

## A New Yorker in Canada: To be Polite or Brutally Honest?

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### 1. Getting Directions in NY vs Toronto

2. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kx6\\_yBkuve8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kx6_yBkuve8) (until 1:20)

### 3. New York Jewish Conversational Style, in International Journal of the Sociology of Language 1981(30):135 - 149 · January 2008, Deborah Tannen

#### The Negative Stereotype

Evidence abounds of the negative stereotype of New York speech in general and New York Jewish speech in particular. The most widely recognized component of this speech is, of course, phonology. An Associated Press release (Boyer, 1979) reports on California therapists who help cure New York accents. One such therapist is quoted: 'It's really a drag listening to people from New York talk. It upsets me when I hear a New York accent. . . . We're here to offer a service to newcomers to this area, especially to New Yorkers. . . . When they open their mouths, they alienate everyone. We're here to help them adjust to life in Marin County.'

A third-grade teacher in Brooklyn wrote to Ann Landers complaining of native-born children who say, for example, 'Vot's the kvestion?', 'It's vorm ottside', and 'heppy as a boid'. Ann Landers advised the teacher, 'With consistent effort, bad speech habits can be unlearned. I hope you will have the patience to work with these students. It's a real challenge.'

### 4. Exodus 23:7

(ז) מדבר-שקר תרחק ונגי וצדיק אל-תהרג כי לא-אצדיק רשע:

(7) Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer.

### 5. Mishnah Bava Metzia 4:10

(י) קנשם שאונאה במקח וממכר, כד אונאה בדברים. לא יאמר לו בכמה חפץ זה, והוא אינו רוצה לקח. אם היה בעל תשובה, לא יאמר לו זכר מעשיך הראשונים. אם הוא בן גרים, לא יאמר לו זכר מעשה אבותיך, שנאמר (שמות כב) וגר לא תונה ולא תלקצנו:

(10) Just as the laws of fraud apply to buying and selling, so to do they apply to the spoken word. One may not say, "How much is this object?, if he does not wish to buy it. If one had repented, another should not say to him, "Remember your earlier deeds". If one descended from converts, another should not say to him, "Remember the deeds of your ancestors". For it is said (Exodus 22:21), "And a stranger you shall not wrong or oppress."

### 6. Genesis 18:12-13

(יב) ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר בלתי היתה לי עדנה ואדני זקן: (יג) ויאמר ה' אל-אברהם למה זה צחקת שרה לאמר האף אמנם אלד ואני זקנתי:

(12) And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?" (13) Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'"

### 7. Yevamot 65b:9

דבי רבי ישמעאל תנא גדול השלום שאף הקדוש ברוך הוא שינה בו דמעיקרא כתיב (בראשית יח, יב) ואדוני זקן ולבסוף כתיב ואני

It was **taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: Great is peace, as even the Holy One, Blessed be He, departed from the truth for it. As, initially it is written** that Sarah said of Abraham: **“And my lord is old”** (Genesis 18:12), **and in the end it is written** that God told Abraham that Sarah said: **“And I am old”** (Genesis 18:13). God adjusted Sarah’s words in order to spare Abraham hurt feelings that might lead Abraham and Sarah to quarrel.

### 8. Bava Metzia 23b:11-24a

... דאמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל בהני תלת מילי עבידי רבנן דמשנו במלייהו במסכת ובפוריא ובאושפיזא

... **Rav Yehuda says that Shmuel says: With regard to these three matters alone, it is normal for Sages to amend their statements** and deviate from the truth: **With regard to a tractate**, if he is asked whether he studied a particular tractate, he may humbly say that he did not, even if he did. **And with regard to a bed**, if he is asked whether he slept in a particular bed, he may say that he did not, to avoid shame in case some unseemly residue is found on the bed. **And he can lie with regard to a host [ushpiza]**, as one may say that he was not well received by a certain host to prevent everyone from taking advantage of the host’s hospitality.

