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The Seventeenth Greater Sin: Lying

Lying is another sin which is classified among the Greater sins. The famous scholar, Shaykh Ansari (r.a.) writes in his book, *Makasib al-Muharrama*:

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

Lying is listed with the greater sins in the narration of Fazl Ibn Shazān from Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.).

Lying is one of the greatest sins

A tradition from the Holy Prophet (S) declares,

“Beware I inform you regarding the greatest of the mortal sins: Associating anything with Allah, disobeying parents and lying!”¹

A similar tradition has been quoted from Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) also,

“All the evils have been locked in a room and its key is lying.”²

Angels curse the liars

The Prophet of Islam in another tradition is quoted to have said,

“When a believer utters a lie without a valid excuse, he is cursed by seventy thousand angels. Such a stench emanates from his heart that it reaches the sky and because of this single lie Allah writes for him a sin equivalent to that of committing seventy fornications. Such fornications that the least of which is fornication with ones mother.”³

Undoubtedly, lying is the worst of sins. It is obvious that the evils of lying are more dreadful than those of

adultery. Some false words lead to war between two tribes or two sections of the society. Some lies blight the honour of thousands of people or endanger their lives, or lead to economic disasters.

One kind of falsehood is that which is attributed to Allah (S.w.T.), the Holy Prophet (S) or the Holy Imams (a.s.). Understandably this is the worst kind of falsehood. Often due to lying, innocent people are sent to the gallows and their families destroyed. It is for this very reason that the traditions state:

“Lying is an evil, greater than drinking wine.”

Qur’anic verses denounce lying

Allah the Almighty says in Surah an-Nahl, verse 105:

“Only they forge the lie who do not believe in Allah’s communications, and these are the liars.”

And in Surah az-Zumar it is mentioned:

“Surely Allah does not guide him aright who is a liar, ungrateful.” (Surah az-Zumar 39:3)

It can be understood from the verses of the Qur’an that a liar calls for divine curse and invites the anger of Allah (S.w.T.).

For example:

“... and pray for the curse of Allah on the liars.” (Surah Āli-Imrān 3:61)

And also:

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

A large number of Qur’anic verses and traditions condemn the sin of lying and describe its evil consequences. The late Haji Nūrī has collected these verses and traditions and classified them into forty points for easy recalling and reference. We shall quote them for the benefit of our readers.

1. Lying is transgression

Allah (S.w.T.) says in Surah al-Baqarah:

“...there shall be no intercourse nor transgression nor quarreling amongst one another (during Hajj).” (Surah al-Baqarah 2: 197)

The word “transgression” in this ayat refers to falsehood or lying.

Again in Surah al-Hujurat it is mentioned:

“O you who believe! If an evil-doer comes to you with a report, look carefully into it, lest you harm a people in ignorance, then be sorry for what you have done.” (Surah al-Hujurat 49:6)

This ayat was revealed for Walid, who is mentioned as an “evil-doer”; i.e. a liar.

2. Meaning of the term “false words”

Alongwith the prohibition of worshipping idols it is ordered by Allah (S.w.T.) to abstain from falsehood.

“...therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words.” (Surah Hajj 22:30)

In this verse ‘false words’ mean lying.

3. The liar is not a believer

One of the verses quoted above demonstrates that a liar is not a believer and one who is a believer never speaks a lie. The verse pronounces:

“Only they forge the lie who do not believe in the signs of Allah.” (Surah an-Nahl 16:105)

For it is clear that one who disbelieves in the divine communications cannot be a Mu’min (believer).

4. Lying is an evil and a sin

Traditions have mentioned lying as a sin and an evil. For example, Hazrat Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

“Falsehood is absolutely an evil and a sin.”

5. The Liar is accursed

The liar is eligible for divine curse and Allah (S.w.T.) causes His retribution to descend upon him.”

For example:

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

6. The blackened face of the liar

The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“Beware of falsehood! Because falsehood blackens the face.”⁴

An interesting incident is found in the book, Habibus Sayr:

Sultan Husain Mirza, the king of Khorasan and Zāblistan, sent one of his envoys to Sultan Yaqūb Mirza,

the king of Azerbaijan and Iraq. The envoy carried with him books and other gifts. The Sultan had ordered the inclusion of the book *Kulliyat al-Jami* in the set of books. It was a very popular book in those days. Amir Husain Aburavi, the envoy, in his haste packed the book *Futihat al-Makki* instead of *Kulliyat al-Jami*. On reaching Iraq, he found a hospitable host in the ruler of Iraq. He was asked, "You must have been bored during this long journey?"

The envoy replied, "Not at all! The Sultan has sent for you *Kulliyat al-Jami*. So whenever we halted, I read some portions of it and passed my time."

Sultan Yaqub was eager to see the book. But, when he ordered for it, it was not found to the embarrassment of the envoy.

The king demanded, "Aren't you ashamed to utter such a lie?"

The envoy says, "I left the court ashamed and returned home without a reply to my Sultan's letter. I did not even halt or rest during the journey to Khorasan. I felt death would have been better for me, rather than uttering such a lie."

7. Sin of lying is worse than drinking wine

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

"Certainly Allah has created the lock for every evil and the key to all these locks is drinking wine. But lying is worse than drinking."⁵

Wine disables reason and sense, but lying kills the reason. It makes one so insensate that he becomes ready to commit any kind of satanic act. An alcoholic when under the influence of alcohol is not in his proper senses, and thus it is not possible for him to act with cunningness and treachery. But a liar can cause untold mischief in the society through his cunningness; much more than a drunkard can.

8. The foul-smelling mouth of the liar

It is recorded in a tradition that on the Day of Judgement the mouth of a liar will give an awful smell.

