

The book cover features a dark teal background with yellow sunburst lines radiating from the top. The title is written in a playful, stylized font. 'AN ANGEL' is in red with a white dotted pattern. 'CALLED' is in a smaller, light blue font. 'TRUTH' is in large, white letters with a blue base and white dots. '&' is in a small, light blue font. 'OTHER TALES' is in large, yellow letters with a white outline. The entire title is framed by white decorative swirls. Small yellow and red stars are scattered throughout the background.

AN ANGEL
CALLED
TRUTH
&
OTHER TALES

Reimagining the
TORAH
For Today

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Bereshit

An Angel Called Truth

The Bible opens with the story of the creation of the world and everything in it. The text records that almost everything was created by God acting alone. But when it comes to the first human (Genesis 1:26), the verb used to describe our creation is in the plural form – ‘We shall make Adam’ – not the singular form ‘I shall make Adam.’ Who was God talking to? The Rabbis (Bereishit Rabba 8:5) imagine an angelic council. We’ve told our story from the perspective of one of the angels summoned to be part of this meeting.

As one of God’s four favourite angels I wasn’t surprised to be invited to be part of such an important meeting. God was considering whether to create human beings and wanted angelic opinion on the question. I ruffled my feathers a little and prepared to share my thoughts.

The Angel called Loving Kindness spoke first.

‘Oh wise and mighty God.’ She knew just how to make God feel particularly powerful and important. ‘You are so good at coming

up with these ideas. Just think of the acts of kindness humans will do in the world. I vote create!’

The Angel called Truth disagreed.

‘Humans? Really? You have to be kidding. Not humans. They’ll lie. All the time. To get anything.’ She wrinkled her nose as if God had just come up with the worst idea ever.

In his slightly patronising way, the Angel called Justice peered over half-moon glasses and nodded sagely.

‘Having considered the evidence, I believe humanity will respect basic rules of justice in the world. I find in favour of their creation.’

Finally, it was my turn. Peace always goes last. How painful it was to have to share my opinion.

‘Do not create humans,’ I warned God, ‘for they will be full of violence.’

There was a momentary pause as the evidence was considered. There was an angel stand-off: two angels supporting creation and two opposed. Then, suddenly, God picked up the Angel called Truth and threw her down to the earth.

The three of us ran forward.

‘What have you done, God?’





‘Why did you do that to Truth?’

‘How could you get rid of Truth like that?’

We were horrified and confused – and at that moment, while we argued about what God had done to Truth, the first human being was created.

And all God would say was: ‘Truth must rise up from the earth. It can’t come down from the heavens.’

Should humans have been created. Why?
Why might it have been a bad idea?

Was God right to fix the outcome of the debate? How do you feel about God’s way of ‘fixing’ it?

What is the difference between a truth which falls down from the heavens and one which is built up from the earth?

On the basis that we are deceitful and violent, why did God want us? Why are we here?

Va'eira

Frogs... Everywhere

The first of the plagues that will result in the Children of Israel leaving Egypt takes place in this week's Torah reading. We've told our tale from the perspective of Nour, a young Egyptian girl who doesn't appear in either the Bible or Midrash.

'Dinner is ready, come on in.' I heard my mother call and I was getting hungry, but these little green creatures in the backyard were cute, really cute.

'Come on, children. I don't want to have to keep asking.' Mum was getting impatient.

I am the oldest and, frankly, best of the Mustafa siblings. I knew I should go inside – my brothers and sisters would follow if I went first. But this invasion of frogs was worth testing Mum's temper, at least for a few more minutes.

Eventually, I headed into our home. I hadn't realised they were

inside too. There was one, hopping out of the oven. And another – in the mixing bowl. Yuk. It's hard to enjoy your stew when you have to keep batting green creatures off the dining table.

'It's that time of year,' Dad explained. 'You see, between June and August, the Nile picks up all this vegetable matter and turns red – remember, that happened last week. That makes for excellent breeding opportunities for frogs. It's fine – cycle of nature and all that – absolutely nothing to worry about.' He flicked a frog off his head, folded his arms across his chest and scowled. The scowl meant 'no more questions'. We understood.

