



154955 - Situations in which lying is permissible

the question

Is it permissible to lie in order to avoid harm? For example when one student has a high average, but if that is mentioned in front of people, it may lead to harm, whether that is due to envy, the evil eye or anything else of that nature. In a case such as this, can I mention a different figure, so as to ward off harm from the student? Please explain the situations in which it is permissible to lie.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Lying is an abhorrent sin and immoral deed.

It was narrated from `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. A man may speak the truth until he is recorded with Allah as a speaker of truth. Lying leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to Hell. A man may tell lies until he is recorded with Allah as a liar." Narrated by al-Bukhari (6094) and Muslim (2607).

It was narrated that `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: No characteristic was more hateful to the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) than lying. If a man told a lie in the presence of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), he would remain upset with him until he came to know that he had repented from that. Narrated by Ahmad in *Al-Musnad* (42/101); the commentators classed its isnad as authentic.

Secondly:



The authentic religious texts indicate that there are exceptions to the prohibition on lying in some situations. These texts include the following:

The hadith of Umm Kulthum bint `Uqbah (may Allah be pleased with her), which says that she heard the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: "He is not a liar who reconciles between people, saying good things and conveying good things." Narrated by Muslim (2605).

The words of `Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him): When I narrate to you from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), it would be dearer to me to be thrown down from the sky than to attribute to him something that he did not say. But if I speak between you and me, then war is deceit. Narrated by al-Bukhari (3611) and Muslim (1066).

Thirdly:

The scholars derived several rulings from the texts quoted above and others. These include:

- 1.. Lying is not prohibited in and of itself; rather it is prohibited because of the evil consequences to which it leads.
- 2.. If lying may lead to warding off greater trouble or serving a greater purpose, then it becomes permissible in that case. But the matter of lying should not be taken lightly on the grounds that it will ward off harm; rather it is essential to correctly weigh up the pros and cons.
- 3.. If one is able to avoid lying by using double entendres and ambiguous words, that is undoubtedly better. `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Ambiguous words could help a man to avoid telling lies. Narrated by al-Bayhaqi in *As-Sunan al-Kubra* (10/199).

What is meant by ambiguous words is words from which the listener understands one thing, when the speaker intends something else.

There follow the comments of some of the scholars explaining these rulings.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (may Allah have mercy on him) said:



You should note that lying is not prohibited in and of itself; rather it is prohibited because of the harm caused to the one who is lied to or to others. The least harm it can do is that the one who is lied to believes something contrary to what is really the case, thus he becomes ignorant of the facts, and that harm may extend to others too.

Or in a case in which ignorance of the facts may be beneficial and serve an interest, then telling a lie will result in that ignorance, and in that case it is permissible and may be obligatory.

Hence we say that words are means of achieving goal:

1.. In the case of any praiseworthy goal that could be achieved by either speaking the truth or lying, lying is prohibited in this case.

2.. If the goal can be achieved by lying but not by telling the truth, then lying is permissible if achieving that goal is permissible.

3.. Lying is obligatory if the goal to be achieved is obligatory. For example, protecting the blood of a Muslim is obligatory, so whenever telling the truth could lead to shedding the blood of a Muslim who is hiding from an oppressor, then lying is obligatory in this case. Whenever achieving goals in war, reconciling between people or softening the heart of one who has been wronged [so that he will not insist on revenge] cannot be achieved except by lying, then lying is permissible, but you should try to avoid lying as much as possible, because if you open the door to telling lies, there is the fear that you may tell lies in situations in which there is no need to do that, and not limit yourself to lying only in cases where it is necessary. Thus lying is prohibited in principle, except in cases of necessity. These are the three situations that are clearly exempted, and by the same token, any other situation in which there is a permissible goal to be achieved, for oneself or someone else, is also exempted.

For example, if an oppressor seizes a person and asks him about his wealth, he may deny that he has wealth, or if the ruler arrests him and interrogates him about some evil deed that he did which no one knows about except Allah, may He be Exalted, he may deny that and say: I did not commit zina, I did not steal. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever



commits any of these filthy deeds, let him conceal himself with the concealment of Allah.” That is because telling about one’s immoral deeds is itself an immoral deed. A man can protect his life, his wealth that could be taken wrongfully, and his dignity and honour with his words, even if he is lying, such as if [the oppressor] asks him about his brother’s secret; he can deny having any knowledge of it.

