

I have been diminished by all of the kindnesses and by all of the truth. (32:11)

Kindness is neither an absolute nor a definitive term. Thus, the statement, “all of the kindnesses,” is an appropriate statement. Varied types of kindnesses come in different sizes, shapes and forms. To pay gratitude for all of the kindnesses that Yaakov *Avinu* received from Hashem is an unqualified statement. There are many kindnesses. Truth, however, is unequivocal. It is conclusive and unmitigated. There is only one truth. There is no “whole” truth versus a “half” – truth, because a half-truth is a full lie! Something is either one hundred percent true, or one hundred percent false. No grey area exists between true and false. What did Yaakov mean when he mentioned “all of the truth”?

Horav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, zl, explains that we observe two forms of qualitative truth: absolute; and relative. Worldly concepts are, by their very nature, relative, because – regardless of the statement that we make – we can find something, somewhere that will supersede it. For example, we describe an object as large. This may be true in comparison to what we have presently before us. Elsewhere, however, we may find the same object – many times larger. Another example would be concerning the terms wealthy and poor. There is no absolute in describing poverty; nor is the term wealthy a definitive description. One person may have been a billionaire his entire life until he lost just about everything. He is now left with a mere \$100,000. Another person never possessed a dollar to his name. Suddenly, he wins the lottery and comes home with \$100,000. Both men have the same amount of money. One, however, is considered in sad shape, while the other is wealthy out of his mind! Everything is measured relatively, in accordance with what one has had. If he had nothing; he has plenty. If he had plenty; now, he is a *rachamanus*, pitied.

A similar system of relative comparison applies to the world of ethics and character refinement. The Torah writes that Noach was a *tzaddik*, righteous person. Yet, our sages debate whether the term *tzaddik* is relative to his generation of evil people, or the description would have been equally appropriate had he lived in Avraham *Avinu's* generation, when Noach would have had to measure up to a higher standard. Likewise, in the prayer recited following the reading of *Sefer Tehillim* (actually the prayer recited by the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, on *Yom Kippur*, *Talmud Taanis* 24b), we say, *V'lo yitztarchu amcha Bais Yisrael zeh lazeh, v'lo l'am acher*, “And your nation the House of *Yisrael* should need neither (the assistance) of one another, nor that of another nation.” Simply, this is a reference to material assistance. We entreat the Almighty to render us self-sufficient, without having to rely on outside help, be it from other Jews or other nations.

Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berditchev offers an alternative interpretation that grants us new insight into the meaning of “assistance.” When a Jew is judged by the Heavenly Tribunal, what if he comes up “short” on his merit account? What if he just does not have sufficient virtue to warrant a positive arbitration of his case for life? Hashem will judge him relatively – in comparison with others. If he comes out on top, it might not be because he is himself virtuous; but rather, it might be

because he is better than others of similar circumstances and rearing. If, for some reason, he is at the bottom of the list, then, it is necessary for the Heavenly Tribunal to look elsewhere, out of the box, at gentiles. In comparison to the gentile, we always come up smelling roses, because we have the advantage of *Atah bechartanu mikol ha'amim*, "You have chosen us from among all the nations." This concept saves us. Thus, the prayer that we supplicate is: May we be virtuous in our own merit, without having to be compared to others.

In any event, we observe that a relative dichotomy exists concerning the definition of *emes*, truth. Thus, *Rav Zevin* distinguishes between *emes l'amito*, true truth or deep truth, and "just plain" *emes*. *Emes* is measured on a relative scale, as we have seen above. Something is considered true in comparison with other things that are clearly not true. *Emes* takes into account background, circumstances, qualifications, etc. Is it true – yes or no? The laws of the Torah, however, are absolute truth, rendered by Hashem, the Divine Author of the laws and the Torah. The *mitzvah* itself generates reward. The *aveirah*, sin, itself engenders punishment.

Yaakov Avinu did not view the world through simple, mortal eyes. His perspective penetrated the physical, as he gazed at the intrinsic essence of everything before him. He saw beyond the relative truth to which we are privy. He saw *emes l'amito*. Therefore, he was able to say, "I have been diminished by all of the kindnesses and all of the truth." He understood the meaning of "all."