9. The Angels abhor the liars

The smell of a liar's mouth would be so disgusting that even the Angels will not go near him. They will keep away from the liars. This is not only for the Day of Judgement. Even in this world, the Angels can smell the foul odour from the mouths of the liars. In a prophetic tradition it is said,

"When a believer utters a lie, such a bad smell emanates from his mouth that even the Angels move away."⁶

10. Lying is disbelief (kufr)

The Almighty Allah curses the liars, as is evident from the verse of Mubahala (3:61) and the verse of 'Lam' (24:8).

A mention about this has been made earlier.

11. The stench from the liar's mouth reaches the skies.

12. It is also recorded that the Angels of the sky curse the liars.

13. Falsehood spoils faith.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

"Lying destroys Faith"⁷

14. Falsehood deprives the liar from the taste of faith.

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) says:

"Every believer is deprived from the taste of faith till he gives up lying seriously and also in jest."⁸

15. According to traditional reports, lying causes animosity and hatred between people.

16. The vice of lying questions the character of the liar.

A tradition of the Prophet (S) says:

"The least forbearing is the one who is a liar."⁹

17. The traditions from Ma'sum (a.s.) inform us that all the evils are locked in a room and the key to that room is lying.

18. Lying is a sin and a transgression.

The Holy Prophet (S) is reported to have said.

"Avoid speaking falsehood, because it is a kind of evil and transgression. And both of them belong to Hell." (They make one eligible for Hell).¹⁰

19. According to other reports, seventy thousand Angels curse the liar.

20. Lying is a sign of a hypocrite.

The following tradition of the Holy Prophet (S) is present in the book of Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il:

“The Three signs of a hypocrite are:

Lying, betraying trust and going back on his word (Not fulfilling a promise).”

21. The Islamic Shari'a does not pay heed to a liar's advice.

In this regard the Holy Prophet (S) remarked:

“The advice of a liar has no value.”¹¹

22. Falsehood is the worst of the psychological ailments.

Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) says:

“The disease of lying is the most dreadful of the (psychological) diseases.”¹²

23. Lying is an embellishment of Satan's hands.

A narration of the Prophet (S) is as follows:

“Certainly, Iblis applies antimony (surma), wears a ring and uses snuff. His antimony is laziness and dozing, the ring of his finger is lying and his snuff is pride and arrogance.”

24. The worst earning of a man is falsehood.

The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“The worst of the profit is from the trade called 'lying'.”¹³

Yes! It is a fact that by lying, a person is liable for punishment more than for any other sin.

25. A man came to the Holy Prophet (S) and asked,

“Which action makes the highest number of people the inmates of Hell?”

The Holy Prophet (S) replied,

“Lying. When a believer speaks a lie, he becomes prone to commit every other sin; and when this happens, he commits kufr (disbelief) which then makes him enter Hell.”¹⁴

26. Lying causes forgetfulness

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) is reported to have said,

“One of the divine punishments for too much lying is that Allah makes the liar afflicted with forgetfulness.”¹⁵

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 his skin he speaks more lies and is insulted further because his forgetfulness does not enable him to hide his false statements.

27. Falsehood is one of the doors of hypocrisy.

28. Terrible punishment for the liars

A liar is inflicted with several kinds of punishments. Aqa Rawandi has quoted a lengthy tradition from the Holy Prophet (S) in his book *Daw'at*. The Prophet (S) while describing the spectacle of Miraj (Ascension) said

“I saw a man, who lay flat on his back while an angel mounted his head. The angel who was standing upon the head had a pointed iron rod. He repeatedly injured the sleeping person. The face of the victim was shattered upto the neck. But when the rod was lifted the head returned to its original form. Again the rod was hit on the face and the man suffered the same retribution.”

The Holy Prophet (S) says that he inquired,

“Why is this man punished?”

He was told, “This is a man who left his home in the morning and uttered a lie that caused harm to the people. So he shall be punished in this manner (after death) till the Day of Qiyāma.”

30. The liar is deprived of Salāt al-Shab

The liar is deprived of Salāt al-Shab and in this way he is also deprived of the benefits that accrue from Salāt al-Shab and one of these benefits is the increase in sustenance. Sharifi narrates from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) that he said,

“Doubtlessly, when a man speaks a lie, he is not able to get the opportunity of (performing) Salāt al-Shab. And when he doesn't get this opportunity (to perform Salāt al-Shab) he does not get an increase in his sustenance.

31. Falsehood deprives the liar from true guidance and causes him to deviate.

The Qur'an says:

“And Allah does not guide the unjust people.” (Sura al-Jumu'a' 62:5)

32. Politeness and civility are removed from the one who lies.

Hazrat Isa Ibn Maryam is reported to have said,

“Civility abandons the one who is a frequent liar.”¹⁶

Then no one is attracted towards him and no one finds any emotional attachment with him.

33. Falsehood is the most outrageous kind of evil and an abomination.

34. We have proved Falsehood to be a Greater sin.

35. Lying is poles apart from belief.

In fact a tradition from the Holy Prophet (S) says:

“Falsehood is inversely proportional to belief.”

That is; when falsehood increases, belief decreases.

36. The greatest sinner is the one who has lied.

The Prophet of Allah (S) said:

“The greatest of the sins is talkativeness and falsehood.”¹⁷

37. The liar is doomed because of the lies that he utters.

The Messenger of Allah (S) says:

“Avoid falsehood. For it may appear to be a way of salvation, whereas in reality it leads to destruction.”

(Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il)

38. The liar does not deserve friendship and brotherhood.

The Chief of the believers, 'Ali (a.s.) says:

“Every Muslim is supposed to avoid friendship and brotherhood with a compulsive liar. Because one who befriends a liar is himself considered a liar. Even if he speaks the truth, he is not trusted.”¹⁸

39. The liar is kept away from truth and reality.

“...surely Allah does not guide him aright who is a liar, ungrateful.” (Surah az-Zumar 39:3)

“...Surely Allah does not guide him who is extravagant, a liar.” (Surah Ghāfir, 40:34)

40. Inhuman form of the liar in Barzakh

The liar has a human form only in this world. In Barzakh he does not retain the human form. While describing the scenes of Miraj, the Holy Prophet (S) told Janabe Fatemah Zahra (S):

“On the night of Miraj I saw a woman whose head resembled a pig and her body was like that of a donkey. It was because she spread discord and told lies.”¹⁹

Various grades of lying

Although, Shahīd al-Thani and many other Mujtahids consider every kind of falsehood to be absolutely Harām and a great sin, yet we find in traditions that falsehood is of different grades. Among these different kinds of lies, are some that are certainly greatest of the sins and some are among the greater sins. There are also some types of lying about whom there exists a doubt whether they are “greater” or not. Let us examine each kind of falsehood.

Falsehood against Allah (S.w.T.), the Prophet (S) and the Imams (a.s.)

The worst kind of falsehood is what one utters against Allah (S.w.T.) the Almighty, His Prophet (S) and the Imams (a.s.). The divine book, Qur’an says:

“And, for what your tongues describe, do not utter the lie, (saying) this is lawful and this is unlawful, in order to forge a lie against Allah; surely those who forge a lie against Allah shall not prosper. A little enjoyment and they shall have a painful punishment.” (Surah an-Nahl 16: 116–117)

The sixth holy Imam, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“To attribute falsehood to Allah and this Holy Prophet (S) is the greatest sin.”²⁰

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) also told Abu Noman:

“Do not attribute falsehood to us. Such a lie will expel you from the upright faith (Islam).”²¹

This means that even if a single falsehood is attributed to the Imams (a.s.) the light of faith is

extinguished from the heart. It is such a serious sin that if one intentionally commits it during the fast of Ramzan, his fast is invalidated.

Every type of falsehood

Every kind of lie and every method of speaking an untruth is Harām. Just as it is Harām to speak a lie with the tongue it is similarly Harām to write something false. Even to point a finger in expressing a lie is “Harām.” For example if a person who does not pray is asked by another, “Have you performed Salāt?” and he nods his head. This tantamounts to lying and is a sin. Similarly propagating the words of a liar while being aware that they are untrue is Harām, and so is supporting a liar.

Interpreting the Qur’anic verses and Traditions to suit oneself

Attributing falsehood to Allah (S.w.T.) , the Holy Prophet (S) and Imams (a.s.) means that one fabricates a saying and attributes it to them. For example, saying that the Holy Prophet (S) has said such and such thing, while knowing that it is an absolute lie, or to say that such and such is a Qur’anic verse, when it is certain that it is not a part of the Holy Qur’an. Similarly, it is Harām to distort the apparent and the true meanings of the Qur’anic verses and traditions to suit ones desire or to prove ones point. Incorrect translation of the Holy verses and traditions is also a falsehood.

It is not an easy job

It is for this very reason that most people are not eligible to speak from the pulpit. It is not an easy task to translate the ayats and traditions and explain their meanings in the speech. There is a need to exercise utmost caution in such risky situations. One who has not studied the rules of Arabic grammar properly will inadvertently misunderstand the saying of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Holy Imams (a.s.) He is bound to err even while explaining the apparent meaning. Therefore the speakers must make it a point to say only the apparent meaning of the ayats and the traditions. They must especially abstain from the exegesis of the ambiguous verses.

A kind of falsehood attributed to Allah (S.w.T.)

An example of this kind of lie is when a lying person, in order, to prove his statement says:

“Allah is a witness that I am speaking the truth.” Or, “Allah knows that I am saying the truth.”

There is a saying of Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.):

“One who says, “Allah knows,” where as Allah does not (i.e He knows the opposite of it), the heaven shudder at the Might (and the anger) of Allah”²²

In another tradition, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“When a man says, ‘Allah knows’ while what he says is a lie, Allah tells him, ‘Didn’t you find anyone else to attribute a falsehood to?’”²³

In some traditions it is mentioned that when a person makes Allah (S.w.T.) a witness for a falsehood Allah (S.w.T.) says, “Didn’t you find anyone weaker than Me to be a witness for your falsehood?”

Falsehood against the Prophet (S) and Imams (a.s.)

It implies fabricating a tradition and then attributing it to the Holy Prophet (S) or the Imams (a.s.). In the same way it is *Harām* to knowingly propagate a weak tradition. However if one is sure of the proper references then he can quote the tradition and attribute it to the *Ma'sūmīn* (a.s.).

Traditions must be quoted with the chain of narrators

Numerous traditions are found in the books and one is not sure whether they are authentic or not. In this case one can give the name of the narrator and also provide the title of the book as reference. However one must be certain that the tradition is not against the *Zururiyat ad-Dīn*, (the necessities of Faith). If there is anything against the basics of the principles of religion it is most certainly a fabricated tradition. Similarly there must not be any sort of disrespect to the *Ma'sūmīn* (a.s.), nor should the tradition be against reason. Lastly as a precautionary measure one must quote only from the reliable books.

