**“Do Not Allow Anything to Pass Your Lips That You Are Not Certain is Completely True.”**

**A sermon given by Rabbi Chavah Carp at the Unitarian Congregation of Taos on June 1, 2014.**

Sounds simple doesn’t it. And yet it is not so simple to fulfill. There was a young psychic, called a soothsayer back in his time. He was hired by a very powerful Tribal leader. It was probably the biggest gig he would have in his entire career. This was the kind of job an entrepreneur can only imagine in their dreams.

He was known throughout the kingdoms that if he gives a blessing, goodness comes forth and if he sends forth a curse then things will be cursed. The dignitaries arrive at his home replete with magic charms they - Tarot deck, bones, I Ching, Cyrstal Ball- so he could not say that he did not have the tools of his trade at hand.

Balaam says that he must think about it over night and offers the men a place to stay on his land. Now here is where ego plays into things. We might not feel important in the eyes of the Universe, but in the eyes of fellow humans, we need to be needed. This starts to sway Balaam. Everything in Balams gut including the voice of God says- don’t do this. This job- these people that you are about to curse- they are blessed and you must not curse them.

Balaam wakes up with the truth at hand and sends the clients away. “I can’t and won’t do this job”

The men with their magical arts bag return to their boss, their tribal leader, a King, and inform him of Balaam’s decision not to take on the job.

But them something else happens. Once the men leave Balaam’s ego tells him to go after the dignitaries. Even though in the deepest part of his gut, he knows he should not go. By morning a different story starts to bloom inside his mind, which sways Balaam to take the job anyway because he really needs the work and because he knows he is a powerful person. Even though his inner conversation with God asks- “Hey who are these dudes?”

In spite of what his gut tells him he sets out with his trusty donkey and two servants.

Now he is on the journey with his oldest companion his trusted donkey and two of his servants. On the way there the donkey’s intuition and intuition kicks in. He freezes in the middle of the road. Now Balaam who has begun to lose his center gets angry and starts to beat his donkey to force him to move. Now the thing that is interesting, we all know that animals have a strong intuitive sense, and this donkey could see something that Balaam refused to see. She saw an angel in the path and stopped. Balaam gets angrier and angrier at the donkey and beats the donkey a second time knocking them all off the path, the servants too. He is totally losing his equanimity. Now everyone is involved in this negative consequence of Balaam’s ego. A third time Balaam gets angrier and beats the donkey, Balaam yells at the donkey saying how he is disgracing him after all their time together.

Balaam yells louder to the donkey, “Why are you humiliating me in front of my servants.

Now something really unusual happens, and the donkey starts to talk Balaam. What do they talk about- well- The donkey says to Balaam- “what- I - humiliating you. You beat me up these three times, have we not been together for many long years. Don’t we really understand one another, when I need a rest you gave it to me. Or if you were in a rush to get somewhere- did I complain. “

Balaam is so filled with himself that he doesn’t even realize that his donkey is speaking to him.

Finally something snaps in himself and he does finally look up and sees what his faithful donkey saw. Now he too could see the angel.

The angel said, “I came here to prevent you from dong a terrible thing. Balaam could finally see that what he did was wrong. He was wrong to not listen and wait if the dignitaries would return to get him a second time, he was wrong for beating his trusted donkey and being cruel to an animal, he was wrong for letting his ego get the best of him.”

Balaam was taking up too much space and not letting there be room for others or room for the truth to become clear in his mind. In fact you may have noticed that Balaam doesn’t even realize that his donkey was talking to him, that’s how self absorbed he was.

In the meantime- the tribal leader hears that Balaam is coming to him and sends his own men to greet him on the road. The King is now insulted that Balaam comes to him and does not allow King to come and get Balaam.

Now this whole business deal is a mess. Balaam was hired to put a curse on a community and the energy is all wrong. He humiliated the King, dealt harshly with his donkey, he totally lost his balance.

One begins to wonder if Balaam will ever get it right. Eventually the King convinces Balaam to provide the curse in spite of all the previous lessons of the day.

The King and his men go together to the foothills and build altars overlooking the encampment of the Israelite people and after a great deal of pomp and ceremony, in front of the King’s men Balaam blesses the people with the song that we sing today- Mah Tovu.

Now the King is furious, and says- Wait- you did not do what I asked. Balaam is still being shy and says- hey let’s try it again. Let us go to another vantage point and this time you must curse them. Again they go through the whole ritual of altar building and smoke on the mountaintop etc, and Balaam opens his mouth and out pours another blessing. And you guessed it, the King is more furious, and insists they go to a third place, where once again- Balaam pours out a blessing from his mouth. Only this time, he knows that is what is about to come forth from his mouth- and these are the words;

“Oh How beautiful are your tents Oh Jacob.”

