

himself and everything for others; therefore, you see, the first step you have to take is to see that neither you nor any of your belongings interfere adversely with the welfare of another person. You, with all your belongings, should become a blessing; be on your guard that you and your belongings do not become a curse! Watch over all your belongings so that they do no harm to your neighbour! And also what you throw away or pour away—see to it that it do no harm; you ought to bring good, so do not bring evil! (*loc. cit.* and Ch. M. 415).

50

FALSEHOOD, LYING, FLATTERY,
HYPOCRISY

איסור דיבור שקר, חנופה, גניבת דעת

Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to another.

LEVIT. XIX, II.

Keep thee far from a false matter.

EXOD. XXIII, 7.

368 Although the Oral Law (תורה שבעל פה) teaches that the pronouncement 'Ye shall not deal falsely' is a warning against falsely denying having received goods in trust, and 'Neither lie one to another' a warning against taking a false oath for that purpose, it is nevertheless possible to assume that the prohibition is general and that those two warnings are only parts of it—that they are applications of the same general command. To be sure, the words 'one to another' suggest damage caused to another person through lying; but then, generally speaking, every lie injures the person to whom or against whom it has been told; in the same way our *Chachamim* consider every fraud—which is indeed nothing but a sort of lie—as intellectual theft and therefore governed by the law on theft (גניבת דעת). And the second pronouncement 'Keep thee far from a false matter,' which the Oral Law (*Kethuboth*, 17a) interprets as covering anything said in support of the directly damaging falsehood, is considered to be a general prohibition of the lie, applied by Beth Shammai even to a white lie uttered for "politeness" sake. We therefore thought we should explain here the prohibition of the lie in general which elsewhere in *Tenach* and Talmud is painted in such black colours.

369 God, Who created man to be just, that is to say, to leave and give to all entities in all their relations that which is their due, has also endowed his

mind with the faculty of mirroring the reality of things in their various relations so that man may be able to perceive the entities and their relations, and, on the strength of this knowledge, give to them what the teachings of justice lay down as their right. This reproduction of reality in the mind is Truth. Truth, therefore, is a precondition of Justice; for only according to the image of the things and their relations which appears in man's mind can man behave towards them; if this image be false, his behaviour towards them will be different from what is due to them: he becomes unjust. And thus, if nothing else, justice itself—which is our Divine calling—will guarantee that, as far as that calling of ours demands, we shall be able to perceive the reality of external things from their reflection within ourselves.

But just as God has endowed the human mind with the faculty of mirroring the reality of its owner's external world, so also has He given him the faculty of revealing to others the reality as known to him by means of his language. And thus, the individual can live not only according to his own experience, but the whole of mankind can co-operate for the improvement of the human mind, the individual can inherit the spiritual treasure of all mankind, and, by becoming richer in truth, also become richer in justice, and lead a life of action instead of a life of mere experience. In such manner, by means of that supreme blessing, God has knitted together the community of man with the vital thread of love, and has ordained that man should rely on his brother for the spiritual good—namely, truth.

But he who, instead of truthfully expressing in words what he has experienced to be real, communicates a false image of it to his brother, who accepts it and bases his behaviour on it—either being unjust to his fellow-creatures or, having a wrong conception of their intentions towards him, being destroyed by them—that man turns into a curse that supreme blessing of the Creator; for he who denies truth to his brother, thus violating the highest duty towards him which God has imposed, calls down a curse—he who lies calls down a curse. And as material property is valuable only as a means for a life devoted to justice, and the liar steals the first condition of that justice—namely, truth, and gives falsehood in exchange, thus giving birth to injustice, the liar is even more dangerous than the thief. The thief takes only the means of life as such, while the liar takes those of a just life, producing, in turn, injustice—and misery. For just as God links the supreme good, justice, to truth, so does He do the same with regard to the minor good, happiness. For to appreciate the nature of things you rely on your knowledge of them; and if somebody deceives you about their true nature, he robs you of a support or causes you to lean on a support that is insecure.