### 9. Ketubot 16b-17a

תנו רבנן כיצד מרקדין לפני הכלה בית שמאי אומרים כלה כמות שהיא ובית הלל אומרים כלה נאה וחסודה אמרו להן ב"ש לב"ה הרי שהיתה חייגרת או סומא אומר' לה כלה נאה וחסודה והתורה אמרה) שמות כג. ז (מדבר שקר תרחק אמרו להם ב"ה לב"ש לדבריכם מי שלקח מקח רע מן השוק ישבחנו בעיניו או יגננו בעיניו הוי אומר ישבחנו בעיניו מכאן אמרו חכמים לעולם תהא דעתו של אדם מעורבת עם הבריות

§ **The Sages taught: How does one dance before the bride**, i.e., what does one recite while dancing at her wedding? **Beit Shammai say:** One recites praise of **the bride as she is**, emphasizing her good qualities. **And Beit Hillel say:** One recites: **A fair and attractive bride. Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel:** In a case where the bride was **lame or blind**, does one say with regard to her: **A fair and attractive bride? But the Torah states: “Keep you from a false matter” (Exodus 23:7).** **Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai:** According to your statement, with regard to **one who acquired an inferior acquisition from the market**, should another **praise it** and enhance its value **in his eyes or condemn it** and diminish its value **in his eyes? You must say that he should praise it** and enhance its value **in his eyes** and refrain from causing him anguish. **From here the Sages said: A person’s disposition should always be empathetic with mankind**, and treat everyone courteously. In this case too, once the groom has married his bride, one praises her as being fair and attractive.

### 10. Eruvin 53b

אמר רבי יהושע בן חנניה מימי לא נצחני אדם חוץ מאשה תינוק ותינוקת אשה מאי היא פעם אחת נתארחתי אצל אכסניא אחת עשתה לי פולין ביום ראשון אכלתיים ולא שיירתי מהן כלום שנייה ולא שיירתי מהן כלום ביום שלישי הקדיחתן במלה כיון שטעמתי משכתי ידי מהן אמרה לי רבי מפני מה אינך סועד אמרתי לה כבר סעדתי מבעוד יום אמרה לי היה לך למשוך ידיך מן הפת

Having discussed the clever speech of various Sages, the Gemara relates that **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya said** as follows: **In all my days, no person defeated me** in a verbal encounter **except for a woman, a young boy, and a young girl. What is the encounter in which a woman got the better of me? One time I was staying at a certain inn** and the hostess **prepared me beans. On the first day I ate them and left nothing over**, although proper etiquette dictates that one should leave over something on his plate. On the **second day I again ate and left nothing over**. On the third day **she over-salted them** so that they were inedible. **As soon as I tasted them, I withdrew my hands from them. She said to me: My Rabbi, why aren’t you eating beans as on the previous days? Not wishing to offend her, I said to her: I have already eaten during the daytime. She said to me: You should have withdrawn your hand from bread** and left room for some beans.

### 11. Berachot 28a

ההוא יומא אתוספו פמה ספסלי. אמר רבי יוחנן: פליגי בה אבא יוסף בן דוסתאי ורבנן. חד אמר: אתוספו ארבע מאה ספסלי. וחד אמר: שבע מאה ספסלי. הנה קא חלשה דעתיה דרבן גמליאל, אמר: דלמא חס ושלום מנעתי תורה מישראל. אהזו ליה בחלמיה תצבי חינורי דמליין קטמא. ולא היא, ההיא ליתובי דעתיה, הוא דאהזו ליה.

The Gemara relates: **On that day several benches were added** to the study hall to accommodate the numerous students. **Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Abba Yosef ben Dostai and the Rabbis disputed this matter. One said: Four hundred benches were added** to the study hall. **And one said: Seven hundred benches were added** to the study hall. When he saw the tremendous growth in the number of students, **Rabban Gamliel was disheartened. He said: Perhaps, Heaven forbid, I prevented Israel from engaging in Torah study. They showed him in his dream white jugs filled with ashes** alluding to the fact that the additional students were worthless idlers. The Gemara comments: **That is not** the case, but **that dream was shown to him to ease his mind** so that he would not feel bad.

## 12. Genesis 37:4

(ד) וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אָהֵב אֹתָם אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוּ לְשָׁלָם:

(4) And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

## 13. Tur HaAroch, Genesis 37:4:1

(א) ולא יכלו דברו לשלום. אינו אומר דבר עמו אלא דברו משמע אפילו עם אחרים לא יכלו לדבר בשלום:

(1) “and they were unable to converse with him or about him, peacefully.” You will note that the Torah did not write that the brothers did not speak to him, but whenever they spoke, even to strangers, and Joseph became part of their conversation, they referred to him negatively.

