

The Truth Beyond and Beyond Truth - Two Understandings of Religious Truth in the Breslav Tradition

**Alon Goshen-Gottstein
The Elijah Interfaith Institute**

Likutey Moharan I, 51 - Truth: Returning from the Many to the One

The emergence of falsehood, which is evil, which is impurity, is due to the remove from the One. Because bad/evil is opposition, for example: whatever is against a person's will is bad. And in the One there is no opposition, but all is good. As the rabbis taught (Pesachim 50), "On that day God will be one and His name one", that all will be for good. Because in the one there is no evil/bad. And therefore in the future will be fulfilled the verse: The speech (or tongue) of truth will endure forever (Prov. 12, 19). Because then all will be One, all will be good.

For truth is one. For example, if we take a silver dish, and say that it is a silver dish, it is the truth. But when we say it is a golden dish, it is a lie. So we see that truth is one, because the only truth one can say is that it is a silver dish, nothing else, but falsehood is manifold, because one could say it is a golden dish, a copper dish, and other names. So the lie is in the aspect of "they sought many intrigues" (Ecc. 7). And this is why in the world to come evil will be eliminated, as will contrariety and tears. As it says, (Is. 11) "They will not cause any harm," that is the elimination of evil. And it says (Isa. 11) "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the tiger with the goat", this is elimination of opposition, and it says (Is. 25) "and God will wipe tears off every face," this is the elimination of tears, that are the aspect of lying.

For then God will be one and His name one, which is all good, all truth. And this is why in the world to come all impurity will be eliminated, as it says (Zach. 13) "I shall remove the spirit of impurity from the earth," because then all will be one, as it says (Job 14), "who will produce the impure from the pure, is it not the move away from the One?"

Prior to the creation, when creation was still in potential, so to speak, before He actualized it, all was one, all truth, all goodness, all holiness. Even the designation "pure" was not applicable. This is because purity applies only when impurity is also possible, as it is written "You will be purified of all your impurity" (Ez. 36,25). But when all is one, the aspect of "many intrigues", which is the essence of evil and impurity, as explained above, has no place. For purity is a mean between holiness and impurity, through which impurity is rectified, as in "you shall be purified of all your impurity". This is also the aspect of free choice, which is a mean between two things. And this cannot apply before creation, for then all was one, and in the one there is no choice, choice being an aspect of purity. And when God brought creation forth from potential into actuality, there were two things, the aspect of the One and creation. And then free choice applies, which is the aspect of purity, which is a mean between the one, for it is close to it, and has not yet come to the many intrigues, that are the evil and impurity. Nevertheless, it is an indicator and a sign of the devolvement, for it can devolve until it becomes bad and evil...and this is why it is possible to purify and to raise

impurity to purity, for it devolved from purity, as it says “and you shall be purified of all your impurities”....

And all this..the aspect of purity, the aspect of free choice, from which comes the essential devolvement of impurity, which is evil and contrariety, the aspect of lies, all this comes from the aspect of “after creation”, after creation came forth from potential to actuality, for then there were, so to speak, two aspects, that is the One and creation. We see therefore that the essential hold of falsehood, which is impurity, is on account of its distance from the one, that is from the aspect of “after creation”.

And through divine providence, even after the act, when God brought forth [creation] from potential to actuality, all things are united with Him. And evil draws its vitality from the residue of providence, that is from behind his shoulders, as is known, and it is far from the One. And through truthfulness God’s providence is upon him (i.e. the truthful person), as it says “My eyes are upon the truthful” (Ps. 101,6). And through falsehood, which is evil, he removes God’s providence from himself, as it says “He who speaks falsely will no be sustained before My eyes” (ibid.), and his vitality comes only from behind the shoulders.

We see therefore that when a person wants the state of after becoming and activity, when [God] brought potential into actuality, to be all one...as it was before, when all was in potential, he must keep himself from falsehood, and thereby God’s providence is upon him, and then all is One.