And by stealing from another directly something precious—truth—and so indirectly the most precious thing—justice—the liar also kills himself spiritually; for he extinguishes in himself that Divine spark which alone makes of him a human being created for the benefit of his fellow-men.

371 Every lie, even the smallest, seemingly the most trivial one, is a betrayal of your fellow-man, is theft of his most precious good, murder of your own personality. Beware, therefore, of the smallest deviation from truth as you know it. Do you not feel how your soul revolts against every false word which your lips attempt to utter? Surely you feel it on lying for the first time. This rebellion within yourself warns you not to murder your own human soul, admonishes you that God has created you to be truthful, just as His word calls you to be truthful. Do not imagine you are able to calculate which lie would be harmless to your fellow-man. Even if you cannot see the harm with the short range of your vision, unhappiness and injustice may follow ten times removed within your neighbour's sphere of life. And even if this does not happen, you would have in any case lost your own soul. Therefore do not even lie for fun; for who would like to have a short moment's fleeting pleasure at the expense of harm to his neighbour and the killing of his own spiritual self? And even if the truth were to cause you well-deserved harm, would you like to avert the consequence of one wrong by committing another wrong, and disregard the harm which you yourself suffer to your most precious possession through falsehood?

372 Thus truthfulness in itself is justice's highest demand, and lies are in themselves a crime, which destroy others as well as yourself. But for the whole of life's purity, the consequences of the habit of lying are as horrible as are blissful the consequences of truthfulness. Few sins are committed without the sinner taking comfort from the hope that, called upon to justify himself, he would be able to save himself by lying; and therefore almost every sin is accompanied by the resolve to resort to lying. Therefore if you preserve your truthfulness so that you render yourself incapable of deviating from the truth, whatever may happen to you, it will serve you as a shield against many sins. Conversely, the more you become intimate with the lie, the easier will become your path to every other evil. All you who have influence over the soul of the young, to prepare them for a life of justice, watch out that they retain that inner shield which protects them from many aberrations; watch out that they remain sincere, truthful and straightforward as the Creator wanted them to be, so that they fear the lie more than the hardest punishment which you might inflict upon them.

A lie concerning the personality of the person to whom it is told, usually consisting in giving him a better opinion of himself than he really deserves, is flattery. A lie concerning your own personality is hypocrisy. But just as nowhere is truth more necessary than in knowing oneself, and nowhere deception more harmful than here, so hardly any lie is more harmful than flattery. And when you realize why people usually employ flattery, how the flatterer sacrifices the other's morality and his own dignity in order to obtain some material advantage from the other, thus stealing his virtue as well as his property and sully his own self for the sake of a usually mean profit—if you realize all this you will see that no liar is more despicable than the flatterer. Be mindful of your human dignity, and even if you could become a prince by flattery and if you had to remain a beggar through your honesty, your human dignity should be more precious to you than any possession; remain a beggar—remain honest; do not turn into a crawling worm.

The hypocrite turns into one big lie not only his word but his deed, in fact, his whole life, in order, through pretence, to win the favourable disposition towards him of another. For behold, God has created our heart in such a way that, apart from the love and justice that He wanted us to give to all human beings, we give our benevolence—our heart, as it were—above all to those who either appear to us as the embodiment of pure and noble humanity or who seem to have a special affection for us. Now, if you act or speak in such a way as to produce in us a certain opinion, but your words are spoken and your actions performed only for the sake of that opinion and are only superficial and not the true reflection of reality or the honest expression of your true feelings—if you do that, you steal our feelings, our heart; it is this hypocrisy, above all, which our *Chachamim* have branded with the significant name *g'nevath da'ath* (גניבת דעת), theft of feelings, although this name can also be found to mean theft of thought—to lie in general. And they warn you not only against hypocrisy, that falsifies your whole life, but against every single act of hypocrisy, against even any pretence that causes any one of your actions towards your neighbour to appear more friendly than it is in reality.