The fifth Holy Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) has said:

“And do not quote (a tradition) except from a reliable authority, otherwise you will fabricate a great falsehood. And falsehood debases you (in the sight of Allah and His creatures).”²⁴

The Sermon of Amir ul-Mu'minīn 'Ali (a.s.) to Harith al-Hamadani also contains the following advice:

“Do not quote everything circulating among the common people. It suffices to be a falsehood.”²⁵

Hence whenever quoting a tradition it is necessary to mention its source. Not a single word must be deleted or added, and not even a single word must be replaced, because in all such cases it would amount to attributing falsehood to the *Ma'sūmīn* (a.s.).

The honourable Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

“One who attributes something to me, which I have not said, shall sit in the Fire.”²⁶

Aqa Nūrī writes in his book *Darūs Salām*:

“A person came to Aga Muhammad 'Ali a pious scholar and author of the book *Magame*, and said:

“I dreamt that I am tearing at the flesh of Imam Husain (a.s.) with my eenth. What is the interpretation of this dream?”

Aga Muhammad ‘Ali pondered a while and then said:

“You must be a preacher, relating the tragedies (Masaeb).”

The man replied in the positive.

Aga Muhammad ‘Ali told him, “Either you give up this profession or quote only from reliable books.”

Another similar anecdote is recorded in the book, Shifaus–sdoor. A preacher was reciting a majlis in the presence of Ayatullah Al–Haj Muhammad Ibrahīm Kalbasi. He was saying that Hazrat Imam Husain (a.s.) said, “Zainab, O! Zainab.”

Upon hearing this Ayatullah Kalbasi loudly exclaimed, “May Allah break your mouth! Imam (a.s.) did not say ‘Zainab’ twice, he had said it only once.

1. Relating the contents of the narrations

However it is permitted to render the import of traditions in ones own words but it is a must that the speaker should be well versed with the Arabic language and also be capable of understanding the usage. Thus, it is allowed to relate the contents of the tradition in ones own words.

When it is not disrespectful to the Ma’sūmīn (a.s.), poetry could be rendered into prose and vice-versa. In the same way the past event could be quoted in the present tense. For example if one intends to say that, “a person came to Imam (a.s.) and said...” He could say, “a person comes to Imam (a.s.) and Imam (a.s.) tells him.” However, the audience should be aware that what is being related in the present tense has actually passed. In the same way if the traditions say that Imam (a.s.) has prohibited something, the speaker could say, “Imam (a.s.) said, ‘Do not do it!’”

2. False oath and avoiding testimony

Another grade of falsehood is a false oath, false evidence and escaping from testifying in an Islamic court. This type of falsehood is also confirmed as a greater sin. Each one of these shall be described in detail in the following pages.

3. The evil effects of falsehood

To lie is surely a great sin, with obvious evil effects, due to the harm it can cause others. The more harmful a lie, the more serious is the sin associated with it. For example, a lie causing monetary loss is definitely less serious than the one that causes loss of a human life.

4. Lying in jest and pleasantry

Lying in jest is another kind of falsehood. For instance, telling a simpleton that, “A certain lady wants to marry you,” or “that person has invited you for dinner tonight,” when actually there is no truth in it. This type of falsehood is also *Harām* as proved conclusively from the traditions.

Certain Mujtahids opine that if something untrue is said in jest, and it is clearly understood to be a joke, then it is permitted. However, other Mujtahids regard even a falsehood in jest to be absolutely *Harām*, whether it is an apparent joke or not, as a precautionary measure. The traditions also confirm that lying even in jest is not permitted.

Total abstinence from lying

Hazrat Imam Zayn ul-’Abidīn (a.s.) says,

“Avoid falsehood, whether it is small or big, in solemnity or jest.”²⁷

Hazrat Amir ul-Mu’minīn (a.s.) said,

“No man can taste faith, till the time he completely forgoes lying, in solemnity and in jest.”²⁸

It is also related from Amir ul-Mu’minīn (a.s.) that he said:

“There is no merit in falsehood, whether in seriousness or in jest. Do not even promise your child something if you do not intend to fulfill it. Certainly, falsehood leads man to sin (fearlessly) and (this) leads to the Fire.”²⁹

The Holy Prophet (S) in his advice to Abu Zar Ghaffari (r.a.) says:

“O Abu Zar one who protects his private parts and his tongue shall enter Paradise. One who utters a small falsehood in company of people to make them laugh, that same lie shall take him towards Hell.”

“O Abu Zar, woe be upon the one who speaks falsehood to make people laugh. Woe be upon him woe be upon him O Abu Zar. One who remains silent will obtain salvation. Then silence is a must for you (in place of falsehood). Not even the smallest lie should be uttered by you.”

Abu Zar (r.a.) says that he asked,

“O Messenger of Allah, what is the repentance of the one who has intentionally spoken a lie?”

The Holy Prophet (S) replied:

“The sin shall be erased by Istighfar (seeking forgiveness) and by the five-times prayers.”³⁰

The Prophet of Allah (S) is quoted to have also said:

“Curse be upon the liar if he has lied in jest.”

It is also narrated from the Messenger of Allah (S) that he remarked,

“I guarantee a house in the best part of Paradise for one who refrains from a dispute even when he is on the right, and a house in the medium-grade area of Heaven for one who refrains from falsehood even in jest, and a house in the garden of Paradise for a person with the best morals.”³¹

Lying in jest is a sin but it is not a greater sin. However if this joke hurts the feelings of a believer or causes him physical harm or is an insult to him, it will be a greater sin.

Exaggeration is not falsehood

Common hyperboles in a conversation are not falsehood. For example after relating a certain thing one says:

“I have told you a hundred times!” Obviously, he has not repeated his statement a hundred times and it is also clear that by “hundred” he does not imply the figure “100”; but rather it means that he has said it a number of times.

Similarly other figures of speech are also permitted, especially in poetry.

