

# The JEWISH Spin on Current Events

## PLACEBO PILL

*Should we give them to our children?*

### c OVERVIEW d

1. IS HONESTY A BIBLICAL COMMANDMENT OR JUST A GOOD HUMAN TRAIT?
2. ARE YOU EVER ALLOWED TO LIE?
3. WHEN ALLOWED, CAN ONE LIE 'STRAIGHT-OUT', OR MUST ONE SAY A 'HALF-TRUTH'?
4. IS DECEPTION ALLOWED WHEN IT IS FOR THE VICTIM'S OWN BENEFIT?
5. SHOULD ONE BE EXTRA CAREFUL WHEN DEALING WITH CHILDREN?

Prepared and delivered by:

***Rabbi Levi Osdoba***

May 28, 2008

*(Next class will be held on June 25)*



A Project of the

**BELLE HARBOR TORAH INSTITUTE**

211 Beach 140 Street, Belle Harbor, NY 11694 • 718-474-2613

[www.belleharbortorah.com](http://www.belleharbortorah.com) ♦ [rabbi@belleharbortorah.com](mailto:rabbi@belleharbortorah.com)

## c SOURCES d

**1. Is honesty a Biblical commandment or just a good human trait?**

c 1A d

EXODUS 23:7

Distance yourself from a false word.

**2. Are you ever allowed to lie?**

c 2A d

GENESIS 12:10-13

There was a famine in the land, and Abram descended to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "See now, I have known that you are a woman of beautiful appearance. And it shall occur, when the Egyptians will see you, they will say, 'This is his wife!' then they will kill me, but you they will let live. Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake, and that I may live on account of you."

c 2B d

GENESIS 22:1-2.12

And it happened after these things that G-d tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham," and he replied, "Here I am." And He said, "Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the land of Moriah; bring him up there as an *olah* upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you."...

... And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad nor do anything to him for now I know that you are a G-d-fearing man, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me."

c 2C d

TRACTATE KETUBOT 16B-17A

Our Rabbis taught: How does one dance before the bride? Beis Shammai say: The bride as she is. And Beis Hillel say: Beautiful and charming bride! Beis Shammai said to Beis Hillel: If she was lame or blind, does one say of her: Beautiful and charming bride? But the Torah has said, "Distance yourself from falsehood". Beis Hillel said to Beis Shammai: According to your view, if one has made a bad purchase in the market, should one praise it in his eyes or denigrate in his eyes? Surely you would say, one should praise

it in his eyes. From here the Sages said: A person's mind should always be mingled with people.

### c 2D d

#### TRACTATE YEVOMOT 65B

And R' Il'a sadi in the name of R' Elazar the son of R' Shimon: One may modify a statement in the interests of peace; as it says, "[Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, and they said, "Perhaps Joseph will nurse hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all the evil that we did him." So they instructed that Joseph be told], Your father gave orders etc. [before he died saying]; "Thus shall you say to Joseph: 'O please, kindly forgive etc. [the spiteful deed of your brothers...].' "

R' Nassan says: [Not only is it *permitted* to deviate from the truth in the name of peace, it is even] a mitzvah, as it says [when G-d sent Samuel to anoint David as king instead of Saul]: "But Samuel asked, "How can I go? If Saul finds out he will kill me etc." [So Hashem said, "Take along a heifer, and say, 'I have come to bring an offering to Hashem].' "

The academy of R' Yishmael taught a Baraisa: How great is [the preservation of] peace! For even the holy one, blessed is He, altered the truth for the sake of peace. Because initially it is written [that Sara laughed to herself at the absurdity of having a child because] "My husband is old!" Yet later, [when G-d related her statement to Abraham], it is written "[Why is it that Sarah laughed, saying: 'Shall I in truth bear a child], though I am old?'"

### c 2E d

#### OVOT D'RABBI NOTON 12:3

When two men had quarreled, Aaron would go and sit with one of them and say, "My son, see what your friend is doing! He beats his breast and tears his clothes and moans, 'Woe is me! How can I lift my eyes and look my companion in the face? I am ashamed before him, since it is I who treated him foully.'" Aaron would sit with him until he had removed all anger [literally, jealousy] from his heart.

Then Aaron would go and sit with the other man and say likewise, "My son, see what your friend is doing! He beats his breast and tears his clothes and moans, 'Woe is me! How can I lift my eyes and look my companion in the face? I am ashamed before him, since it was I who offended him.'" Aaron would sit with him also until he had removed all anger from his heart.

Later, when the two met, they would embrace and kiss each other.

**3. When allowed, can one lie 'straight-out', or must one say a 'half-truth'?**

c 3A d

SEFER CHASSIDIM 642 & CHOFETZ CHAIM, HILCHOS ISSUREI RECHILUS 1:8 (PARAPHRASED)  
 If one does find himself or herself in a situation where they must lie, the correct way to do this is to use words that may have another meaning, vague statements, or through the use of half-truths.

**4. Is deception allowed when it is for the victim's own benefit?**

c 4A d

GENESIS 18-27. 30-35.

...And he came to his father and said, "Father," and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "It is I, Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me; rise up, please, sit and eat of my game that your soul may bless me." Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you were so quick to find, my son?" And he said, "Because HASHEM your G-d arranged it for me." And Isaac said to Jacob, "Come close, if you please, so I can feel you, my son; are you, indeed my son Esau or not?" So Jacob drew close to Isaac his father who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are Esau's hands." But he did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like the hands of Esau his brother; so he blessed him. He said, "You are, indeed, my son Esau!" And he said, "I am." He said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game that my soul may bless you...

...And it was, when Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob scarcely left from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came back from the hunt. He, too, made delicacies, and brought them to his father; he said to his father, "Let my father rise and eat of his son's game, so that your soul will bless me." Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your firstborn son Esau." Then Isaac trembled in very great perplexity, and said, "Who – where – is the one who hunted the game, brought it to me, and partook of all when you had not yet come, and I blessed him? Indeed, he shall remain blessed!" When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me too, Father!" But he said, "Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing."

**5. Should one be extra careful when dealing with children?**

c 5A d

## TALMUD, YEVAMOS 63A

Rav's wife would aggravate him. When he would tell her, "Prepare me lentils," she would prepare *chimtzei* [i.e., a type of legume]. If he said, "Prepare me *chimtzei*," she would prepare lentils. When his son, Chiya, grew up [and would relay his father's requests to his mother], he would reverse [his requests] to her [unbeknown to Rav. When Rav noticed how he is now receiving his desired dish], he said to him [i.e., his son], "Your mother has improved!" [Chiya, the son] replied to him, "It was actually I who reversed your request to her." [Rav] replied to him, "This bears out the poplar saying: 'The one who comes from you will educate you'. However, you should not do this, for it says: "they train their tongue to speak falsehood, striving, etc." (Jeremiah 9:4).

## c 5B d

## TALMUD, SUCCAH 46B

And R' Zeira said: A person should not say to a child, "I will give you something," and then not give it to him, because he thereby teaches him to lie, as it is stated: "They train their tongue to speak falsehood" (Jeremiah 9:4).