For instance, you must not shower invitations and other offers on your friend if you know that he will not accept them. Or when, for his entertainment, you open a bottle, which you would have opened in any case, regardless of his visit, you must not lead him to believe that you did it because of the pleasure his visit gave you, etc. The law adds that any falsehood, deception, flattery or hypocrisy is despicable and prohibited towards anyone, whatever his race or creed; though this is understood as to owe truthfulness to your fellow-man, not as an individual but as a human being absolutely (Ch. M. 228). It is also noted with regard to commerce that in consequence of your duty to be

truthful you must not conceal any quality of your merchandise when you know that the buyer's notion of it is different—even when that quality does not diminish the real value; for instance, you must not sell to a non-Jew non-*kasher* meat without mentioning it, as the buyer might suppose that it was slaughtered according to Jewish law, etc. (Ch. M. 228).

- 374 In accordance with the commandment 'Keep thee far from a false matter,' our wise men warn us expressly against supporting another person's lie even if only by remaining silent oneself or by the mere fact of one's presence; by standing silently by while another gives expression to a falsehood; by lying, even if it is intended to support a truth, etc.; and they warn you to remind yourself to remove from your path every obstacle to the recognition of truth, etc. (Ch. M. 9, 17, 28).
- 375 Our *Chachamim* make a fine distinction in stating: 'No man must be uncouth in his social intercourse with his fellow-men (מעורב בין הבריות), and they teach what modification, although it is only an apparent one, is imposed on the prohibition of lying by the duty of sociability; they explain that social life would be impossible if everyone, without being asked, were to tell the truth to everyone else as he sees it; and that social life itself has introduced a language which would be falsehood outside the realm of social intercourse, but which within this circle ceases to be falsehood because he to whom it is addressed does not expect always to be told the strict truth. This is the language of courtesy, which, because it originates in social intercourse, ceases to be falsehood; for just as society clothes the words with their meaning, so can it likewise change the meaning of words for special occasions. And just as society on certain occasions answers in the negative with the word 'yes' and in the affirmative with the word 'no,' and you are therefore compelled to understand the wording in the same sense, in the same way society uses the word 'servant' for social intercourse for no other purpose than to be courteous, while in all other circumstances the word connotes a very large measure of dependence. The same is true of all the empty phrases and expressions of friendliness which have become part and parcel of social life. Similarly, nobody in social intercourse wants another person to tell him, uninvited, all that he thinks of him, and the rule is: what you say should be true, but you are not obliged to reveal all your thoughts. No social gathering could exist if each were to tell the other on meeting him whatever unfavourable observations he has made as to his appearance, language, conduct, etc. Such silence is not deception, precisely because in those circumstances nobody expects to be told, nor would your silence cause him to have too good an opinion of himself. The case is different if you do not point out their

shortcomings to your brother or your friend with whom you are in intimate relationship. Rather than a violation of the duty of truthfulness, it is your duty to accept and observe these rules of social life. But even a single step beyond them, even a single step beyond what is called courtesy in your own environment, is flattery, hypocrisy and therefore sin (Ch. M. 228: 6; E.H. 65; *Kethuboth*, 17a).

The author is aware of few pronouncements in our law with regard to cases in which a man, if told the truth, were to make unlawful use of it, or in which the truth would do harm to your fellow-man; for instance, a murderer asking you about his intended victim, or a thief about the whereabouts of some property, or a person who is dangerously ill about a relative who has died unbeknown to him, etc. But to draw conclusions from analogous situations, there seems to be no doubt that in all these cases it would not only be wrong to tell the truth, but it would be a duty to tell a lie. For, just as I am permitted to prevent murder by killing the murderer, or theft at least by beating the thief, or to save a person who is dangerously ill by disregarding a large number of commandments—indeed, am obliged to do so—so am I not only allowed in the aforementioned cases to suppress the truth because by telling it I would contribute to murder, theft and death, but it would be my positive duty to lie if my silence alone were to be a contributing factor.

In the same way, according to the teaching of our wise men, I am allowed to deviate from the truth where truth would arouse discord, this curse of all life, between man and man, or where I can restore peace, that blessing of all blessings, where it has departed; indeed, according to some, it would be a duty in these cases too.