

~~Lies~~  
Truth

## LYING

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 1

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand what it means to be truthful in speech and action
- Understand that lying is forbidden in Islam
- Understand that lying can also be in action and belief
- Be reminded that lying as a joke is not allowed
- Understand the concept of 'al-tawriya'
- Be reminded that in some very specific situations lying is permitted
- Discuss the conditions of taqiyyah
- Discuss the reasons behind why a person may lie
- Understand briefly the consequences of lying in this world and the hereafter

### Lesson 1: Truthfulness and Lying

Truthfulness is one of the most important virtues that a Muslim should have. Furthermore the Prophet (saw) says:

“the nearest of you to me tomorrow and those most worthy of my intercession are those who are the most truthful in speech, the most trustworthy, the best in manners and the closest to people”<sup>i</sup>

Accordingly, lying is a terrible sin, which Allah (SWT) commands us to avoid.

وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ

“..and shun lying speech” (22:30)

It is a sin which is classified among the Greater sins. The famous scholar, Sheikh al-Anṣārī says:

“Common sense suggests lying is Ḥarām, all the revealed religions also say so; particularly Islam. The Qur’an is explicit in this regard. The opinion of the majority of the jurists confirms this tenet and reason also sustains this assertion.”

### LYING IS FORBIDDEN IN ISLAM

We know that that which Allah (SWT) has forbidden for mankind is unhealthy and harmful for mankind while that which He (SWT) has allowed, is healthy and beneficial for man. Among the things that Allah (SWT) has forbidden is lying.

Common sense itself suggests that lying is essentially deceiving, misrepresenting or hiding the truth. Doing this intentionally with an aim to misguide another person or to direct punishment to another person is

wrong and harmful to the society and the individual. Lying also breaks relationships and is a source of hardship for the victims of lying.

Allah (SWT) tells us in the Holy Qur'an not to lie:

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“And do not mix up the truth with the falsehood, nor hide the truth while you know (it).” (2:42)

## FORMS OF LYING

Lying can occur in speech as well as in action and belief. There are several levels of lying in both speech and in action. Some examples of lying:

- Claiming to have achieved something that one actually did not, simply to brag
- Lying to get out of trouble after a person has made a mistake
- Lying about others to damage their reputation, out of jealousy or competitiveness
- Lying in action: acting in a way that goes against our beliefs. For example, a person who calls themselves a Muslim and talks about their belief, should not commit sins, especially major sins.
- Lying in action by being two-faced or acting one way in the presence of a person but differently in their absence.
- Lying in belief: being a hypocrite. This is when a person pretends to have a belief which they in fact do not. This is the worst type of person. The prime examples are the hypocrites who lived at the time of the Prophet. They pretended to be Muslim simply to damage Islam from within.

## LYING TO LAUGH

It is very common especially among young people to make practical jokes which often involve lying to another person.

Imam al-Sajjād (as) said:

"Avoid telling lies irrespective of small or great, whether it is in earnest or joking, because when a person tells a lie in small (things), he dares to tell a lie in great things, too."<sup>ii</sup>

Islam forbids us from lying for practical jokes also as this can damage your reputation as a truth teller. The more practical jokes and lies you make, the less believable you become even when you are actually speaking the truth. We all know the story of ‘*the boy who cried wolf!*’

## Review Questions

### Q1. Why is lying forbidden in Islam?

- a. Because it causes problems in society
- b. Because Allah (SWT) has forbidden it
- c. Because it is common sense that lying is harmful
- d. All of the above

### Q2. Which Imam has told us to avoid lying even in small things:

- a. Imam ‘Ali (as)
- b. Imam al-Sajjād (as)
- c. Imam al-Jawād (as)

## Lesson 2: Exceptional Situations

In the previous lesson, we discussed that lying is a great sin. In this lesson, we will discuss some exceptional situations related to lying.

### THE WHITE LIE – IS IT ALLOWED?

The expression ‘white lie’ may refer to situations where a person may not tell the whole truth in order to be polite to others or to avoid hurting the feelings of people they respect. The default rule is that such lies are not allowed in Islam. For example, if I do not want my friend to come over to my house, I should not lie and offer just to ‘be polite’.

Once, Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) was walking home with his son from the mosque and a companion friend joined them in the walk. When the Imam reached his doorstep, he bade farewell to the companion without inviting him in even out of courtesy. When the companion left, the Imam’s son asked him, ‘why didn’t you invite him in?’ The Imam (as) replied that he did not want to be among those who made empty offers which were not really true.

However, in some situations, it can be a good idea to focus on another aspect of the situation to avoid hurting other people’s feelings.

For example, if your grandmother buys you a shirt which you do not really like, you might focus on something positive in the gift and comment on that by saying something like: 'It was so kind of you to get me such a gift!'

## **WHEN IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO LIE?**

In certain situations, it may be allowed, and even sometimes obligatory, to lie. The important thing to remember in all these situations is that we should be lying for mere personal interests.

### **TAQIYYAH**

Taqiyyah refers to when a person acts or speaks in a way that conceals their beliefs, in order to protect their life, honour, wealth or family. It refers to situations where a person would be killed or persecuted because of their faith.

The prime example is that of 'Ammar ibn Yāsir. He saw his parents murdered in front of him because of their belief in Islam. He was tortured almost to death, before he eventually said some words of disbelief that his torturers were ordering him to say. He basically said, in words, that he was no longer a Muslim. However, in his heart, his faith remained as strong as ever. He was released after this, and went to the Prophet (saw) to ask forgiveness. The Prophet (saw) explained to him that why he did was justified, and that if he was in that situation again to do the same thing.

