

# Tawriya: "Creative Lying" Advocated in Islam

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- Now meet *tawriya*, a doctrine that allows lying in virtually all circumstances.

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Perhaps you have heard of *taqiyya*, the Muslim doctrine that allows lying in certain circumstances -- primarily when Muslim minorities live under infidel authority. Now meet *tawriya*, a doctrine that allows lying in virtually *all* circumstances—including to fellow Muslims and by swearing to Allah—provided the liar is creative enough to articulate his deceit in a way that is "technically" true.

Deceit and lying may be far more ingrained in the culture than previously thought.

The authoritative *Hans Wehr Arabic-English Dictionary* defines *tawriya* as, "hiding, concealment; dissemblance, dissimulation, hypocrisy; equivocation, ambiguity, double-entendre, allusion." Conjugates of the trilateral root of the word, *w-r-y*, appear in the Quran in the context of hiding or concealing something (e.g., 5:31, 7:26).

As a doctrine, "double-entendre" best describes *tawriya's* function. According to past and present Muslim scholars, several documented below, *tawriya* occurs when a speaker says something that means one thing to the listener, although the speaker means something else, and his words technically support this alternate meaning.

For example, if someone declares "I don't have a penny in my pocket," most listeners will assume the speaker has no money on him—although he might have dollar bills, just literally no pennies.

This ruse is considered legitimate according to Sharia law; it does not constitute "lying," which in Islam is otherwise forbidden, except in three cases: lying in war, lying to one's spouse, and lying in order to reconcile people. For these exceptions, Sharia permits Muslims to lie freely, without the strictures of *tawriya*, that is, without the need for creativity.

As for all other instances, in the words of **Sheikh Muhammad Salih al-Munajjid** (based on scholarly consensus): "*Tawriya* is permissible under two conditions: 1) that the words used fit the hidden meaning; 2) that it does not lead to an injustice" ("injustice" as defined by Islamic law, which mandates any number of things -- such as executing apostates, subjugating non-Muslims, **pedophilia**, amputating limbs for theft, stoning for alleged adultery, death for homosexuality, and so on—that are by Western standards, considered total injustices). Otherwise, it is permissible for a Muslim even to swear when lying through *tawriya*. Munajjid, for example, cites a man who swears to Allah that he can only sleep under a roof (*saqf*); when the man is caught sleeping atop a roof, he exonerates himself by saying "by roof, I meant the open sky." This is legitimate. "After all," Munajjid adds, "Quran 21:32 refers to the sky as a roof [*saqf*]."

A recent example of *tawriya* in action is -- because it is a "great sin" for Muslims to acknowledge Christmas -- **this sheikh** counsels Muslims to tell Christians, "I wish you the best," whereby the Christians might "understand it to mean you're wishing them best in terms of their [Christmas] celebration." But — here the sheikh giggles as he explains—"by saying *I wish you the best*, you mean in your heart *I wish you become a Muslim*."

As with most Muslim practices, *tawriya* is traced to Islam's prophet. After insisting Muslims "need" *tawriya* because it "saves them from lying," and thus sinning, **Sheikh Uthman al-Khamis** adds that Muhammad often used it. Indeed, Muhammad is recorded saying "Allah has commanded me to equivocate among the people inasmuch as he has commanded me to establish [religious] obligations"; and "I have been sent with obfuscation"; and "whoever lives his life in dissimulation dies a martyr" (Sami Mukaram, *Al Taqiyya Fi Al Islam*, London: Mu'assisat al-Turath al-Druzi, 2004, p. 30).

More specifically, in a canonical hadith [the purported acts and sayings of the prophet Mohammed's life], Muhammad said: "If any of you ever pass gas or soil yourselves during prayers [**breaking wudu**], hold your nose and leave" (**Sunan Abu Dawud**): Holding one's nose and leaving implies smelling something offensive—which is true—although people will think it was someone else who committed the offense.

Following their prophet's example, many leading Muslim figures have used *tawriya*, such as **Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal**, founder of one of Islam's four schools of law, practiced in Saudi Arabia. Once when he was holding class, someone came knocking, asking for one of the students. Imam Ahmed answered, "He's not here, what would he be doing here?"— all the time pointing at his hand, as if to say "he's not in my hand." Obviously the caller, who could not see Ahmed, assumed the student was simply not there.

Also, **Sufyan al-Thawri**, another important Muslim thinker, was once brought to Caliph Mahdi who refused to let him leave, until Thawri swore to return. As he was going out, Thawri left his sandals by the door. After a while, he returned, took his sandals and left for good. When the caliph asked about him, he was told that, yes, Thawri had sworn to come back—and, indeed, he had come back: only to take his sandals and leave.

Lest it seem *tawriya* is limited to a few colorful anecdotes more befitting the *Arabian Nights* than the religious law (Sharia, or "the Path") of over a billion people, there are also modern Muslim authorities who justify it, such as **Sheikh Muhammad Hassan**, the famous cleric who says Islam **forbids** Muslims from smiling to infidels, except when advantageous, and **Dr. Abdullah Shakir**. They both give the example of someone knocking on your door; you do not wish to see them, so you hide in another room, as

a relative answers the door and says, "He's not here" -- by "here" meaning the immediate room.

Similarly, on the popular **Islam Web**, where Muslims submit questions and Islamic authorities respond with *fatwas* [religious edicts], a girl poses her moral dilemma: her father has explicitly told her that, whenever the phone rings, she is to answer it by saying, "He's not here." The fatwa solves her problem: she is free to lie, but when she says, "He's not here," she must mean that he is not in the same room, or not directly in front of her.

Of course, while all the sheikhs give examples that are innocuous and amount to "white" lies, *tawriya* can clearly

be used to commit "black" lies, especially where the non-Muslim infidel is concerned. As **Sheikh al-Munajjid** puts it: "*Tawriya* is permissible if it is necessary *or serves a Sharia interest*." Consider the countless "Sharia interests" that can run directly counter to Western law and civilization -- from empowering Islam, to subjugating infidels. To realize these Sharia interests, Muslims, through *tawriya*, are given a blank check to lie, which undoubtedly comes in handy — whether at high-level diplomatic meetings or the signing of peace-treaties.

*Note: The purpose of this essay is to document and describe the doctrine of tawriya. Future writings will analyze its full significance — from what it means for a Muslim to believe that the Supreme Being advocates lying, to how tawriya suppresses one's conscience to the point of being able to passing lie detector tests — as well as compare and contrast it to the practices of other religions..*

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