No falsehood should be regarded as insignificant

It is commonly seen that when the host asks his guests to stay on for dinner or lunch, the guests say, “we are not hungry;” although in reality it is not so. Consequently it is a lie. People tend to ignore such lies and consider them insignificant. The traditions denounce them in unequivocal words, and their prohibition is clearly established in the Islamic law.

Asma Binte Umais says:

“On the first night of Ayesha’s wedding, the Holy Prophet (S) gave me a bowl of milk and told me to give it to the ladies. The women said, “we are not hungry.” When the Holy Prophet (S) heard this, He said:

“Do not bring together hunger and falsehood.”

Asma asked the Prophet (S),

“O Messenger of Allah (S), if we desire something but verbally refuse it, is it a lie?”

The Holy Prophet (S) said,

“Yes! Certainly every kind of falsehood is recorded, (in the scroll of deeds) even the smallest of the small lies is written.”³²

If a person, just for the sake of formality, invites others, “Please come, and visit us sometimes,” when he actually does not desire so, it is not a lie. Because the word “come” is conditional and uncertain. It is neither a truth nor a falsehood. But it is better to refrain from such a show of politeness, because to say something which you do not mean is a sign of hypocrisy.

One day, Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) was seated with his son Ismail when one of his followers arrived, saluted him and sat down. When the Imam (a.s.) stood up and walked towards the ladies portion, the man also followed till the door. Imam (a.s.) bid farewell to him from there. Later, Ismail asked his father, “Why didn’t you invite him inside just for the politeness sake?”

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said,

“It was not proper to invite him inside. I did not wish him to come inside. Neither did I wish that Allah should include me among those who say one thing and wish another.”³³

A False dream

One type of falsehood is that a person says:

“I dreamt such and such.” Or attributes falsely a dream to someone else when it is not so. This is also falsehood.

The Holy Prophet (S) says: *“the worst types of falsehood are three:*

To call someone as the son of someone other than his (real) father.

To relate a dream that one has not seen.

To say something which is not said by me.

One kind of falsehood is to relate folk tales, which are not based on reality but are considered true. The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“The worst of the narrations is to narrate false history.”

Falsehood in examples

Examples are used to explain, understand and remember some intellectual concepts. Sometimes, animals are shown as conversing among themselves. (For example, there is a poem by Allamah Iqbal where a squirrel advises the mountain to give up pride). Now everyone knows that such things are not

possible so there is no risk of anyone having a misunderstanding. On the other hand they serve a useful purpose. Hence such examples are permitted. We find such types of examples in the narrations of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.).

Moreover there are also narrations that prove the permissibility of explaining facts and truthful concepts through the media of stories and anecdotes.

Imam Hasan (a.s.) mentions a simile

Hazrat Imam Hasan (a.s.) was in the court of Muawiya when a man said something uncivil about Imam (a.s.). Imam Hasan (a.s.) replied:

“O Umar Ibn Uthman! How stupid is your nature that you cannot understand. Your simile is like the mosquito that considered itself great. It perched on a date palm and when it took off in the air it said to date palm,

‘Be careful! I am about to land on you once more.’

The tree replied, ‘I don’t even know since when you had perched upon me, so how can your flying away affect me?’

Listening to a lie is Harām

It must be known that just as it is Harām to speak falsehood, it is also Harām to listen to it while knowing that it is a lie. And just as it is Harām to read or write falsehood, it is also Harām to quote a lie. The Qur’an has denounced the Jews and the polytheists for spreading untrue things. It is said regarding them,

“(They are) listeners of a lie.” (Surah al-Mā’ida 5:42)

Shaykh Sadūq (r.a.) has recorded that Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) was asked,

“Is it allowed to listen intently to a liar?”

Imam (a.s.) replied,

“One who listens intently to a speaker, worships him. If the speaker is (speaking) from Allah the listener has worshipped Allah. But if the speaker is (speaking) from Satan the listener has worshipped Satan.”

A similar kind of tradition is recorded from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) in the book al-Kāfi.

The Qur’an says,

“...and avoid false words.” (Surah Hajj 22:30)

And also,

“And they who do not bear witness to what is false...” (Surah al-Furqān 25:72)

These types of verses confirm the impermissibility of listening to falsehood. When a liar is speaking a lie which is a great sin, the place where he commits this sin becomes a place of divine wrath and the listener shall also be included in it.

From the aspect of Nahy Anil Munkar (Forbidding Evil) also, it is Wajib to restrain the liar from speaking falsehood.

What is Toriya? (Concealment of truth without uttering a lie)

Toriya means to say something, which could be interpreted in more than one way. One of the meanings should be the truth and the other against reality. It is said that one who speaks a ‘Toriya’ intends the true interpretation whereas the listeners take it to mean the opposite. For example if a tyrant comes to your place and wants to call you outside but you want to remain in the safety of your home, a person from your family can go to the door and say, ‘He is not here’; with the intention the ‘He’ is not at the door. The tyrant may think that you are not at home. This is permitted.

Or if an oppressor is asking you the whereabouts of a person whom he intends to oppress. In this case you can say, ‘I do not know his whereabouts’; signifying by the pronoun ‘his’ someone else whose whereabouts you really do not know. In the same way if one has committed a greater sin and someone asks him, “Have you committed this sin?” The person could save his honour by saying, “I shall seek forgiveness from Allah (S.w.T.) if I ever committed it.”

Similarly he may use uncertain terms or rhetorical sentences.

For example he may say, “Do you expect me to commit such a grave sin?”

Or he can also say the following prayer,

“O Allah protect me from such a sin.”