Mum was worried, you could tell. Yesterday, she went to the Court magicians to see if they knew what was going on.



‘I wonder if it’s a sign,’ she whispered to me, ‘like someone trying to warn us about something.’

I looked out at the garden. There weren’t just a few frogs now. This was out of control. The frogs were *everywhere*.

What do you do when you see something that doesn’t make sense? How do you try to understand what is going on around you?

Do you know people who see something unusual and take it to mean nothing? What is the problem with this approach to the world?

Do you know people who see something unusual and take it to mean too much? What is the problem with this approach to the world?

Bo

Samuel Goes for Gold

This is the portion in which the Exodus takes place. When the Israelites leave, they have to leave quickly, without even enough time for their dough to rise. They are also commanded to ask for gold and silver from the Egyptians, and to take that with them. We've imagined our story from the perspective of a boy helping with the packing.

Mum's sorting out the clothes, bundling everything that will fit onto a sheet she'll tie up to make a bag. Dad is in the kitchen weighing out the flour. I want to help.

'Dad, can I help knead the dough?' What I really want to know is why we are in such a rush; surely the Egyptians have been completely crushed? Besides, if we really are going to be leaving in twenty minutes, how will the dough have time to rise? Dad doesn't look like he is in the mood for questions.

Mum shouts over the chaos.

'Don't worry about the dough. If you haven't got anything else

to do, run over to the Gamals and ask for their gold.' Really, like the Gamals would just hand over their gold! That doesn't sound very likely. Usually the Gamal kid spits when he passes me in the street – and he gets his manners from his parents. They are the richest family in our neighbourhood. They live in the biggest house, behind the biggest fence, with the fiercest guard dogs. The best thing to do with the Gamals is keep well away.

'Come on, Samuel,' Mum shouts from across the room. 'Gamals – gold – move it!' Mum appears too stressed to use full sentences.

Now, I know there have been a lot of miracles lately, but getting the Gamals to hand over their gold to me seems beyond impossible. I just stand there looking confused. Mum comes over. She puts her hands on my shoulders and I can feel she is trying to keep the stress from her voice.

'Don't worry, we're owed it. We've worked like slaves for that family, for years now.



It's our payment. It's justice. And they will hand the gold over. Moses has said they will.'

I pull myself together. Mum's right, we do deserve payment. And I can be brave. So that's how I find myself walking up the long path leading up to the big house, tiptoeing past the dogs, my heart beating hard.

'I've come for our payment. The g-g-gold,' I stutter as Mr Gamal appears in the doorway. 'Oh, and I'm in a rush.'

What is the best thing to do when your parents are busy?

How do you think Mr Gamal would respond to Samuel's request?

Other people have been enslaved throughout human history. Today, some political activists are calling for reparations for the work of slaves taken from Africa. Do you think we should or could organise reparations for modern slavery? How might that work?

Tazria

A Rash Decision

This week's reading features a major discussion of a strange skin disease called Tzara'at. It can appear as a rash, spots or scabs. Tzara'at is not like any disease known to medicine, though the word is often translated as 'leprosy'. We learn its symptoms, how it is to be diagnosed (by the priests) and how anyone with Tzara'at has to be kept away from the rest of the camp until the symptoms pass. Much later in the Bible (Numbers 12) we learn that Miriam, Moses' sister, contracts Tzara'at having bad-mouthed Moses for his choice of wife.

We have told our tale from the perspective of a young woman in the camp – unmentioned in either the Bible or Midrash – who wakes up one morning with a rash on her arm.

I sit on the bed, scratching. This rash is itchy. Please don't let it be Tzara'at. When Rachel, in the next tent, had Tzara'at she had to go away for weeks on end. I don't mean to spread stories about Rachel, but ... you know she loves a gossip. Everyone says she got Tzara'at because of that time she was talking about

Shimon and the donkey. After all, we all know that Miriam, Moses' sister, got Metzora when she bad-mouthed Moses' wife Zipporah. By the way, I never gossip.