## 14. Rashi on Genesis 37:4:1

(א) ולא יכלו דברו לשלום. מתוך גנותם למדנו שבחם, שלא דברו אמת בפיה ואמת בלב:

(1) AND THEY COULD NOT SPEAK PEACEABLY TO HIM — from what is stated to their discredit we may infer something to their credit: they did not speak one thing with their mouth having another thing quite different in their hearts (Genesis Rabbah 84:9).

## 15. Midrash Aggadah, Leviticus 19:17:1

(א) לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך. אלא למוד משבטים. שמתוך גנותן למדנו שבחם, שנאמר ולא יכלו דברו לשלום (בראשית לז ד), רצה לומר כי שונאים את יוסף היו ולא היו יכולים לדבר עמו בפה לשלום מאחר שהלב שונא, והזהירך התורה שלא תשמור השנאה בלבבך, ואתה מדבר בפה רכות אלא העבר השנאה, והוי מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום:

## 16. Talmud, Arachin 15b-16a

אלא דמפיק בלישנא בישא, דאמר: היכא משתכח נורא? אלא בי פלניא [דאיכא בשרא וכוורי]. אמר רבה: כל מילתא דמיתאמרא באפי מרה, לית בה משום לישנא בישא. אמר ליה: כל שכן חוצפא ולישנא בישא! אמר ליה: אנא כרבי יוסי סבירא לי, דאמר רבי יוסי: מימי לא אמרתי דבר וחזרתי לאחורי. אמר רבה בר רב הונא: כל מילתא דמיתאמרא באפי תלתא, לית בה משום לישנא בישא; מ"ט? חברך חברא אית ליה, וחברא דחברך חברא אית ליה.

What constitutes evil speech? — Rabbah said: For example [to say] there is fire in the house of So-and-so. Said Abaye: What did he do? He just gave information? — Rather, when he utters that in slanderous fashion: ‘Where else should there be fire if not in the house of So-and-so? There is always meat and fish’. Rabbah said: Whatsoever is said in the presence of the person concerned is not considered evil speech. Said Abaye to him: But then it is the more impudence and evil speech! — He answered: I hold with R. Jose, for R. Jose said: I have

never said a word and looked behind my back. Rabbah son of R. Huna said: Whatsoever is said before three is not considered slander. Why? Your friend has a friend, and your friend's friend has a friend

### 17. Yereim 191

רכיל לא תלך... הוזהקתי לכתוב מה שפירשו חכמים בערכין [ט"ו ב'] היכי דמי לישנא בישא כגון דאמר לא משתכח נורא אלא בפלניא דשכיחי בשרא וכוורי פי' אפילו זה הוי לשון הרע כיון דמפקיד ביה בלשון לישנא בישא הוא כ"ש האומר גנאי וקיי"ל כר' יוסי דתניא ר' יוסי אומר מעולם לא אמרתי דבר וחזרתי לאחורי פי' לראות אם יבא [אותו] פלוני שאמרתי עליו שלא אמרתי דבר שלא הייתי אומר בפני בעלים דהכי קיי"ל דהא קם ליה רבא כוותיה.

**My summary:** Rav Eliezer of Metz (*Yere'im* 191) suggests the following resolution: *Lashon ha-ra* is really a prohibition against being hypocritical or two-faced. By simply gossiping, one may violate other prohibitions, such as the general prohibition of *ona'at devarim*, harming people throughout words. However, *lashon ha-ra* is only gossip that one says while pretending to like and not to wish to hurt someone. Thus, if one is willing to say something to the subject's face, or is willing to say it publicly such that the information will surely get back to the subject, this is not *lashon ha-ra*.