Also if you have pointed out somebody’s fault and he feels bad about it, there is no need to utter a lie and say, “You do not have this fault.” What can be said to pacify instead is, “Your personality is such that it is wrong to say such things about you.”

Toriya is commanded

Toriya is of Three kinds.

First type

The first type is when some purpose has to be achieved or there is a risk of some harm. These types of examples are quoted above. It is apparent that such a kind of 'Toriya' is permitted.

Second type

The next type of 'Toriya' is when a person intends to harm or insult someone else. There is no doubt that such a kind of 'Toriya' is 'Harām'.

Third type

The third type of 'Toriya' is when there is neither a purpose behind it nor one intends to cause harm to others. According to some Mujtahids this type 'Toriya' is Harām. This is because 'Toriya' is a kind of a falsehood and whatever proofs exist for the prohibition of lying could also apply for this type of 'Toriya'. Secondly there is nothing to prove the legality of this third type of 'Toriya'. However, some of the Mujtahids are of the opinion that this kind of 'Toriya' is not Harām. For according to them all those proofs that permit 'Toriya' are also applicable to this type and hence it is not a lie.

However, the precautionary method is to resort to 'Toriya' only when it is certain that it permissible.

Circumstances when lying is permitted

Whenever there is a danger to life, honour and property and if the danger can be avoided by lying, one is allowed to lie. The danger could be to ones own life, honour and property or to that of someone else.

So much so that it is also permitted to take a false oath in this situation and in some cases it even becomes Wajib (obligatory) to speak a lie. E.g. when there is risk to ones life. In this case, it is Wajib to save oneself by lying and taking a false oath. For example, if an oppressor intends to kill a Muslim or to beat him up, dishonour him, seize his property or imprison him and if he enquires from you of his whereabouts, it is obligatory not to tell the truth even if one has to take a false oath and say that one does not know of his whereabouts.

In the same way if someone entrusts a thing in your possession and another intends to seize it; it is your duty to protect the entrusted thing even if you have to resort to falsehood or take a false oath.

False oath to save the Muslims

There are many traditions that support the taking of a false oath in order to save the Muslims. For example, Shaykh Ansari in his book, Makasib quotes from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) and Imam 'Ali (a.s.) that they have narrated the following tradition of the Holy Prophet (S).

The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“Swear falsely by Allah, but save your Muslim brothers from unjust murder.”

Ismael Ibn S'ad records a confirmed tradition, wherein he says that he asked Imam 'Ali Ri'za (a.s.) concerning the person who takes a false oath to save his property from an unjust ruler.

Imam Ri'za (a.s.) replied,

“There is no harm (in it).”

He was again asked, “If a man takes a false oath to save the property of his believing brother, just as he had sworn falsely to save his own property. Is it allowed?”

Imam (a.s.) said,

“Yes! It is allowed.”³⁴

Also Hazrat Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says,

“If one is compelled to take a false oath to save the life of a Muslim or to save his property from an oppressor or a thief, not only is the expiation of this false oath not payable but he would rather be eligible for (divine) rewards.”

Monetary loss and falsehood

Two points must be remembered at this juncture. One is that even though it is permitted to lie to save oneself from every type of monetary loss, yet it is Mustahab (recommended) not to lie if one is capable of bearing the loss. Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) says,

“The sign of belief is that one speaks the truth even if it causes loss and refrains from a lie even if it is beneficial (to lie).”³⁵

If one is compelled he must limit himself to Toriya

Another important point is that in situations where the Mujtahids have permitted Toriya it is best not to use falsehood, but limit oneself to Toriya only.

Reconcile two believing people by using falsehood

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

“Speech is of Three types, truth, falsehood and reconciling people.”

Someone asked, “May my life be sacrificed for you. What is, ‘reconciling people’?”

Imam (a.s.) replied:

“You hear someone speaking ill about somebody but you tell the other person that the former was saying good things about you.”³⁶

Conveying a message of ill will

Infact one is ordered to resort to lies if by doing so, one can bring about reconciliation between two people. One who brings about such reconciliation shall not be termed a liar. Because if the message of ill will is communicated from one to other, it will only increase enmity between the two.

In the same way if a husband and wife have separated and divorce is about to take place, one is allowed to speak a lie if it can bring about a reunion. For example the husband could be told, “Your wife is very much troubled by the separation. She has such intense feelings for you that she may fall ill.” Or the wife may be told similar things so that they may reunite.

Reconciliation among people

The Holy Prophet (S) has said,

“After the fulfillment of Wajib acts, the best action is to bring about peace and reconciliation among people. This is such an act that spreads goodness in the world.”

Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) said that the Holy Prophet (S) has said at the time of recording his will and testament.

“O 'Ali, Allah even likes a falsehood for the sake of peace and dislikes truth that spreads corruption.”³⁷

The Holy Prophet (S) has also said,

“To make peace among people and to think about reconciling people, and removing discord is better than prayers and fasting.”

Abu Hanifa Saeq Al Haj says, “There was an inheritance dispute between my son-in-law and me. Our dispute was in process when the agent of Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.), Mufazzal happened to pass by. He stopped to listen for a while then returned to his house. He then gave us four hundred dirhams and solved the dispute.

Then he said, ‘The money that I gave you was not mine. It belonged to my master Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.). He had ordered me to solve the disputes among his followers through this money.’”

This shows the importance of peace and reconciliation. The Holy Prophet (S) has also stated that it was better than prayers and fasting, even though this action is Mustahab (recommended) whereas the former

are Wajib (Obligatory). The reason for this could be that due to prayers and fasting an individual is reformed. Whereas the peacemaker reforms the whole society and consequently prayers and fasting also become popular among the people. Unity among the Muslims is not only beneficial for the Hereafter, it is very much needed from the worldly point of view also. When the hearts of the believers unite for the sake of Allah (S.w.T.), such a power is achieved that not only the apparent enemies can be faced but even the hidden enemies, i.e. “the self” and “shaitan”, can be easily deflected.

