

Islam views lying as a serious vice. God says in the Quran:

"And do not say that of which you have no knowledge." (Quran 17:36)

The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, stressed the importance of always being truthful and the seriousness of habitual lying, "Truthfulness leads to piety and piety leads to the Paradise. A man should be truthful until he is written down as truthful with God. Lying leads to deviance and deviance leads to the Fire. A man will lie until he is written down as a liar with God."^[3] Truth is to state what corresponds with reality, how things are, and is the opposite of lying. The malice of lying is tied to hypocrisy as described by the Prophet Muhammad, "If anyone has four characteristics, he is a pure hypocrite, and if anyone has one of them, he has an aspect of hypocrisy until he gives it up: whenever he is trusted, he betrays his trust; whenever he speaks, he lies; when he makes an agreement, he breaks it; and when he quarrels, he deviates from the truth by speaking falsely."^[4] The Prophet's teaching is that we try our best to free ourselves of hypocrisy by keeping our trusts, telling the truth, keeping our promises, and not speaking falsely.

Islamicly, the most heinous lie is against God, His prophets, His revelation, and bearing false witness. We should be careful not to make false excuses like *'I was too busy or I forgot,'* or say words that can be taken as promises by others like *'I'll call back tomorrow,'* with no such intention. At the same time, not lying should not be confused with impoliteness, *'saying at it is,'* but we should be careful not to lie about little things when no one apparently gets hurt. This can be done by carefully choosing our words.

Is "Never lie!" an absolute principle of Islam or are there exceptions? Suppose that a would-be murderer comes knocking on your door, looking for his victim. Is the morally correct answer, "She's hiding upstairs, hoping you will go away"? Philosophers like Kant wrote as if this was in fact the morally correct thing to do, but Islamicly, lying is justified in such cases.

Footnotes:

[1]

'The Right to Do Wrong: Lying to Parents among Adolescents and Emerging Adults,' by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Elizabeth Cauffman, S. Shirley Feldman, Lene Arnett Jensen; Journal of Youth and Adolescence, Vol. 33, 2004.

[2]

'The truth about lying,' by: Allison Kornet. Psychology Today, Publication Date: May/June 97

[3]

Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

[4]

Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim

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