

Master of Deception

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Undoubtedly you've heard this story: one of the world's foremost journalists, someone millions of people rely on to keep them informed about world events, has been accused of fabricating news stories. I think this shocks us because it begs an all-important question: "What is reality and what is nothing but a Hollywood production?" And: "How many other things have the media and other trusted agencies fed us that are total fabrications?" This episode is a stark reminder of the awesome power and deception of falsehood.

God is One; His truth is inseparable from Him. So where do

lies, deception and falsehood fit in to the balance of things?

Before the world was created, God's light was everywhere. There was no room for creation or freedom of choice. No other reality existed but God's Oneness. Therefore He concealed His light in order to create our universe. His light is still there, but now we have to choose to uncover it. As a result of this process, the forces of falsehood exist and thrive. They are the forces that allow God's light to stay hidden.

This week's *parashah* features an interesting dichotomy. When one person steals something from another (*gezeilah* in Hebrew), he must repay his victim for the loss incurred. But if he takes something without the other's knowledge (*geneivah*), he has to pay double! This is interesting because taking something from someone in broad daylight often means using intimidation and force, while stealing without the victim's knowledge would seem to be a lesser crime. Why, then, does the Torah double the punishment for the latter?

Those who strive to build a relationship with God quickly realize the difficulties that lie in their way. We are surrounded by confounding thoughts and ideas. The forces of deception surround us and confuse us. They show us a lack of progress, cause us to be unsure which of the many paths to follow, and bombard us with negative or illicit thoughts that we thought we outgrew long ago. We are ensnared by a thick cover of darkness and unsure where to turn.

This is most obvious when it comes to prayer. We so badly want to call out to God and connect with Him, but we feel hemmed in all sides. The forces of deception do everything in their power to stop us from connecting to the Source, and make powerful arguments against even trying.

But lies have many holes. We can expose their falsehood and dispel the darkness by finding the point of truth within ourselves. No matter what I may have done wrong or whatever

negative thoughts surround me, if I turn to God honestly and express my sincere desire for Him, I can dig my way out of the lies that are telling me otherwise. The point of truth is my soul talking. When I tune in to its cry, however muted it may be, no darkness can ever hide me from reality.

Theft is a terrible crime – it means taking something that doesn't belong to you. Yet stealing clandestinely is ultimately worse because the deceit involved creates a false reality that ensnares so many. By looking for truth and exposing the big lie, you not only save yourself but also rescue all the others who are trapped in falsehood. When the thief is caught and his deception revealed, he pays double, because not only must his original robbery be recovered, but also the collateral damage caused by his deceit must be returned. You have the power to expose him!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geneivah 5