Kur water and the united hearts

The unity and understanding among the people could be compared to Kur³⁸ water. If water is divided by putting it in different vessels and each of them is less than a kur, then whenever impurity (Najasat) falls into one of them, it makes that water Najis (impure). But if all the water is collected in one place and it becomes more than a kur and if an impurity falls into it, it does not make the kur water Najis. On the contrary the kur water is capable of purifying the impurity of a Najis object. Exactly, in the same way when the people unite together, the divine mercy descends upon them and each one benefits by it. Secondly due to the unity among the Muslims they will be held in high esteem by people of different faiths.

Another example is the merits of congregational prayers and its great rewards. It is very much recommended to behave kindly towards the believing brother, to help him and support him. Similarly it is highly meritorious to visit the believers, to shake hands with them and to hug them. These actions carry great benefits. To make peace between two believers qualifies one to untold rewards. Similarly it is mentioned that to befriend a believer for the sake of Allah (S.w.T.) carries tremendous rewards. After examining the rewards for all of the above actions one concludes that all such actions have been promulgated for maintaining the unity among believers.

Falsehood in the battle-field

It is known from some traditions that during a war with unbelievers, it is permissible to use falsehood, if by doing so, victory can be gained over them.

Promise to a wife

A man can give a promise to his wife even if he does not intend to fulfill it, a man can give a false promise to fulfill his wife's desire, if he thinks that his refusal will cause dispute and discord in the family, or make his wife extremely unhappy. Obviously such falsehood is also permissible under compelling conditions when a man fears that refusing to promise may lead to an extreme situation like divorce.

However, whether such a promise is permitted or not is difficult to confirm. Some weak traditions do state that such a false promise is allowed. For example if a wife asks for something, her husband can

give her a false promise.

Fear of retribution and good deeds

Hazrat 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) says:

“Avoid lying! For when one desires something he strives for it and when one fears something he strives to keep it away from himself.”³⁹

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) explains the above tradition as follows: If one sincerely desires the pleasure of Allah (S.w.T.) one must strive for it and one of the ways of doing so is by refraining from lies. Falsehood is a forbidden act causing extreme displeasure of Allah (S.w.T.). In the same way if one really fears divine retribution, one must keep aloof from sins, for sins incur punishment. If a person merely claims that he hopes for divine rewards and fears divine punishment, but does not perform good deeds nor refrain from sins, he is a liar.

The following saying of Amir ul-Mu'minīn 'Ali (a.s.) is recorded in Nahjul Balagha:

“One who thinks that he hopes (in divine rewards) but his actions do not express it, then by Allah, he is a liar. For when he hopes for something it becomes apparent from his actions.

But if he hopes in Allah and his actions do not show it? In the same way when one is afraid of something his actions express this (fear) and he flees from that thing. Then after claiming to be fearful of divine punishment why does he not flee from sins?”

Thus if a person who claims to be fearful of Allah (S.w.T.) and hopeful of divine rewards, but whose actions do not confirm his claim, is considered a liar. In the same way a person who claims to have the traits of patience, thankfulness, contentment and resignation etc. which are not shown in his behaviour is also a liar.

Your speech must conform to your thoughts

Hazrat Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says,

“Whenever you say 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is the greatest) you must consider everything between the earth and the sky to be lesser than Allah. Because when Allah sees that a person say Allahu-Akbar only superficially, He says, 'O liar! You try to be smart with Me? By My Might and Honour I shall deprive you of My remembrance.’”

It is regretful that people verbally say, 'Allahu Akbar' but their actions belie their words. For if they are told to do something for the sake of Allah (S.w.T.) or to refrain from something for the sake of Allah (S.w.T.) they do not pay any heed, but if a monetary fine is due for any disobedience, they are sure to

respond. Thus money has importance for them than Allah (S.w.T.)'s pleasure or displeasure. There are people who perform particular actions or restrain from them only due to fear of harm by fellow humans. If they are told to do so only due to the fear of Allah (S.w.T.), they will not be impressed.

A show of submission

A person who says to Allah (S.w.T.), 'Thee only do we worship and Thee only we ask for help', but his actions are such that day and night he is involved in the acquisition of wealth and is preoccupied in the satisfaction of carnal desires. Can we consider this man to be truthful? Does this man really worship Allah (S.w.T.)?

In the same way many a man puts his trust and faith in the apparent agencies through which he gets his profit and gain. He regards these as the deciding authorities and seeks their help, overlooks the fact that these means themselves are through Allah (S.w.T.)'s grace. Can such a person be truthful when he says "Thee only do we worship and Thee only we ask for help?"

Falsehood in supplications

Oftentime people supplicate with the following words, "I am pleased with my Lord and Cherisher, He the sole cherisher of all the creatures. I am satisfied with Him."

But if the situation changes and these people are faced with distressing circumstances, they do not hesitate to complain about what Allah (S.w.T.) has decreed for them. In such a case the above-mentioned supplication amounts to lying.

Confession of Belief in the Imams (a.s.)

The supplication, "I am pleased that Muhammad (S) is my Prophet; and Qur'an is my Book and 'Ali is my Imam; and all of them are for my guidance," will also be a lie when uttered by a person who does not practice the tenets of Islam as explained by our Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.) and behaves according to his own whims and fancy.

Do you speak the truth?

