

And Hashem said, “Let us make man in our Image in our likeness. (1:26)

Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 8:5) teach that, when Hashem set out to create man, the angels organized themselves into groups – pro and con. Chesed, Kindness, “advised” Hashem to create man, because he would behave kindly and benevolently to others. Emes, Truth, disagreed, claiming that man would be filled with lies; thus, his presence in this world would be harmful. Hashem listened to their positions and then proceeded to fling Truth to the ground. This is alluded to in Daniel (8:12), V’sashleich emes artzah, “He threw Truth earthward” (and created Man). This Midrash begs elucidation. If, in fact, man is full of lies, why did Hashem override Emes and create Man? Evidently, by flinging Truth to the ground, Hashem set the stage for enabling the creation of Man. How can we understand this?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that we identify two forms of truth. First is Heavenly truth, which is absolute, uncompromising and free of any embellishments. Our world is not yet prepared for the pure, unadulterated level of Heavenly Truth. At some junctures in time, however, we merited to hear the d’var Hashem, word of G-d, conveyed to us through the Neviim, Prophets. The truth of the Neviim was surely Heavenly truth. A Navi told it like it was – no cover ups, no holding back, no alterations. As Hashem’s agent, he was to convey the message exactly as Hashem communicated it to him.

This truth can, at times, be brutal. When Shmuel HaNavi spoke to Shaul HaMelech, his chastisement was straightforward and harsh. When Gad HaNavi rebuked David HaMelech, he did not pull back. His words conveyed the truth – which, in this case, was harsh. When Yeshayahu HaNavi informed Chizkiyahu HaMelech that, as a result of his sin, he would die, he told the brutal truth.

We are not prophets and, as such, are not permitted to speak in this manner to our fellow man. We must couch our message with gentleness, making every effort not to shame our fellow man. Unduly harsh language can hurt someone’s feelings, and, if that person is overly sensitive, the pain can be unsettling, even destructive. The Torah does not want us to lie, but it might condone a creative manner of presenting the truth.

When Hashem threw Truth down to the ground, He Intimated that man would not be held to the Heavenly standard of truth. He would be required to adhere to the second form of truths, the earthly truth, which demands that we do not issue a falsehood, but does not permit us to speak this truth in a harsh and hurtful manner. Hashem proceeded to create Man, because he was to behave kindly and act benevolently to others. Since he takes into account the feelings of others, his emes is actually a form of chesed.

Harsh truths often touch on sensitive topics; thus, they can evoke strong emotional reactions like sadness, anger or humiliation. Focusing on an individual’s personal flaws, failures or difficult realities is something we do not like to do, and should not do – unless it is absolutely critical for the person’s betterment. We can gain nothing if we destroy a person’s self-esteem. All the kindness in the world will not repair a destroyed self-image. Furthermore, some people indeed delude themselves, holding on to certain beliefs, hopes and illusions. We forget that these delusions – or,

as we might refer to them, “meshugassen” -- allow them to cope with life. Brutal truth will shatter these illusions and destroy the person. Honesty is vital, but the harsh truth can lead to negative consequences that outweigh the benefits of honesty.

Rav Schwab would relate the following story. We know that young children, due to their lack of discernment and sensitivity, might tell it the way they see it: straight, unembellished and undiplomatic, but the truth nonetheless. One of the Rav's grandchildren was in the shivah, mourning, house, after the passing of his maternal grandfather. When Rav Schwab, who was the child's paternal grandfather, entered the home for the purpose of nichum aveilim, comforting the bereaved, the little boy approached him and innocently asked, “Why did Grandpa die and not you?” Rav Schwab rendered a powerful insight concerning the young child's innocent question. A child's truth is absolute and should be considered as if a message from the mouth of a true Navi. As such, the child's innocuous question inspired him to pause and think about the child's question. “Maybe he has a point. Veritably, I am not perfect, and I am also guilty – as everyone else is – of sins. It is only due to the grace of Hashem that I am still alive.” This is an idea that we should all ponder all the time.