Downstairs, my parents are whispering – trying to whisper. I can make out that they are talking about me. They are gossiping about their own daughter! I hate it when they do that. Mum's worried. She mumbles something super-quietly to Dad. Has she noticed my rash, or is it something else?

I should ask Mum's advice about the rash, I know I should, but she's going to insist I get it checked by the priest. Can you imagine if a priest said I was contagious? No-one will ever talk to me again.



Oh, if it is Tzara'at everyone will assume I was involved in telling stories about Shimon. That's so unfair. If only this rash would go away. Argh, it's just so itchy. Oh! Wait a minute... now it's on my leg too.

'Mum... Mum!'

Something weird happens to your body.
What do you tend to do about it?

When we get ill is it helpful to reflect on the
behaviour that might have caused it?

Do we treat people differently because of
how they look? How?

Do we treat ourselves differently because of
how we feel we look? How?

Re'eh

The Lying Prophet

This portion prepares the Children of Israel for entering the Promised Land. They are warned not only not to worship false gods but also not to follow false prophets who might lead them towards false gods - even if the prophets correctly predict the future. The Torah wants to make sure that false gods will play no part in our lives. We have told our tale from the perspective of a child, heading home from the market with their mother. They see a strange woman, sat behind a table, with a scarf round her head.

‘Oh, you look like a young woman who wants to know about how the world really works, right? Come over here.’ She sings to me, calling me over. ‘Put your bags down for a moment and I’ll tell you just how you can achieve anything in this world. I can explain this to you, you know, I know all the secrets of this world. I can see the future. I can make your dreams come true! You are going to be famous, you are going to be rich. I know these things – here look at this.’ She twirls her gloved fingers in the air and produces a coin, out of nowhere. I know I should be heading home, but the shopping is heavy, I’m distracted.

‘Let me prove my special powers to you, my dear child,’ the woman promises me. She’s holding out a card face-down ‘Just name a card, any card.’ ‘Errr,’ I’m a little confused, ‘OK, seven of clubs.’ She turns over the card – it is the seven of clubs. ‘You see,’ my child, ‘I know things. I know things about you, about



who you are and who you could be. Come over here.’

But then, suddenly, my mum is by my side. She pulls me away. ‘She’s a trickster,’ she warns, ‘a lying prophet. Resist anyone

predicting your future. Freedom means we face every day without knowing what is going to happen next. She's only got false signs for you. She can't know your future. No-one can know your future. You should know that she has no power at all.'

And with that, she leads me home.

Do you look for signs/proof in your life?
Does it help you make decisions?

How do you know whom to believe?

Should you trust someone more or less if
they can 'prove' to you that they're right?

Where do magic tricks stop and blatant
deception start? How do you work out
when you're dealing with one or the other?

What are the benefits of living your life not
knowing the future?

One of Britain's leading Rabbis and a marketing expert (both with early/pre-teen kids) have created micro-stories for each of the Torah reading sections of the year. Their aim is to engage and enlighten older children and provide a fresh approach to religious learning for a vitally important age-group. Thought-provoking questions follow each of 60, stunningly illustrated tales to challenge pre-teens to think about themes such as morality, self-belief, faith and difference. Uniquely, the significant majority of these stories are written in first-person narrative, from the point of view of 10-13 year old characters who are the same age as the ideal readers.

An Angel Called Truth and Other Tales is a crowd-funding project. We need your help.

In September 2019 we launched <https://anangelcalledtruth.com> where backers can sign-up for pre-publication special offers including a limited-edition hardback, original art-work and bulk purchasing for institutional giving. Funds collected during the crowdfunding stage will be used to commission more of Pete's outstanding illustrations and to bring the book to publication. Backers will also receive regular updates, early peaks at additional stories and artwork and have the opportunity to help shape the project as it comes to fruition.

If you are interested in more, and especially if you are interested in supporting this project, please take a look at our website or drop us a line at **info@anangelcalledtruth.com**. We would love to hear from you.