Can You Ever Tell a Lie?



**Introduction**

**Sources**

**A. Pirkei Avos 1:2**

*The world stands on three things: Torah, the service of God, and deeds of kindness.*

**B. Pirkei Avos 1:18**

*Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, “The world is sustained by three things: justice, truth, and peace.”*

**C. Torah Shmos 23:7**

*Distance yourself from falsehood.*

**D. Talmud Shabbat 104a**

*Truth stands, falsehood does not stand.*

**E. Kabalah**

*Falsehood has no feet.*

**#1 Define Truth/Lie**

**#2**

A non-Jewish religious leader was teaching his congregation about the incident involving Rachav and the two spies (Yehoshua/Joshua 2:1-24).

Briefly: two Jewish spies were sent by Yehoshua on a reconnaissance mission to Jericho before it would be conquered, as the Jewish people prepared to enter the Land of Israel. A rumor spread that spies were present in the city. A woman named Rachav, who ran a brothel, hid the spies on her roof. When she was asked by the authorities to hand over the spies, she said that they had already left the city.

The religious leader said that Rachav had done the right thing, just as people hiding Jews from the Nazis had to lie.

His congregants disagreed with him, saying that one always has to tell the truth, even at the cost of a life.

The religious leader disagreed, saying that one can lie and repent afterwards.

**Question: Who was right: the religious leader or his congregants?**

**#3**

Jack is calling you but you don’t want to talk to him. You walk out of the door and ask Ben to answer the phone and tell Jack that you’re not home.

**Question: Is this called lying or not?**

**Explain.**

**#4**

**Torah Shmos 23:7**

*Distance yourself from falsehood.*

**Question: What is meant by the phrase “D*istance* yourself from falsehood”?**

**Why doesn’t it just say, “Do not lie”?**

**#5**

**Talmud Shavuos 31a**

*If a Rabbi tells his student, 'You know that I would not lie for a fortune. Reuven owes me money, and I only have one witness against him.' Even if the Rabbi asks, 'Just stand with my witness, to make Reuven think that I have two witnesses (so he will admit his guilt)', it is forbidden.*

**Question: What do we learn here regarding lying?**

**#6**

**Question: Based on the previous source in #5 - what would you say about a case when your words are technically not true but you are not misleading anyone?**

*Example A:*

During negotiations, a businessman says: ‘I will not go down by 1 cent.’ And it’s obvious to everyone that this businessman is just applying tactics to get the other party to agree to compromise on the original offer.

**Question: Did he just lie, or is he as innocent as can be?**

*Example B:*

If you live in Israel - what time do you put in the wedding invitation that you are sending to your friends and relatives? Jewish standard time in Israel goes like this – if you call the chuppah for 7pm, people won't come before 8:30pm. Can you write 7pm on the invitation knowing that they will come at 8:30 and that is when the wedding will start?

**Question: Would that be true?**



**#7**

**Exceptions: Inconsequential falsehood is permitted -**

***(1) For the sake of fulfilling a mitzvah and the pursuit of good -***

For example, it is permissible to make up a completely fictional story to improve the mood of a friend who is in the hospital. For example, it is permitted to make up a funny story about how you got lost on the way to visit him, if this will make him happy. (Improving the mood of the patient is part of the mitzvah of visiting the sick.)

***(2) For the sake of peace -***

- Between a husband and wife.

- To bring peace between any two parties in a dispute:

Aaron, the brother of Moses, would inform each party in a dispute that the other felt bad and wanted to resolve the issue. When the two finally ran into each other, they embraced and made up.

***(3) To praise a bride to her groom –***

**Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 16b-17a**

*How do we dance before the bride? [How do we praise the bride to the groom?].*

*Beit Shammai says, “[We praise and describe] the bride as she is.”*

*But Beit Hillel says, “[In all cases we give praise and say] that the bride is pleasant and kind.”*

*Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel, “Now, if she were lame or blind do we say about her that she is a beautiful and charming bride? But the Torah has said: ‘Distance yourself from falsehood!’”*

*Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai, “According to your view, if someone made a bad purchase in the market [and he asked your opinion on the purchase, and he had no way of returning the item] should one praise it in the purchaser’s eyes or denigrate it? Of course you would say that one should praise it in his eyes. [We should therefore praise even a homely bride].”*

***(4) For the sake of acting with humility, being discreet about one’s private life, or to protect another from harm****.*

An example of altering the truth for humility:

*A: I heard that you’re an expert in the laws of truth and falsehood!*

*B: I’ve learnt some of the laws but not all (even though B is really an expert).*

An example of altering the truth for modesty:

*A: Why were you late to work this morning?*

*B: I had to take care of some paperwork at the bank (even though in truth, he was at home caring for his pregnant wife who was not feeling well).*

**#8**

This would seemingly give everyone the right to lie as long as he thinks he’s right and the other is wrong. But **in book of Jeremiah, 9:4** we are warned that it is a bad thing to get used to lying: *They have taught their tongue to speak lies*.

**Question: What would be a good practice to prevent becoming a habitual liar?**

**#9 What’s your takeaway from today's discussion?**