### **RESOLVING CONFLICTS**

If two believers are in conflict with one another, other people should do all they can to reconcile them. This means that if one of the people say something negative about the other, we should never go and tell the other person. It also means that sometimes we may need to lie in order to repair the relationship between them. In fact, it is sometimes obligatory to do this. This is especially important in situations of reconciling between family members and avoiding divorce.

The Prophet (saw) advised Imam 'Ali (as):

“Allah, the Exalted, loves lying with the purpose of reconciliation, and detests truth if it leads to mischief”<sup>iii</sup>

### **PROTECTION FROM AN OPPRESSOR**

One day, the Prophet (saw) was sitting on the side of a road when he saw someone fleeing from some evil people. After the man passed, the Prophet went and sat on the other side of the street. When those people chasing the man saw the Prophet (saw) and asked him whether he had seen anyone, he (saw) said: 'since I have been sitting *here*, I have not seen anyone'.

This above example show us 'how' to lie in such a situation – so since the time the Prophet (saw) moved across the street, after that no one passed him – so by 'here' he meant specifically that particular place which he was sitting in at that moment, not before.

Imam al-Şādiq (as) has said:

“If a Muslim is asked about a Muslim and he harms that other Muslim by telling the truth, he is written as a liar. However, if a Muslim is asked about a Muslim and he benefits that other Muslim by lying, he is written as a truthful person in the eyes of Allah”<sup>iv</sup>

## **Review Questions**

**Q1. List three situations where lying is permissible. Give a short explanation of each situation.**

## **Lesson 3: Consequences of Lying**

We have so far discussed that lying a major sin, and we have also discussed some exceptional situations related to lying.

### **SOME OF THE CAUSES OF LYING AND THE SOLUTIONS TO THEM**

There are perhaps three major reasons why people lie:

- It has become so common that it is no longer seen as something wrong or detestable. Once a sin becomes public and commonplace, people become less sensitive to it. This is why in Islam, while it is bad to commit a sin, it is far worse to publicise that sin.
- People may think that by lying they can reach their goal faster and so they lie in order to get ahead in life. In this regard Imam 'Ali (as) gives us a true test for how faithful we are, saying:

“Faith is when you prefer truth, when it would harm you, over lying, when it would benefit you”<sup>v</sup>

Wealth which is gained through illegal means such as lying has no blessing, and it is often lost from the person’s possession through one calamity or another.

- The third reason people may lie is because of fear of the consequences or because they do not feel secure from the consequences of lying.

However, the lifestyle of the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt was such that they did not worry about these consequences and kept the pleasure of Allah (SWT) as their priority. For example, one day a man wanted to speak to Imam al-Sadiq (as) but the Imam was in a state of Janābah. Rather than making any excuses, the Imam (as) told the man directly that he was in a state of Janābah and asked him to come back later.

On this note, we should make sure that we do not miss our prayers because we are too shy to perform Ghusl. Even though this may be awkward, we must learn to overcome this awkwardness and perform our obligations on time.

We can stop lying by following the examples set for us by the Ahlul Bayt (as) and especially remembering Allah (SWT), fearing only Him and no one else. By keeping in mind His Pleasure, and being strong we can overcome lying.

## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF LYING**

There are several narrations from the Imams that have condemned lying and have shown us the evil consequences of this act, to ensure that we stay away from it as much as possible:

- Lying destroys faith:  
Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir (as) says:

“Lying destroys Faith”<sup>vi</sup>

- Lying leads to forgetfulness:  
Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) has said:

“One of the divine punishments for too much lying is that Allah makes the liar afflicted with forgetfulness.”<sup>vii</sup>

Thus a man speaks a lie and then forgets his lie. Consequently people come to know that he has spoken a lie and his falsity is exposed to the people. Now to save himself he speaks more lies and is insulted further because his forgetfulness does not enable him to hide his false statements

- The curse of Allah  
The liar is eligible for Divine curse and Allah (SWT) causes His retribution to descend upon him.”

For example Allah (SWT) says:

“...the curse of Allah be on him if he is one of the liars.” (24:8)

- Lying leads to a person being lied to. Parents cannot expect children to be truthful when they themselves lie at work or lie to their spouse or lie to get a better business deal. Giving advice to others without practising it ourselves does not work. When it comes to business, it is permissible to not tell the truth by saying for example: ‘this is my car, you can check it for yourself and see if it has any faults’ without telling the person all its faults. However, it is not permissible to lie to the person by decorating the car or lying about its features or condition.
- Lying is the key to the house of sins. If you can imagine all sins being locked in a warehouse, the key to that warehouse would be lying. This is one of the major dangers of lying: it leads to multiple other sins.
- One of the properties of lying is that the lying person is exposed later on. It is a natural consequence of a lie that the truth will later show up. Therefore, whenever a person lies they are taking the risk of the truth being disclosed which always occurs, one way or another.

## **Review Questions:**

**Q1. <sup>viii</sup>Discuss the consequences of lying in 200 words.**

<sup>i</sup> [***Wasa'lu-Shi'a 12:163***]

<sup>ii</sup> [Tuhaful-Uqul, p. 201]

<sup>iii</sup> [Wasa'elu-Shi'a vol 12 p.252]

<sup>iv</sup> [Mostadrakul-Wasa'el vol.9 p.95]

<sup>v</sup> [Nahjul-Balagha, Wisdom No. 458]

<sup>vi</sup> al-Kāfi

<sup>vii</sup> Wasa'il ul-Shia

<sup>viii</sup> References

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