

DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM FALSEHOOD PART 5

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In the past few weeks we have defined the meaning of falsehood and discussed situations where it is permissible to lie¹. It still remains to be fully understood why speaking falsely in certain situations is not considered falsehood according to the Torah's definition.

The Torah views 'emet' (truth) as achieving the morally desirable result in any given situation. Situations that are considered positive by the Torah constitute truth. For example, a state of affairs of peace and harmony is considered to be emet. In contrast, situations that are considered negative by the Torah constitute falsehood. For example, discord and hatred are representative of falsehood.

Consequently, it is permissible in certain circumstances to lie in order to maintain peaceful relations between people because a state of Shalom (peace) is emet. In contrast, if a person speaks brutally honestly and thereby causes friction between people he has in effect spoken falsehood. Even though his words were technically true, the result was not.

This also explains why it is permissible to lie in order to avoid causing pain to others. For example if someone has bought an item that he can no longer return and he asks his friend for his opinion of the purchase, the friend should not express his dislike for it because that would cause unnecessary pain. Lying and saying how nice it is would constitute emet in this instance. This is because the success of deceit is an expression of the success of falsehood.

This explanation enables us to attain a far deeper perspective truth. A person may feel that he must always say the truth even though by doing so he can cause considerable pain and discomfort to others. By doing so he is, in fact, speaking falsehood.

It is important to note that this principle does not mean that the 'ends justify the means'. In this case the 'means' of lying is not considered negative at all if done with the correct intentions. However, it is very easy to convince oneself that it is justified to lie because of the ultimate results, when this may not in fact be the case.

As always, it is advisable to seek an Orthodox Rabbi who can guide us in specific cases.

¹ It is important to note that a person should not develop a habit of lying, even in a permissible way. When we get into the habit of lying for valid reasons it is likely that we will develop a trait of dishonesty and that will lead to lying that is forbidden. Moreover, it is very important that one's children not be exposed to constant lying because they will inevitably develop the trait of

dishonesty.

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