

# ETERNAL TRUTH

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

*God saw that the light was tov. (Bereshith 1:4)*

Following each stage of creation, the Torah states that God saw that it was "tov." Although the literal translation of "tov" is "good," here this word must be understood differently, for it is obvious that God in His omniscience knew, even prior to any creation, that His handiwork would be good. "Tov," then, does not refer to "good" in its literal sense. Rather the word is an expression of the concept of perpetuation relative to each of these creations. Since God alone has eternal existence, only that which God deems proper, or "good," can endure.<sup>1</sup>

The word "emeth" - "truth," also implies perpetuation. As long as an object continues to perform the task that God created it to do, it is considered to be emeth. Conversely, when an object ceases to do its function it is considered to be "sheker" - "false."<sup>2</sup> The parallel between these two concepts, tov and emeth, is brought out by the above verse, which simultaneously describes the light as tov, while hinting to the word "emeth" in the final letters of the words "vayar Elokim eth".<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, the Gemara suggests that when the Torah commands us to take a branch of an "etz avoth" on Sukkoth, it may be referring to the "hirdoff" plant. However, the Gemara then rejects this possibility, citing the verse, "You shall love truth and peace."<sup>4</sup> Rashi explains that because the hirdoff plant is poisonous, it represents neither peace nor truth. It is logical that a toxic plant would not represent peace, but why does the plant contradict the concept of truth? The Torah itself has associated truth with perpetuation; thus it is clear that a poisonous plant cannot be part of anything that is identified with truth.

Although truth is eternal, it may not manifest itself immediately. A Roman governor once challenged Rav Eliezer, citing the verse, "The lip of truth shall be established forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment."<sup>5</sup> Since the Roman Empire had retained its supremacy for many years, he claimed it represented truth, in fulfillment of that verse. The Jewish people, on the other hand, had a monarch for only a short time; thus they are an example of the end of the verse, "...a lying tongue lasts only a moment." Rav Eliezer responded, "If the verse read, 'The lip of truth is established forever' (in the present tense), your claim would be valid. However, the words of the verse are, 'The lip of truth shall be established forever' (referring to the reign of truth in the future tense). In our age, falsehood reigns; only in the future will the truth become apparent." The Roman Governor was so impressed by Rav Eliezer's answer that he converted to Judaism.<sup>6</sup>

1. *Ramban on Bereshith 1:4.*
  2. Mishnah Para 8:9; Reishith Chochmah. 3. See section on Bereshith 3:14 - "A Leg To Stand On" (page 37) which explains this idea in depth.
  4. Sukkah 32b, citing Zechariah 8:19.
  5. Mishlei 12:19.
  6. Zohar Ki Sisa 188a.
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