

Avoiding Falsehood:

The Importance of This Mitzvah:

1. The seal of Hashem is truth. Hashem created the world with truth. When we adhere to the truth and strive to be people of truth, we become partners in building Hashem's world.
2. The Talmud says that someone whose words veer from the truth is not allowed to enter the environs of Hashem, as derived from the incident involving the spirit of Navos, whom Achav had executed unjustly.
3. Sefer Hachinuch: There is nothing more disgusting than falsehood; it is the cause of many of the diseases and curses in this world.
4. Talmud: Someone who speaks a distortion of the truth is like an idol worshipper.
5. Talmud: Liars are counted among the four groups of people who cannot receive the Shechinah.
6. Chazon Ish: A person who says an untruth occasionally retains his basic human form, though he is tainted by sin. But someone who makes a habit of lying adopts the form of a *Shakran* - a liar - and his human aspect is nullified.
7. The World to Come is known as the World of Truth. It is understandable, therefore, that people whose essence is falsehood have no place there.
8. Talmud: One of the questions that you are asked before the Heavenly tribunal is: "Did you conduct your business honestly?"
9. Orchos Tzaddikim: When someone accustoms himself not only to speak truth but even to think only thoughts of truth, then at night he will be shown visions of truth and will have glimpses of the future in the manner of angels.
10. Sefer Chassidim: When a person always speaks the truth, without saying or even thinking a word of sheker, then whatever he says shall come about - he decrees below and Hashem carries it out Above.
11. Meiri: "The truth is heavy; therefore, its bearers are few." In this world we see how the wicked seem to succeed in life with their falsehood. We do not see the actualization of the Passuk: "The lips of truth shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is just for a moment."
12. Vilna Gaon: When trying to make friends, some people make the mistake of using falsehood and prohibited flattery. They don't realize that when a person speaks honestly and means what he says, he is loved much more than the smooth talker who is always trying to charm others with insincere accolades.

The Mitzvah:

1. The Torah says "Midevar Sheker Tirchak" - "Stay far away from falsehood." Apparently, the Torah did not find it sufficient to use the more common wording of "Tishamer" - "Guard Yourself." When it comes to Sheker - falsehood, we have to

keep a great distance and flee from every trace of falsehood. Sheker is regarded as something repulsive, leading us to steer clear of anything related to it.

2. You violate this Mitzvah even if you merely include some falsehood in a true report, and even if the words are literally true but their implication is false.
3. The prohibition is applicable to men and women, in all places and at all times. Adults should accustom children from a young age to tell only the truth, especially when you see they are intentionally misrepresenting the truth for their own benefit.
4. The prohibition of lying is no different whether the lie is told to a man, woman, adult, child, Jew or non-Jew. We must be even more careful to not lie to children.
5. We are prohibited to voluntarily and willingly lend an ear to words we know to be false, or even to a report whose truth is questionable.
6. Sheker includes saying things that can be construed in two different ways, when our intention is to mislead others into believing the false interpretation of our words.
7. Sheker includes saying things that are absolutely true, but deliberately omitting crucial details so that the report will be taken in a false manner.
8. Sheker includes a falsehood that emerges from our actions or body language, even if we do not utter word.
9. Writing a falsehood is obviously prohibited.
10. We may not mislead others through our silence.
11. Mentioning true facts, but out of context, is prohibited.
12. We may not cause others to lie. (especially when questioning children about events where they may lie in order to avoid punishment.)
13. It is a midas chassidus to refrain from speaking falsehoods, even as a joke, if what we say may possibly mislead someone.
14. However, when our purpose is purely to cheer people up, and no one is being misled by our words, it is permitted.
15. Very pious people are careful to avoid shekel even in their thoughts. (Rav Safra)
16. A person is considered a liar even when he makes up stories or alters reports that he hears, for no particular personal benefit and without causing a loss to anyone else.
17. We should not say "I will do..." or "I will not do such and such.." without adding the phrase "bli neder."
18. We should not tell a creditor: "Come back tomorrow, and then I will pay you" if we know that we won't be able to pay him the next day either.
19. Exaggeration is generally not used with the intention to mislead others and does not constitute the violation of speaking shekel.
20. Euphemistic language when used to avoid saying something unpleasant is permitted.
21. When speaking with friends and students in a loving way, it is fully permissible to address them as "brothers" or "children." You may call a friend of the family "Uncle" or "Aunt."

