

DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM FALSEHOOD PART 2

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Last week we discussed the most basic definition of falsehood. We saw that the main criteria for determining falsehood is not necessarily the words that are spoken. rather of more importance is the message that is conveyed. If that is misleading then even if the actual words are technically true, nonetheless, the prohibition to not speak falsely has been transgressed.

This concept can also work in such a way that there are times when a person speaks words that are not technically true and yet does not transgress the command to not lie. How is this so? If the message being conveyed is not misleading, then the fact that the words spoken are not completely accurate is of little significance.

Wedding invitations offer an enlightening example of this phenomena. In many circles, it is well-known and understood that the time stated for the wedding ceremony to take place is invariably significantly earlier than the time that the wedding actually takes place. For example, in Israel, many weddings begin a full hour later than the time on the invitation. In such a society, there is no falsehood in announcing that the time it will start is 7.00pm and deliberately intending that it will actually begin at 8.00pm. This is because it is understood in Israeli society that weddings begin an hour after they are announced. Consequently, even though the words on the invitation are not accurate, nobody is misled.

It is interesting to note that in such a situation there would be more falsehood in beginning the wedding at the actual time that is stated on the invitation! If everyone understands that 7.00pm really means 8.00pm, then it is wrong to deliberately begin the wedding at 7.00pm without making it absolutely clear that that is what will happen.

It should be noted that the people announcing this time should be aware that there may be people who come from other societies where the social norms of timings are very different and that this should be clarified.

We have now further developed our understanding of the definition of falsehood, as deliberately misleading people. This is even true to the extent that saying words that are not technically true is not considered to be misleading.

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