

And G-d said, “Let us make Man in Our image, after Our likeness. (1:26)

The *Midrash Rabbah* relates that, when Moshe *Rabbeinu* was writing the Torah as Hashem’s “secretary,” he came to the above *pasuk*. He asked Hashem incredulously, “*Ribbono Shel Olam*, why give an excuse to the heretics?” This *pasuk* appears to imply that Hashem either needed assistance in creating or had partnered with the angels. In any event, it seems to dispute the Oneness of Hashem. The Almighty replied, “He who wants to err – will err.” This statement begs elucidation. There are many places in which we find Hashem doing things – even miraculous occurrences – to prevent people from making a mistake, from misjudging a situation. For instance, in order to prevent the skeptics from impugning Avraham *Avinu*’s paternity of Yitzchak *Avinu*, and instead attributing Sarah’s miraculous conception to her stay with Avimelech – He formed Yitzchak’s facial countenance to resemble that of Avraham perfectly. If so, why did Hashem not care about the mistakes made by people with regard to the world’s creation?

Horav Dovid Povarsky, zl, explains this with an exposition on the principle of belief in Hashem. He first questions *Chazal*’s vernacular: *Kol ha’rotzeh lit’os yiteh*, “He who wants to err- will err.” What does “wanting to err” mean? Who wants to make a mistake? The basic definition of mistake/error is that it is not on purpose, unknowing, lack of understanding. Indeed, as soon as one commits an error, he immediately declares, “Oops! I made a mistake!” Certainly, one does not attempt to make a mistake.

In response to this question that the *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that with regard to matters of faith, one cannot simply make a mistake unless he wants to. Belief in Hashem is cut and dried. It is clear, without question. No reasonable person who is blessed with a working mind could believe otherwise. Ostensibly, one who errs in areas of faith does so purposefully and with malicious aforethought.

This is not true concerning other areas in which one can make a justified error. For instance, in the case of Sarah *Imeinu*, she had been married to Avraham *Avinu* for quite some time. Their union had not produced offspring. Suddenly, she spent a short interlude with Avimelech, and she conceived! The fact that she was ninety years old does not seem to concern anyone. It was a legitimate mistake about which one who was not very astute could make an assumption. Therefore, Hashem saw to it that Yitzchak looked like Avraham.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* refers to the individual who refuses to continue living a life of error. By conceding to his mistake, his courage will be rewarded. David *HaMelech* achieved the monarchy for his ability to say, *Chatasi*, “I sinned.” His ancestor, Yehudah, set the standard with his, *Tzadkah mimeni*, “She (Tamar) is more righteous than I.” Shaul *HaMelech* refused to concede his guilt; thus, he forfeited his monarchy. These are all circumstances in which some form of justification is offered to legitimize the sin. Therefore, a reward is set aside for he who can

overcome his ego.

Indeed, the *Chovos HaLevavos* observes a common problem whereby one will compound his mistake by refusing to concede error, even after he knows beyond any shadow of a doubt that he is dead wrong. This is what is meant by *ha'rotzeh litos* – one who wants to err. He refuses to admit that he might be wrong. Such recalcitrance engenders no hope.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concludes with the following parting words to his students, “You are yet young, therefore you have no idea concerning the challenges to our faith that were present years ago in Europe. (The *Haskalah*, Jewish Enlightenment, with its rabid hatred of Torah was everywhere, poisoning the wellsprings of faith.) There was once a person about whom it was said that whatever he was asked to do – he would do exactly the opposite. It was decided to fool him at his own game by asking him to do the opposite of what was needed of him. This way, by doing the opposite, he would end up doing exactly what we wanted. Regrettably, he was so set in his lie that he still followed it and in this instance did not do the opposite – even though it was against his very nature.

What is it about *emes*, truth, that people tend to shy away from? Is it easier to live a “lie” than to live the “truth”? Apparently, by his very nature, man does not have a proclivity to the truth. This is taught to us by *Chazal*. As mentioned earlier, prior to creating man, Hashem consulted with His Heavenly Tribunal, asking the various forces in Heaven what they felt about Adam’s creation. Would the creation of man be a good thing, would it be beneficial, or would the world suffer as a result of his creation? The primary “players” of human nature were asked. “Truth” advised that creating man would be dangerous: “He is filled with deceit,” which is the last thing the world needed. “Peace” argued against his creation, since man is argumentative, always embroiled in one dispute or another. The consensus had rendered their verdict: It would be best not to create man.

The **Sfas Emes** derives from *Chazal* that man neither has a tendency towards *emes*, truth, nor does he gravitate towards peace. Man can exist without harmony and integrity. Therefore, if man is going to be honest, he must work at it. Likewise, it is much easier to get into a dispute than to walk away from it. Regrettably, some of us even seem to thrive on controversy.

If this is the case, if honesty is something one must pursue and work at, it makes sense that, when he is under pressure, such as conceding to his own error, which in his small mind might make him appear deficient, it becomes increasingly difficult. If this is the case, can one really blame man for his unwillingness to concede error? Yes. Apparently, Hashem had not agreed with the Heavenly forces, since He created man despite their misgivings. This means that either Hashem equipped man with the ability to rise above his nature, or He simply believes in us. Thus, one who is *rotzeh litos* is also letting Hashem down.