



# Keep Far Away From Falsehood

I am in the middle of preparing a lecture to be given at a course on ethics in the care of the elderly at Herzog College this coming month. The topic of the lecture relates to the complex and controversial use of “therapeutic lies” in dementia care. This is the practice of deliberately deceiving patients for reasons considered in their best interest. I will look at these questions from the health care literature but also from the Torah’s perspective. So the verse in this week’s portion related to telling the truth “keep far away from falsehood – *midvar sheker tirchak*” (23:7) caught my eye.

The Zedah La-derech comments on the unusual way this verse is worded- “keep far away” saying that the wording “ makes it seem that there is no transgression more serious and widespread than falsehood”. It’s not enough not to tell a lie – we are instructed to try to stay far away from lies. This is in contrast to another verse which also prohibits falsehood, “deal not falsely with each other – *Lo tshakaru ish B’amito*” (*Vayikra* 19:12). The verse in *Vayikra* is a negative command, while the verse in our portion is positive and demands much more

– that we “ keep far away” requesting an extreme care in refraining from anything that might come near to being an untruth, even if it is not obviously dishonest.

Nechama Leibowitz explains the difference in the wording between these two verses that talk about falsehood in relation to the context where we find them placed in the Torah. The verse in our portion occurs in a judicial context. The verse right before states “Do not pervert justice...”. The verse in *Vayikra*, is found in the portion of *Kedoshim*, and refers to falsehood in all spheres of life.

We all know that we must not lie, but the Rabbis describe instances in life when peace is more important than telling the whole truth. They learn this concept from examples that are brought in Torah. This includes: God’s leaving out some of Sara’s words (about Abraham being old) when He relates them to Avraham (*Bereshit* 18:12), Yosef’s brother’s relating words in the name of their father that we never heard said “forgive...the transgression of your brethren...” (*Bereshit* 50:16-17) and Aharon’s policy of going out of his way to reconcile people who were fighting amongst themselves by telling each side separately that the other side wants to make up with them (*Avot DeRabbi Nathan* 12).

But all the above examples are very different from court procedures and the administration of justice which our verse

relates to. Here the Torah demands the whole truth and nothing but the truth: “keep far from a false matter – *mdvar sheker tirchak!*” Nechama Leibowitz brings five different examples brought in the Talmud of how far the judges, plaintiffs and witnesses, must go to keep away from falsehood in court. One such example is that if a judge knows or feels that a case is crooked (i.e he sees that the witnesses are not acting in good faith but he can’t prove it) he shouldn’t rule in such a case and should stand down.

May we have courts today that stay away from falsehood.



## RECIPE

Since we talked this week about falsehoods, this week’s recipe is for mock chopped liver. It might taste and look like liver, but it really isn’t – it just deceives us.

### MOCK CHOPPED LIVER

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 onions, sliced
- 5 eggs, hard boiled and peeled
- 1 can peas, drained
- 1/2 can green beans, drained
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup ground walnuts

Sauté the onions for about 20-25 min, till soft and golden. Blend the hardboiled eggs, peas, green beans and onions together till creamy. Add the salt and ground walnuts and mix till it looks like chopped liver. ■

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