Another example is if someone wants to reconcile between two people, or reconcile between his co-wives, such as pretending that each of them is the most beloved to him. And if his wife would not obey him except by means of a promise that he cannot fulfil, he may make that promise to her now, so as to soften her heart; or if he apologizes to someone who will not be content unless he assures him that he did nothing wrong, or he pretends to be extra friendly to him, there is nothing wrong with that.

There is a guideline, which is that lying is prohibited. But if telling the truth in those situations could lead to some trouble, then in that case he must weigh up the pros and cons, then decide what is the best course of action.

So if he realises that the trouble that would result from telling the truth is regarded as worse according to Islamic teachings than the lie itself, then he may lie, but if the consequences of lying are more serious in nature than the consequences of telling the truth, then he must tell the truth. Two options may be so close that you are uncertain which is worse; in that case it is more appropriate to tell the truth, because lying is only permissible in the case of necessity or important need, so if you are not sure whether the need is important, then the basic principle is that lying is prohibited, so you must adhere to that.

Because it may be difficult to determine which option has worse consequences, you should try to avoid lying as much as possible. By the same token, whatever the need to tell a lie is, it is preferable to overlook the goals and avoid lying. But if the goal is connected to achieving the interests of someone else, then it is not permissible to overlook the rights of someone else and cause harm to him. Most of the lies that people tell are for their own gain, and they are aimed at increasing wealth and status, or at making gains that, if one misses out on them, will not lead to



any troubles, to the extent that a woman may talk about her husband and boast about him (that is, his generosity and how much he loves her), be she is lying for the purpose of annoying her co-wives, and that is prohibited.

Asma' said: A woman asked the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): I have a co-wife, and I pretend that my husband has given me something that he did not give to me, for the purpose of hurting her. Is there any sin on me? He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The one who pretends to have been given something that he was not given is like the one who wears two garments of falsehood." Agreed upon.

Everyone who tells a lie is taking the risk of trying to examine the issue on the basis of his own understanding [when he is not qualified to do that] so as to ascertain whether the purpose for which he is lying is more important according to Islamic teachings than telling the truth or not. This is a very subtle issue, and the prudent thing is to avoid it, except in cases where it is obligatory to lie, meaning that it is not permissible to refrain from lying, such as if telling the truth would lead to bloodshed or committing a sin.

It was narrated from the early generations that resorting to double entendres and ambiguous words will help one to avoid lying. `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Double entendres and ambiguous words help a man to avoid telling lies. This was also narrated from Ibn `Abbas and others.

What they meant by that is that if someone is compelled to lie, if there is no need or necessity for that, then it is not permissible either to use double entendres or to lie, but using a double entendre is less serious.

End quote from *Ihya' `Ulum ad-Din* (3/136-129).

Al-`Izz ibn `Abd as-Salam (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Lying is an evil deed and is prohibited unless it could serve an interest or ward off harm. Hence it is permissible in some cases and obligatory in others. Examples of that include the following:



1.. If a husband lies to his wife so that she can improve her conduct and become easy going, that is permissible.

Similarly, with regard to lying in order to reconcile between people, it is more appropriate that it should be permissible because it serves a general interest – then he mentioned some other situations in which lying is permissible, then he said: –

Indeed in these and similar scenarios the correct view is that lying becomes permissible in such cases.

End quote from *Qawa'id al-Ahkam* (p. 112).

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Not every lie is a sin; rather in some cases it may be an act of obedience to Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, and an obligation that must be fulfilled, and the one who refrains from that is sinning. It is soundly narrated that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “He is not a liar who reconciles between people, saying good things and conveying good things.” And the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) permitted a man to lie to his wife so that he can make her love him, and he also permitted lying in war.

Moreover, it was narrated that there was scholarly consensus that a Muslim must lie if an oppressive ruler asks him where another Muslim is so that he can kill him unlawfully, and that if he tells him the truth and informs him where he is, he is an evildoer and a sinner.

End quote from *Al-Fasl fil-Milal* (4/5).

Fourthly:

As for telling the student something other than his real grade for fear of the evil eye or envy, this is not a case of necessity that makes it permissible to lie. Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, will defend the believer, as He says:

{Verily, Allah will defend those who believe} [Al-Hajj 22:38].



So it is not appropriate for a Muslim to be consumed by fear of enviers and those who would harm others with the evil eye.

In this case... If it is possible to use double entendres and ambiguous words, then there is a concession allowing that, and there is nothing wrong with it.

But if it is not possible to use double entendres and ambiguous words, then he should tell the truth and put his trust in Allah, may He be exalted, and understand that no one will ever harm him unless that is what Allah has decreed for him.

And Allah knows best.