

In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and earth. (1:1)

The Baal HaTurim notes that the last letters of the words Bereishisbara Elokim — taf, aleph, mem — spell out (when rearranged) the word emes, truth. This teaches us that the world was created via the attribute of emes. Interestingly, the Torah alludes to the word emes in an indirect manner, since the sequence of the letters is out of order. Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, infers a profound lesson from here. The Torah teaches us that one must strive for the truth, regardless of the situation. One is not obligated to be truthful only during times of smooth sailing in which he has no extenuating circumstances or financial troubles. One must be truthful, even under circumstances that overwhelm and distress him, when life has no order, and the demands on him are overpowering. Even when he is under stress, one must act with integrity. Indeed, the only thing that can guide him to maintain a straight course through the ambiguities and vicissitudes that confront him is the truth.

The Brisker Rav, zl, was known to be the paragon of integrity. The attribute of emes was his benchmark in every endeavor in his life. He demonstrated this trait when an individual whom he held in esteem would visit. The Brisker Rav showed him the greatest reverence, regardless of the person's station in life. Conversely, if he was visited by a person for whom he had very little respect, it did not matter whether the individual had a large following or not, the Rav's greeting was only cordial and diplomatic.

Indeed, the Brisker Rav was once asked if a person's stature can be measured by his following. He responded that one's following is not an indication of his true character. He substantiated this with Rashi's comment concerning the multitude of stars that accompany the moon. These stars are present to appease the moon after its size had been diminished by Hashem. This teaches us that one's following is not a sign of his essence. On the contrary, it might indicate the converse. A weak person needs a strong backing. A strong person does not need the accolades and the "pat on the back" that are quite often false anyway.

The Rav cited the following analogy to explain this further. A man walks down the street and notices a large tree. Regardless of how many people come along to support his "view," he is clearly aware that there is a tree in this place, because he sees it with his own two eyes. Let us look at another scenario. The same person stands in the street and does not see a tree. Then, even if another person comes along and says he sees a tree, he will not believe his peer. If ten people come and declare that they see a tree, the first person might begin to question his own ability to see clearly. After all, ten people say that they see a tree! If one hundred people come along and verify that they see a tree, then the first person who had not seen a tree might even begin to believe that he is losing his eyesight. If one hundred people see something and he does not, then something must be wrong. His "inability to see" will increase as more and more people exclaim that they see a tree.

The same idea applies to Torah leadership. The true Torah giant does not need a large community to pay him homage. The Chafetz Chaim was rav in Radin, a small community in Poland. He made the town great. He gave it distinction. He gave it greatness. The Chafetz Chaim and so many like him were distinguished in their own right. They did not need others to substantiate the reality of their gadlus. There are others, however, who are like the elusive tree that one believes exists only because so many say they see it. If the tree is not there, the fact that people say it is there will not bring it into existence. Gadlus baTorah is inherent within the person. It is not subject to public acclaim.