

Conflicts Within & Conflicts Without 4

‘There is no evil that cannot be done
By a person who deliberately lies
Who transgresses in one thing
Taking no account of the next world’.
Buddha

‘The person who lies,
Who transgresses in this one thing,
Transcending concern for the world beyond:
There is no evil
He might not do.’
Tr: Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

Ithivuttaka

I undertake to observe the precept of not speaking that which is an untruth.
Theravada

As the Buddha refrained from false speech until the end of his life, so I too will
refrain from false speech until the end of my life.

Mahayana

Refraining from false speech is a voluntary undertaking: there is no authority that declares such a commandment. As one could see from the above observation by Buddha himself, anybody who could utter an untruth is untrustworthy. That person is capable of committing any crime without any compunction. When we undertake to observe the precept, we declare in Pali ‘Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami’. Musavada includes not only speaking the untruth but also ‘parusavaca’ (harsh words) and ‘pisunavaca’ (slandering). Although it is not essentially an untruth, slanderous speech (sappapralapa) is also included under ‘musavada’. However, guarding one’s speech is an essential component of the Noble Eightfold Path- ‘Sammavaca’

It is not difficult for us to understand the evil effects of uttering of that which is not true. What crimes are committed and what suffering is brought down to the victims of false speech! If one were to examine the extent of damage that an untruth causes, one would find that it permeates all aspects of human activity. Untruths could disrupt the smooth running of our entire social fabric.

The most common use of the lie is to cover up a crime that has been committed. One could murder another and just lie about it. One could support the statement of a murderer. Another could lie about someone’s crime just to protect the criminal because the criminal happens to be one of his own. Still another

could lie through fear of retaliation from the criminal element. A criminal or one who covers up for him for whatever reason, would deliberately and/ or unwillingly cease to observe the precept of non-killing. It could happen in instances of taking what is not given (panatipata) or adultery (kamesomiccacara) or even taking alcohol or drugs (surameraya).