### 18. Yevamot 63a:12-13

רב הוה מיפטר מרבי חייא אמר ליה רחמנא ליצילך ממידי דקשה ממותא ומי איכא מידי דקשה ממותא נפק דק ואשכח (קהלת ז, כו) ומוצא אני מר ממות את האשה וגו' רב הוה קא מצערא ליה דביתהו כי אמר לה עבידי לי טלופחי עבדא ליה חימצי חימצי עבדא ליה טלופחי כי גדל חייא בריה אפיך לה אמר ליה איעליא לך אמך אמר ליה אנא הוא דקא אפיכנא לה אמר ליה היינו דקא אמרי אינשי דנפיק מינך טעמא מלפך את לא תעביד הכי שנאמר (ירמיהו ט, ד) למדו לשונם דבר שקר העוה וגו'

The Gemara cites more statements with regard to wives. When **Rav was taking leave of his uncle and teacher, Rabbi Ḥiyya**, upon his return from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, **Rabbi Ḥiyya said to him: May the Merciful One save you from something that is worse than death.** Rav was perplexed: **Is there anything that is worse than death? He went, examined the sources, and found the following verse: "And I find more bitter than death the woman, etc."** (Ecclesiastes 7:26). Rabbi Ḥiyya was hinting at this verse, and indeed, **Rav's wife would constantly aggravate him. When he would say to her: Prepare me lentils, she would prepare him peas; if he asked her for peas, she would prepare him lentils. When Ḥiyya, his son, grew up, he would reverse the requests Rav asked him to convey to her, so that Rav would get what he wanted. Rav said to his son Ḥiyya: Your mother has improved now that you convey my requests. He said to Rav: It is I who reverse your request to her. Rav said to him: This is an example of the well-known adage that people say: He who comes from you shall teach you wisdom; I should have thought of that idea myself. You, however, should not do so, i.e., reverse my request, as it is stated: "They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity, etc."** (Jeremiah 9:4). If you attribute such a request to me, you will have uttered a falsehood.

### 19. Maharsha, Yevamot 63a

למדו לשונם דבר שקר העוה גו' ר"ל גם כי הכא שראוי לומר לכבוד אביו שקר מ"מ כדי שלא ירגיל האדם בכך לא יאמר שקר גם במקום הזה והיינו דכתיב למדו לשונם וגו' אמר על אותו דור הרע אחר שנלאו ולא היה בידם לומר שקר במקום העוה ואינו ישר למדו לשונם דבר שקר כדי להרגיל עצמם בכך:

### 20. Yam Shem Shlomo, Yevamot 6:46

מו. דין דמותר לשנות בדברי שלום, ומצוה הוא, ודוקא באקראי, אבל בין אביו לאמו אסור, ודין דמצוה לספר דבר הנשמע, וכן מצוה שלא לספר דבר שאינו נשמע, ושם ביארנו, דאסור לספר אותן הגדות שנראים כעין גוזמא, בפני עם הארצות: א"ר אילעא משום ר' יהודא בר שמעון (ס"ה ע"ב) מותר לשנות בדברי שלום, שנא' (בראשית נ', י"ז) כה תאמרו ליוסף וגו', ר' נתן אמר, מצוה, שנאמר (ש"א ט"ז, ב') ויאמר שמואל איך אלך וגו', ויאמר עגלת בקר תקח בידך וגו', ונראה, דוקא דבר שהוא באקראי, אבל שליחות שהוא בין אביו לאמו לא ישנה, אפי' במשנה משום שלום, כמו שמצינו בהאי פירקא (ס"ג ע"א) שהקפיד רב על חייא בריה, וא"ל, את לא תעבוד עובדא כו', והיינו דא"ל האי קרא (ירמיה ט, ד) למדו לשונם דבר שקר וגו', כלומר, שהקפיד שלא ילמוד לשונו בכך.

## 21. Limitations on Lying, Rav Yitzchak Blau <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/limitations-lying>

Several commentators wonder why Rav tells Chiya to stop. After all, it is a well-accepted halakhic principle that one is permitted to lie for the sake of preserving peace. A few pages later in the very same tractate (Yevamot 65b), we learn that God Himself deviated from the strict truth to preserve harmony between Avraham and Sarah. Why shouldn't Chiya employ the same principle?

R. Shmuel Edels (Maharsha) sees the verse cited from Yirmiyahu as the key to the answer. The prophet there speaks about learning to prevaricate. A situation in which Chiya would constantly lie to his mother would train him for a life of deceit. While the occasional lie to protect someone's feelings will not have a negative educational impact, an ongoing pattern of falsehood will. Therefore, Rav directs Chiya to stop.