Genesis Rabba 8,5:

R. Simon said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, ‘Let him be created,’ while others urged, ‘let him not be created.’ As it is written, "Lovingkindness and truth met, justice and peace kissed." (Psalms 85:11): Lovingkindness said, ‘Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of lovingkindness’; Truth said, ‘Let him not be created, because he is full of lies’; Justice said, ‘Let him be created, because he will perform acts of justice’; Peace said, ‘Let him not be created, because he is full of strife.’” What did God do? God held Truth and cast it to the ground, as it is written, "and truth will be cast to the earth." The ministering angels said before the Holy One, "Sovereign of the Universe! Why do you despise Thy seal? Let Truth arise from the earth!" Hence it is written, "Let truth spring up from the earth." (Psalms 85:12)

R. Nathan of Breslav - The Impossibility of Religious Truth

Likutey Halachot, Hilchot Ribit 5

There are several aspects concerning truth, for truth is one...but one requires great effort to attain ultimate truth in its ultimacy. Even in wisdoms of this world it is hard to attain the truth, as

scholars who seek to understand through their wisdom recognize, where no wisdom is really fully known (except for mathematics and algebra), all the more so in the wisdom of the knowledge of God, that cannot be attained through any wisdom and mental attainment, except through efforts and the labors of the true righteous, who withstand temptation and are purified of all earthly desires. Only they attain in truth the knowledge of God, to the degree that their knowledge, in the world to come, will be the source of the angels' knowledge of God. (subsection 16)

Ultimate truth can only be attained in this world, by passing through trials. And this is why God took truth and threw it to the ground, removing it from himself. Because God does not chose such a truth, even though its intention is, in truth, well received, yet it has not yet attained the truth of God's knowledge, not having been in this world of free choice and not having been purified and refined in the multiplicity and untruth [through which] truth can be ascertained from multiplicity and untruth. This is why [God] decreed to cast truth to the earth, for this itself is the rectification and working out of truth, by throwing truth to the ground...through this very means truth will be worked out and purified, through the truly righteous, and only then clear truth will be revealed, so that one can attain the knowledge of His truth, in a way that would have never been possible to attain when truth was above in the supernal worlds, where there is no untruth.(subsection 19)

The core revelation of truth in its fullness will be through our righteous Messiah, who will come at the end of these days, when the world has become increasingly populated. And the multiplicity is primarily a multiplicity of opinions, that there is great divergence of opinions....and Messiah, in the fullness of his righteousness, will attain the absolute truth and reveal the truth in the world, and then redemption will be complete and the purpose of creation will have been fully realized. (subsection 18)

Messiah, through whom is the essential revelation of truth in the entire world, will come at the end of days precisely after time has been extended and gone on for long, from the creation of the world till the time Messiah will come. And so there will [already] be many people and many opinions and wisdoms, which is the essence of multiplicity and changes, on account of which untruth has taken a hold leading God to cast truth to the ground...it is precisely then that the great rank of the Messiah will be seen, as he reveals the truth then out of so many changes”(subsection 49).

The essence of free choice touches upon the matter of truth and falsehood, as we learn from Torah [51]. For falsehood is evil, impurity that attaches itself to the remove away from the One. For as soon as creation came forth from potential to actuality there were two things, and choice [became possible]. So we see that the essential hold of untruth is in the aspect of multiplicity through removal from the One. And the greater the removal from the One, and the greater the multiplicity, so untruth becomes more prominent. As we see that as soon as Eve was created and there were two people in the world, they caused harm and ate from the fruit of good and evil and brought about death for generations... And so later when Cain and Abel were born and people started multiplying there was conflict between them till Cain killed Abel, and so all that went wrong was a consequence of multiplicity increasing. As it says, “When human beings began to increase in number on the earth....The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become” (Gen. 6)...

However, in truth, the essential value of truth and its perfection is precisely where one seeks out and reveals ultimate truth in the place of multiplicity. And the greater the multiplicity, and the more untruth has its hold there, when one attains the realization and revelation of truth there, that is the very worth of truth and its perfection, and this is the purpose of all of creation, from beginning to end...

And so the zaddikim (righteous ones) achieve the purpose of creation by withstanding the trial and being purified, uncovering the ultimate truth from the multiplicity to which untruth attaches itself. (subsection 17).

Because it is hard to attain ultimate truth therefore controversy is multiplied. And controversy is caused by truth itself, where everyone considers truth rests with him. Because with regard to truth and falsehood there are many nuances. There is a great liar...and there is also the case of someone who is not a liar, but because he is not sufficiently pure in his deeds his thought is misguided from one error to another till truth is reversed for him, to the point that he calls good evil and evil good thinking that is the truth... And there is someone whose error is refined, and someone whose error is the finest of the fine, as in the case of some great masters who erred in a law or in a certain matter, even though their intention was desired by heaven. And especially with regard to controversy...for in this world truth has fallen so that even great saints and true sages cannot attain ultimate truth (subsection 16).

