

Zos Habrocha

Truth with Love

In the *Torah* portion *Zos Habrocha* Moshe blesses the Jewish people. Moshe blessed the Jewish people with love. He even spoke about G-d's love for the Jewish people: "Indeed You loved the Tribes greatly." Yet when he blessed the Tribes, Moshe told the truth about them, too. How to tell the truth with love is one of the lessons of this *Torah* portion.

According to Judaism, truth is the seal of the Holy One, Blessed Be He. We do not believe in Judaism because its beliefs are absurd. We believe in Judaism because it is objectively and subjectively true. We are not called upon in Judaism to sacrifice the truth for the sake of our beliefs. In Communism's heyday, good Communist leaders were asked to perjure themselves for the sake of Communism. At Stalin's show trials, prominent Communists admitted to things that they never did because they were convinced by brainwashing that this would help Communism. Judaism never asks us to tell lies so we can further Judaism's goals.

However, as William Blake has said, "The truth that's told with bad intent beats all the lies that you can invent." Just because something is true doesn't mean that we should say it, especially in interpersonal relationships. The truth must always be told with kindness. I remember talking to a group of teenagers 15-16 years old, when all of a sudden a teenage boy burst into the room and looked at one of the girls and asked, "When did you get out of the insane asylum?" He did not tell a lie. She had just been released from Shadow's Glen. She immediately burst into tears and left the room. The boy had done a terrible thing. The truth should only be spoken with kindness.

According to Jewish law, if a doctor feels that by telling a patient the true condition, he will cause the patient to get much worse (he would cause the patient to panic), he shouldn't tell him. Even G-d stretched the truth a little when Abraham asked Him what Sarah said when she heard that she was going to have a child at 90. She had actually said, "How is this possible since my husband is old?" But when G-d told Abraham, He said that what Sarah said was how is this possible, since she is old. For the sake of *Shalom Bayis* (peaceful family life), the truth can be stretched a little. Af-

ter all, what Sarah really meant, too, was that she also was old. This lesson is also emphasized in the *Torah* portion *Vayechi* where we learn how, after Jacob died, the brothers who sold Joseph to Egypt came before Joseph and said, our father commanded us before he died to go to you and ask you to forgive us. Nowhere in the *Torah* do we learn that Jacob ever knew that the brothers had sold Joseph. But the brothers knew that if their father would have known, he would have asked Joseph to forgive them.

Truth is a very important value in Judaism, but it is not an absolute value. After all, if a Nazi in Hitler's time would have approached one of us to confirm that our neighbor was Jewish, in order to send him to Auschwitz, we would not have been required by our religion to have told him "yes." On the contrary, in order to save his life, we should have said "no." But, in addition to this extreme case, the truth in Judaism must always be told with kindness. The truth should never be used to beat someone over the head. Judaism never demands that we tell lies to further its aims, or in order to pursue our own selfish goals. But it does allow us to fudge the truth sometimes if it will prevent needless arguments or will prevent the