The Iyun Yaakov (a commentary by R. Yaakov Reisher found in the Ein Yaakov) mentions a different suggestion. He argues that in situations where the truth will invariably come to light, one should not lie. In such a case, the lie will only bring temporary relief until the full truth emerges, and then the deceived individual will respond with even greater anger.

We can understand that the Iyun Yaakov is making more than the pragmatic point of "Lie only when you can get away with it." Rather, he is also pointing out how often the spreader of falsehood becomes trapped in webs of his or her own making, and ultimately cannot keep the falsehood going. As a result, it behooves us to think carefully about lying, even when we do so for a good cause.

R. Shelomo Luria (Yam Shel Shelomo) says that lying for the sake of peace is permitted only for the occasional lie, but not for a consistent policy of lying. While we could understand his point as being identical with that of Maharsha, R. Luria says nothing about training the child in deceit. Perhaps he intends to make a different point. If a relationship depends upon an ongoing pattern of falsehood, then the falsehood is not truly repairing the relationship, but only covering up the fact that something in the relationship is rotten. The occasional lie can be reconciled with a healthy and meaningful relationship, but not a lifetime of falsehood. Rav understands that Chiya's strategy does not truly address the tension between him and his wife, and he instructs Chiya to desist.

The author of the Ben Ish Chai, R. Yosef Chayim, also wrote a commentary on the aggada, called Ben Yehoyada. There, he adds a point that works well with our understanding in the previous paragraph. He asks: Why did Chiya tell the truth to his father, and not just lie to him as well?

We might answer that in these situations of tension between spouses, the children often feel responsible for the problem, attempt to bring reconciliation, and sometimes also end up choosing sides. Ben Yehoyada explains that not telling Rav would lead to calamity. Rav would think that the rift is repaired and would return to the former intimacy with his wife, including revealing his innermost secrets. If his wife remains angry with him, she will use those secrets to hurt Rav. Chiya understands that Rav must know the truth so that Chiya's strategy not damage his father.

This explanation also strengthens our interpretation of the Yam Shel Shlomo's position, namely, that false solutions often cause more harm than good. Although not every rift can be healed, falsehood is no substitute for true resolution.

It emerges that while Halakha does allow lying for the sake of peace, a few significant restrictions apply. One should not do so if such lying will train a person in falsehood, if the lie only brings temporary relief, or if the fabrication glosses over the real issues that need to be addressed.

## 22. <https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/rav-his-wife-and-son-peas-and-lentils-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter>

## Three New Explanations

Torah Academy of Bergen County students suggested that Rav is teaching that children should not try to resolve tension between their parents. Although children's efforts may help the parents, it is psychologically harmful for children to try to solve their parents' issues. This is a boundary which children should never disrespect. It is always in the best interest of children to not become tangled in the web of parental marital discord.

TABC students also suggested that one may lie only for exceptionally important matters. Apparently Rav felt that his receiving his preference of either peas or lentils is not sufficiently important to justify telling a lie. The Torah regards truth-telling as being of paramount importance. The Mishnah (Avot 1:18), for example, states that the world stands on three things: "justice, truth and peace." In fact, the Gemara (Shabbat 55a) teaches that Hashem's seal is truth. Thus, one may lie only in regards to matters of very serious import. Rav felt that receiving his preferred meal is a trivial matter not warranting his lying in order to receive the food he wishes to eat.

I suggest an answer based on the following insight: Rav seems to have been living (at least during that time in his life) in poverty. The fact that the Gemara mentions only peas and lentils suggests that this is all he ate, perhaps because he could not afford to purchase anything more expensive. I find it most reasonable to assume that Rav considered using his son's strategy of reversing his requests long before Rabi Chiya introduced this idea (Rav simply wished to criticize his son in the gentlest manner possible, so he couched his rebuke with praise).

I believe that Rav understood that his wife was (either consciously or subconsciously) resentful of their poverty and that this generated her habit of refusing to serve him the food he preferred. Rav felt, I believe, that it is better to allow his wife a benign outlet for her resentment in order that she function properly in all other areas of their family life. Rav teaches an essential lesson that is vital for all couples to learn - it is of utmost importance to maintain perspective and not be bothered by small irritations.