Other Related Prohibitions:

1. When a person wrongly denies that he was entrusted with an item for safekeeping or as collateral, or denies that he owes a debt, or denies that he owes payment to a worker, he violates the prohibition of “Do not deny falsely and do not lie to one another.”
2. A person who gives false testimony violates both the prohibition of ‘Do not bear false witness against your friend’ and “do not bear false report.”
3. Dishonesty and deceit in business transactions and partnerships are a violation of “One man should not defraud his brother.”
4. Even if the falsehood in itself is not a direct cause of immediate danger and loss to someone else, but may be an indirect of future damage (e.g. false representation of friendship), this is considered to be in the category of “Lips of falsehood are an abomination to Hashem” and “I despised the perverse mouth.”
5. When someone uses falsehood or deceitful words to prevent some good thing from reaching someone else, or to redirect to himself a gift or benefit of some kind, which was on its way to another person who in fact deserved it, chapel say of him, “Someone who distorts his words is considered as if he worshipped idols.” (e.g. to claim falsely that one is interested in buying house or a business that another person has plans of purchasing, so that the other party will “buy him off” with a gift.)

Business Language:

1. A manner of speech commonly used by salesmen in business dealings do not violate the prohibition of speaking sheker, ***as long as this is his prevalent mode of speech in their society and everyone knows what they really mean.*** Examples include 1) the salesman saying he will not budge from a. Certain price, or 2) he has other people. Who are willing to pay this price - in order to pressure the customer to close the deal.
2. This concept would apply in the marketplace in some cultures, where haggling is the rule, not the exception.
3. This principle can be applied to many everyday situations: If we are using a common manner of speaking and it is clear that we are not misleading anyone, since the listener knows our intent, there is no violation of sheker. (E.g. changing your age regarding shidduchim, when everyone does it.)
4. The same rule would apply when speaking to security authorities at the airpor ask, “Do you have anything with you that you did not pack yourself, or that someone else gave you?” It would not be sheker to respond “no” when a close relative or friend gave you something.

Stories & Speeches:

1. A writer may use a pen name to conceal his identity, if that is common practice in his place and time.

2. However, the author may not add a title to his name such as “Doctor” or “Rosh Yeshivas” in order to deceive the readers.
3. We are allowed to use a fictional story as a parable to enable us to illustrate a point in a clear manner or to instill Fear of Heaven. However, we must make it clear that the story is just a parable.
4. There is no prohibition for a speaker to exaggerate in praising people, or when eulogizing people, or speak words of assumed humility, or pretend to laugh or cry, as necessary, to accentuate his words, as long as he does not go beyond the accepted standards for that place and time.

Being a Person of Truth in Business & Other Transactions:

1. “Mi Shepara” - backing out of a deal, after putting down money towards a transaction, for no good reason, before the actual “Kinyan” (legal acquisition) was made.
2. “Hin Tzedaka” - You should not say something without meaning it. When we “speak out” a transaction, even when there has been no Kinyan or exchange of money, we should follow through on the words we said. If a person has no such intention when he speaks, then even if he has second thoughts later and carries out his words, he will not have cleared himself of this violation until he does Teshuva for this insincere and misleading speech.
3. “Mechusar Amana” - We are supposed to follow up on our words. When someone closes a transaction, even when there has been no Kinyan and no exchange of money, and even if at the time, he intended to carry out the agreement; if he afterward regrets his words and withdraws from the transaction, he is called “a man who lacks integrity.”
4. Gift - We can not back out on giving someone a gift after we have promised to do so, even though according to the letter of the law, the gift has not yet become the recipient's property.
5. Vows - the above becomes a more serious violation when you promise to give. A poor person or an institution. A donation.
6. Honor - You may not back out of giving someone an honor after promising it to him. (E.g. Mohel, Kohen, etc.)