when one looks closely at the Hebrew letters of the words truth (אמת) and falsehood (שקר). Each of the letters of truth touch have two legs; i.e. they touch the ground in two places, whereas each of the letters of falsehood only touch the ground in one place. From this, the rabbis conclude that truth is more stable and will endure. When standing on one leg, it is all too easy to topple over. Also, the letters of truth come from the beginning, middle, and end of the Hebrew alphabet, whereas the letters of falsehood come in one after the other in a sequence. The lesson is that truth is hard to do, while lying often comes easily.*

- ? What is it about truth that gives it a power that endures?
- ? What is it about truth that makes it hard?
- ? Can you think of a time when you acted deceitfully simply because it was the easier path?

## 2 Rambam, Mishna Torah Hilchot Dei'ot 2:6

It is forbidden for a person to conduct himself with false speech and flattery; he should not have one thing in his mouth and something else in his heart; rather, his interior should correspond to his exterior, and matters in his heart should be what is spoken by his mouth.

*While most of us do not think of ourselves as liars, we are often more than willing to bend the truth when there is something important at stake.*

- ? What exactly might be the problem with false speech or flattery?
- ? How does it make you feel when you see another person acting in this fashion?
- ? Are there times when you feel that false speech or flattery might be justified?

### 3 *Babylonian Talmud, Ketuvot 16b-17a*

### תלמוד בבלי כתובות ט"ז ב-י"ז א

Our Rabbis taught: How does one praise the bride? Beit Shammai say: Praise the bride based on how she is. And Beit Hillel say: Beautiful and graceful bride! Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel: If she is ugly, can one call her: Beautiful and graceful bride? Doesn't the Torah say, "Distance yourself from false matters?" Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai: According to you, if one has made a bad purchase in the market, should one praise the purchase or make him feel bad? Surely, one should praise it. Therefore, the Sages said: One should always get along with other people.

תנו רבנן כיצד מרקדין לפני הכלה בית שמאי אומרים כלה כמות שהיא ובית הלל אומרים כלה נאה וחסודה. אמרו להןב"ש לב"ה הרי שהיתה חיגרת או סומא אומר' לה כלה נאה וחסודה והתורה אמרה מדבר שקר תרחק אמרו להם ב"ה לב"ש לדבריכם מי שלקח מקח רע מן השוק ישבחנו בעיניו או יגננו בעיניו הוי אומר ישבחנו בעיניו מכאן אמרו חכמים לעולם תהא דעתו של אדם מעורבת עם הבריות.

*This text presents a disagreement between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai regarding how truthful one should be in one's opinions of others. According to Beit Shammai, one should always be honest and direct even if it might hurt the other's feelings. Beit Hillel, however, appears to state that there are times when peace takes priority over truth.*

- ? Is your instinctual reaction to be more like Beit Hillel or Beit Shammai? Why do you think that is?
- ? Are there cases where even Beit Hillel might argue that one shouldn't prioritize truth over peace? If so, what do you think they are?

### 4 *Untitled Poem, Joanne Greenberg*

Self-deceit is a strong fort;  
It will last a lifetime.  
Self-truth is a lightning bolt lost as I grasp it.  
And the fires that it strikes can raze my house.  
You ask me to earn after truth, Lord.  
But who would choose to be whipped with fire?  
Unless in the burning there can be great light,

Unless the lightning that strikes terror  
Lights enough to show the boundaries  
Where terror ends,  
And at the limits, still enduring and alive,  
Shows me myself  
And a hope no longer blind.