In this world the perfection of truth is in faith, for the principle of truth is to know that one cannot attain the essence of truth, for the essence of truth is God alone as it says “and the truth (of/is) God forever” (Ps. 117,2). And this cannot be attained. So the principle of truth is to know that one cannot attain the essence of truth, in the aspect of the proverb stating “the goal of knowledge is to realize we do not know”. Therefore the essential perfection of truth is in faith”. (subsection 21)

All moving away from the spiritual life and internal despair come from truth, because a person recognizes in himself the truth of what defects and harm he has caused [through his sins]. And even now he is as he is (i.e. imperfect). And so he says to himself - after all, I know the truth concerning myself, how profound the harm I have caused is, and thereby he despairs and moves away from the spiritual life. So his moving away and his fall are all through truth. But in truth one must remove oneself from such truth. Because this is not really truth. Rather, we must know that we do not really know. And even though we have not yet come to that degree wherein the goal of knowledge is that we know nothing at all, which is a deep and hidden recognition, nevertheless, in the most basic sense we do not really know how things are. The only thing we really do know is that God is true and His Torah is true, and He revealed to us, through his true zaddikim (righteous masters), the depth of his grace and compassion that is limitless. And this is the core of truth...and His thoughts are deep and He knows how we have been created from dust, and every movement and transformation, no matter how slight, that a person manages to achieve in this world, drawing himself to God in this material world, is very precious to Him...as it comes from a distant place. And this is the essential truth, a truth that comes from the earth, that is specifically from the [physical] earth plane. (subsection 24)

Every person must know this so that he is spared the pitfalls that come precisely through truth that has not been properly clarified. This [recognition] will save him from the fire of controversy and opposition that uproots those who engage in dispute from both worlds unnecessarily. For this quality is the worst of all bad qualities in the world. For other qualities and desires are at least somehow necessary, though one must deal with them according to the Torah, even when they are permitted, so as to not engage in them too much. Still, they are needed for human existence, as in the case of eating and drinking and similar activities. But the matter of controversy is completely unneeded for a person. It destroys him and uproots him from both worlds more than all desire...and the controversy concerning the service of God, which is the controversy between the hassidim and the learners, or within the different camps of hassidim and learners - this controversy is worse than anything and destroys much and prevents redemption more than all sins of the Torah. And this controversy is simply unnecessary hate, and all this on account of truth, that everyone considers that truth is with him. But in truth, if he looks to the ultimate truth and does not mislead himself, he will certainly avoid controversy. For he will look at himself [and ask] maybe he is misleading himself. And even if he is not mistaken, he will recognize that you cannot achieve anything through controversy....especially during these generations, when Israel are in a lowly state and we have no political power, how can one rectify what requires rectification, all the more so by means of controversy? Because in rectifying the world and drawing the entire world to the service of God can only be attained by means of peace...and this is why Elijah and the Messiah, who are the instruments for the world's fundamental rectification, will engage only in peacemaking...and therefore if truth incites him to engage in controversy, one must throw such truth away from oneself, casting it to the ground, for God does not desire such truth.(subsection 23)

When God cast truth down to the ground, for finding fault in the creation of the human person, why did God not take Peace to task? After all, Peace too found fault in the creation of man...[the answer is] that peace found fault in man who is full of fighting. But in truth all the fights and the controversies are due to the truth that is not purified and properly worked out, so every one considers truth is with him, thereby increasing fights and controversies in the world.... Therefore God only took peace to task, casting it to the ground...because by casting truth to the ground the finding fault by Peace is already addressed, because by casting truth to the ground there are no more fights and there is peace....because all controversies arise from too much truth.

And this is why one is permitted to change the truth for the sake of peace. For the sake of peace one must change and remove truth, for this is the core truth that God desires, to change truth for peace, for this is the aspect of God casting truth, that found fault in man's creation, teaching us thereby that one must throw and remove such truth from which fault finding and controversies arise.(subsection 36)

Moses saw the great destruction, brought about by the sin of Israel, having transgressed the entire Torah and serving idols, so that according to the law of truth of the Torah Israel should have been distanced [from God] and destroyed...therefore Moses had the wisdom to throw the tablets of the Law to the ground, which is the aspect of "and you have thrown truth to the ground", as God

cast truth to the ground after finding fault in the creation of man. So did Moses do, and attached himself to God, and threw the tablets of the Covenant, that are the aspect of truth, the aspect of the Torah of truth, and cast them to the ground. By so doing he taught that even though they are Torah of truth, nevertheless if one considers that on their account one has lost hope and one can no longer pray for Israel, they must be cast to the ground and [he] removed them from himself and strengthened himself to believe that one cannot attain the depth of the divine mind at all, till he recognized that despite the sin God wants [Moses] to pray for them (Israel). And therefore he prayed much for them, till he achieved through his prayer God's pardon. (subsection 28)