Balaam had to be truthful. Eventually he really got it and he could not do what was wrong. As you can see it was not a smooth passage for him. The path to truth is obscured by money, by power, by ego, by pride and our ability to be internally truthful. Balaam took a very long time before he was vigilant of his true purpose in life.

Vigilance is a word that has become a negative -when in truth it literally means heightened awareness. How aware are we of our body language? Do our eyes roll as we are complementing someone? Is there tension in our fists when we go to work and greet our fellow workers?

Living a life of truth is a challenge. Irena Sendler is a perfect example. She was a social worker who lived in Poland during the Holocaust. She knew what the Nazi’s were doing and she had to do something. But in order to do so she had to pretend to be one thing in order to do the right thing.

She and a handful of others lied their way into the ghettos to rescue children. Those parents who trusted her in a time when no one knew who to trust, saved the lives of their children. As each child was placed in a safe farm or another household Irena wrote down the names of the children and their families and where they were moved to and put those names in a Bell Jar right under the noses of the Nazis. Her hope was to re-unite the families. Over 2500 children lived who otherwise would not have. She risked her life daily to save the lives of others. Irena, a Polish Catholic woman could not stand by and watch a wrong being done. Her story is now widely known. 650 children so far have been traced and their stories have being brought to the light of day. None of the parents survived.

There is a legend about a16th century Rabbi that formed a figure from clay. After many prayers and writing one word on its head it came to life. The being was called a Golem. The word was Emet- Truth. The power of truth is that it is life giving. When the Gold was no longer need to protect the people at night Rabbi Lowe of Prague erased the first letter of the Hebrew word Emet- Truth- and that formed the word death. Where upon the Golem died. Some say his dirt is still piled in the attic of the Synagogue. Imagine that- one letter is the difference between death and truth.

Truth is vital to every relationship. Did you know that above all else I was taught that it is an obligation to praise a bride! This is very holy work. So what happens if you should find yourself struggling with what to say and after a time you find nothing nice to say.

Well- here is your obligation you must keep wrestling with yourself until you discover something praiseworthy and positive to say. In other words- keep looking, even if the job is hard. The great thing about this struggle is that it alters your perspective and where there was hate there is now joy and gratitude.

Lying is considered a spiritual illness. Lying can stem from a desire for money, for respect, for prestige, for pleasure. It is when we build on the lies and we forget the truth we build a house of cards.

In Hebrew the word truth has three letters. These letters are considered emanations, much more than just a tool for communication the letters are imbued with power and deeper meaning. Emet- truth- has holds within it that which we have become in life. Who we have become is visible to others by our actions, by our speech and by our thoughts.

Truth must stem from our discerning heart. If we choose to argue a point, just to win it then we might be harming not only our soul but the soul of another. Ultimately Balaam came to the same conclusion that he must follow what his heart tells him. Even when a powerful leader asked him to put a curse on a people he eventually had to see the truth that this was not a people who are bad but people who show beauty. No matter how hard he tried to see what he wanted to see and the truth came through in the end. By the way this story comes from the book of Numbers.

“We all have a discerning heart, though its voice may be quiet, or even muffled, or drowned out by other inner voices. We also may not be so familiar with its language. Traditiontells us that one of the primary tasks on the spiritual journey is to cultivate and exercise that implement of skillful discernment, the wise heart. Only then will we become the masters of truth, with all the judgment, discernment, fearlessness, and wisdom, that mastery implies.

To effect real change with the quality of Truth we must conduct an inventory of our current habits and patterns of being. Regarding truth we have three relationships with truth;

we can run away from it

we can wait for it to arrive

we can actively seek it out

How do we get to our own truth. The easiest way is to start with the present moment. What is happening now? What have you been thinking about while sitting hear and listening to these words? Did you get caught up with a particular thought- something from the past perhaps? Were you able to quiet your mind and return to the present?

As we move through this process of being more truthful to ourselves, through small steps everyday we eventually become aware of our specific feelings and move closer to our authenticity.

Being truthful teaches us that we must still be kind. If a small white lie saves faces and prevents hurting another then it is for the good. Honesty in our business dealings is also critical. Our ego must be kept in check and finally we must be a willing recipient of the truth from others.

In the coming week consider how you will practice truth this week. Figure out where your weakness lives and work on that one aspect.

Be vigilant of your Thought, Words and Deeds no matter how great the challenge.

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How To have a lovely day

Smile at Strangers

Slow Down

Say Thank you

Give lots of complements

dress nicely

wear perfume

observe and listen

be charming

laugh

wish people a lovely day`