

FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

God said to Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Can I indeed have a child when I am so old?'" (Bereshith 18:13)

As pointed out in the previous article, from this verse we derive that it is permitted to deviate from the facts for the sake of peace.¹ Certainly if one can bring about peace in a different way, he is obligated to do so. However, if there is no alternative but to deviate from strict factual integrity, he should not view the situation as if he is doing something improper.

The proof that this is the correct outlook is that God chose to mention Sarah's words to Avraham, even though he could have chosen not to mention the incident to Avraham at all. He deliberately brought it up, changing Sarah's words when He repeated them to Avraham. Since the Torah records God's words here, it is clear that God intended to teach us that if a person finds himself in a situation in which deviating from the facts is the only way to maintain peace, he should not refrain from doing so. It is no act of piety to express a truth that will lead to pain and strife. The correct behavior is to convey a message that will guarantee peace.²

Although it is permissible to deviate from factual integrity for the sake of peace, we must examine each case very carefully before we decide to do so.³ Not every situation that might result in negative feelings warrants this behavior. It is important to bear in mind that, although we are permitted to be selective in our reporting of the facts for the sake of peace, we may not do so if we will benefit personally from this sheker, or if someone else will be hurt in the process.⁴

It is preferable not to deviate from factual integrity in order to prevent possible future disputes, for this approach could lead one to lie in many cases in order to promote countless peaceful causes.⁵ Although Aharon HaKohen was very active in peace making, he was careful to follow the above guidelines. When he would see two people who were already at odds with one another, he would approach each of them separately and say that he had just seen the adversary "choking himself" and pulling out his hair in distress because he so regrets having upset his friend. Aharon would sit with each of them until both parties were appeased. When the two (previous) adversaries would next meet, they would hug each other as the best of friends.⁶

1. Yevamoth 65b. A halachic authority should always be consulted.

2. Ben Ish Chai, Devarim 16:20.

3. Rif and Rosh, Yevamoth 65b. Me'iri and Ritva, Bava Metzia 23b.
4. Sha'arei Teshuvah 3:184.
5. Devar Shaul, Yevamoth 63b.
6. Yalkut Shimoni, Malachi 2:6.

Text Copyright © 2008 by Rabbi Daniel Travis and **Torah.org**