A man prays, "(O Allah (S.w.T.)) when I look at my sins, I weep and when I see Your mercy and forgiveness I become hopeful and happy in anticipation that You will forgive me," but when faced with temptations, he makes no serious effort to restrain himself and commits sinful acts without any qualms. The falsehood of such a person is clear.

In the same way if a person says, "I weep due to (the fear of) the agony of death, due to the fear of questioning of the grave, due to the fear of Qiyāma," while in reality he is not fearful of any of these, his

falsehood is obvious. It could be this very kind of falsehood that is referred to in Du'a Abu Hamza Thumali of Imam Zayn ul-'Abidin (a.s.):

“O Allah! May be You have found me in the position of a liar and for this (You have taken away your mercy from me) left me on my own condition.”

Lying to the Imams (a.s.)

An example of lying to the Imams (a.s.) is that of a person who recites the Ziarat and says, “(O Imams) I accept your sayings and act upon your commands and obey you,” but who does not do so in reality. In fact he obeys his own desires. Such a person is a hypocrite! He is lying to the Imams (a.s.).

Another example of such a falsehood is when he says in Ziarat, “We make peace with those who are at peace with you and we make war with those who are at war with you.” Even though he verbally claims this, in actual practice he is friendly with the enemies of Islam. Also, he is inimical to the believers. He also claims, “I keep aloof from your opponents,” but does not act upon it. Isn't such a person lying to the Imams (a.s.)?

Then how should we pray?

A question arises here that if by reciting a Du'a or Ziarat, if one is bound to utter lies, then how should one pray?

Although a detailed reply to this is beyond the scope of this book, we can say in brief that the manner of praying denounced by us is when the supplicant invokes Allah (S.w.T.), the Holy Prophet (S) and the Imam (a.s.), but he takes his supplication lightly and makes no sincere effort to better himself.

However, a believer should not feel that since it is not possible to avoid falsehood in prayers it is better not to pray. This is despair of Allah (S.w.T.)'s mercy and a satanic instigation to keep the believer away from the divine rewards. What one should do is to pray sincerely and to achieve perfection in a gradual manner and Allah (S.w.T.) will surely help such a person in achieving this ultimate aim.

A person either understands the meanings of duas and Qur'anic verses (as those quoted above) or not. Even if one recites them without following the actual meaning, the duas and Qur'anic verses will illuminate his heart by their light. He will also be eligible for the divine rewards.

Every person has a different position

With respect to knowledge and piety our Ma'sūmīn (a.s.) occupy the highest position. Amongst the believers there is a wide spectrum of people capable of different levels of understanding and piety, but none can reach the stage of Ma'sūmīn (a.s.). All believers succumb to their desires and selfish motives

to a greater or lesser extent. Consequently they fall prey to sins and disobey Allah (S.w.T.). This is inevitable. This situation is aptly described in the following words of Du'a Abu Hamza Thumali.

“O Allah! I did not sin due to disbelief in You, nor did I sin considering Your command insignificant or thinking that your punishment is light. But I sinned due to the instigation of my selfish desires and due to pride...”

The believers can comfort themselves that they are not really lying when they do not rise up to the level expected in the supplication they utter. They can also comfort themselves that they are believers because they fear Allah (S.w.T.) and repose their hope in Allah (S.w.T.), as the Holy Qur'an says:

“And fear (only) Me if you are believers.” (Surah ʿAlī-‘Imrān 3: 175)

Firm conviction and disobedience

Even though the belief in Allah (S.w.T.) and the fear of His retribution is present in man, he is still prone to sins. It is not that one who believes in Allah (S.w.T.) cannot sin. For example, who does not know that a dead body cannot cause any harm? Everyone firmly believes in it. Yet how many people can stay alone with a corpse at night? Here a firm belief is unable to rid the man of his fear of the dead. Even a firm belief cannot guarantee one's actions. It is for this reason that we recite in Du'a, “Bestow upon me such a firm conviction that I can worship you with sincerity.” There is no doubt that if one prays to Allah (S.w.T.) out of intense fear; which would restrains him from committing sins, Allah (S.w.T.) will surely create such a fear in his heart.

Also the magnitude of his fear increases along with the increase in grades of piety and obedience which he achieves due to constant efforts.

It has been mentioned in the traditions:

“Whoever desires something and strives for it, finds it.”

Truly! Being absolutely truthful seems possible only for the Ma'sūmīn (a.s.). As the Holy Qur'an states,

“And be with the Truthful Ones!” (Surah at-Tawba 9: 119)

The “Truthful Ones” referred to in this ayat are the Ahul Bayt (a.s.).

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1. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 2. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
 3. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
 4. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
 5. Usul al-Kafi

6. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
7. al-Kafi
8. al-Kafi
9. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
10. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
11. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
12. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
13. Wasa'il ul-Shia
14. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
15. Wasa'il ul-Shia
16. al-Kafi
17. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
18. Wasa'il ul-Shia
19. Uyūn al-Akhhār ar-Ri'ā
20. al-Kafi
21. al-Kafi
22. al-Kafi
23. Wasa'il ul-Shia
24. Kashful Muhajja
25. Nahjul Balagha
26. Wasa'il ul-Shia
27. al-Kafi
28. al-Kafi
29. Wasa'il ul-Shia
30. Wasa'il ul-Shia
31. Khisāl
32. Safinat'ul-Bihar
33. Bihar al-Anwar
34. Wasa'il ul-Shia
35. Nahjul Balagha
36. Wasa'il ul-Shia
37. Wasa'il ul-Shia
38. 'Kur' is 377 litres. According to Islamic Practical Law if the quantity of water is more than a kur and if it comes in contact with a najis thing, it is not considered najis unless its colour, or its smell, or its taste has changed
39. al-Kafi

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