

When a Lie is Not a Sin: Discussion Guide

Part I: Truth

Describe the Jewish spiritual truths have made a difference in your life by contributing to:

- Relations with family
- Community involvement
- Living the daily routine
- Confronting challenges
- Religious practice
- Important moments in life
- Your vision of a better world

What would happen if you were to tell the truth, no matter what, even in socially awkward situations?

Consider the following questions and situations. Take examples from the book to illustrate your thoughts.

Part II: Little Lies

There's a surprise birthday party for your friend. Part of the ruse has you and that friend planning for a night out and you lie about where you are going.

You are being considered for a new job. Your interviewer asks, "What is your current salary?" You overstate your salary by ten percent.

When buying a house, a real estate agent asks, "What's your bottom line price?" You give a number that is a little bit lower than you are willing to pay.

A "double effect" describes how one behavior can have more than one consequence beyond what is intended. Give a specific example of the "double effect" as a consequence of each of the following:

- Little lie
- Half-truth
- Embellishment
- Benevolent/Paternalistic lie

You mother suffers from advanced dementia. Each time you see her she asks, "Where's Dad?" She doesn't remember that he died two years ago and she reacts with great upset when you remind her, as if she hears this news for the first time. You started saying, "He is coming tomorrow" and she accepts that response.

Your nephew shows you his artwork and you heap lavish praise even though, as a teacher, you know that his work is no better than any other child's.

You are on the board of your synagogue that requires a signed a pledge of spousal confidentiality. You learn of a significant issue about a synagogue staff member, and are asked to keep the matter in confidence, but you decide to tell your spouse.

You are at the airport, checking in for a flight. Your father gave you a present to give to your sister and you packed the box at the bottom of your suitcase. The security screener asks if anyone gave you anything to give to anyone else. You respond, "No."

You confront a co-worker over a "little lie" who responds with, "At least give me some credit for being honest," and you decide not to.

What has been your experience writing letters of recommendation? Have you ever refused to give a reference? How far will you go to stretch the truth when referencing for someone you really like?

Part III: Big Lies

According to the Midrash, Abraham and Sarah lie about their relationship, but only as a last resort. Explain the differences, if any, between lying as a last resort and lying at the get-go. Why is that distinction important?

What's the difference between lying without forethought and lying without caring? Why is that distinction important?

You are a student at a school where the administration discovered a cheating scandal. You were part of it, but were not accused. You decide not to turn yourself in.

You were stopped for speeding and you lie to the officer about being in a rush to get home because you are not feeling well, lying like you have done when you were stopped like that in the past. This time, though, your son is in the car.

You are selling a house and move a bookcase to hide water seepage in the basement, and you don't say anything about a fussy furnace.

A member of the Burlington Liar's Club is expected to lie. So is an imposter panelist on the TV game show *To Tell the Truth*. When else would a lie be expected?

Is it reasonable to say that a politician should never lie?

Your child admires a sports figure who, after much denial and media attention, just admitted using performance enhancing drugs. You decide to say nothing to your child.

Part IV: The Framework and Closing Sections

What are some social, cultural, educational and economic barriers to exercising free will?

This book is about the “Aha!” of Torah study. When has Torah study brought you that kind of insight?

Now that you are done reading the book, go back to the “This book is for you if…” How has this book achieved these goals?