

MLU-8.1: Honesty

The Arabic word for honesty is “al Amanah” which means trustworthy. Islam is distinguished by good manners, and it takes overspreading the best manners among the believers. Honesty is one of the most important characteristics the Muslim should be characterized with. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was described as truthful and honest before his prophethood.

Types of Honesty

There are two types of honesty.

- External Honesty
- Internal Honesty

- **External Honesty:**

External honesty means honesty, which is judged by other people. The reward of external honesty comes from Allah (SWT), people, and the psychological satisfaction the honest person feels. When you are sincere, you are liked by Allah (SWT) and the people whom you deal with. Your honesty gives you the social approval you need and here comes the social value of honesty.

Further, when everybody is honest, a great deal of human problems disappear including lying, cheating, bluffing, stealing, forgery, and many other social diseases. In other words, honesty is something you give and something you take: others enjoy your honesty and you enjoy their honesty.

In the absence of honesty, many social diseases appear. If a person is dishonest, he is ready to tell lies, to bribe, to be bribed, to distort the truth, to cheat, to forge, to deceive others, and to break his promises. A dishonest person is a totality of diseases. He is ready to misbehave at any time. Each time he misbehaves, he causes a great disturbance or harm to one person to a group of persons, or the whole nation, in some cases.

- **Internal Honesty:**

Internal honesty means the honesty which is judged by the person himself alone.

Thus honesty is a factor in the psychological health of the honest person himself and the health of other persons whom he deals with. However, Islam emphasizes internal honesty, i.e., honesty which is judged by the person himself and cannot be seen by other people.

It often happens that a person acts privately. Sometimes we act with nobody seeing us. A believer in Allah (SWT) feels that although no person is watching him, Allah (SWT) is watching. This continuous watch of Allah (SWT) develops the concept of internal honesty or conscience in the believer. This means that internal honesty becomes an overall strategy of the believer.

The Muslim is, to be honest, internally and externally, privately and publicly, whether observed by other people or not, whether he acts or speaks. This overall honesty makes the Muslim confident of himself, of his behavior, and of his words and deeds. Honesty makes the person feel that he trusts others and is trusted by others.

This confidence makes the believer feel self-satisfied and socially secure.

Honesty implies unity of behavior, unity of standards, and integrity of personality. Honesty implies being away from internal conflicts, social conflicts, and self-contradiction.

Building Honesty:

Islam builds ethical qualities in general and honesty in particular in several ways:

1. **Instructions.** Allah (SWT) orders the Muslim to be honest in all cases, in all deeds and words, to him and others.
2. **Reason.** Allah (SWT) shows Muslims rationally that honesty is the best policy, even on a utilitarian basis.
3. **Reward.** Allah (SWT) promises the honest person generous rewards in the first life and the second life.
4. **Punishment.** Allah (SWT) threatens the dishonest person with severe punishment for his dishonest behavior.
5. **Practice.** Allah (SWT) develops the habit of honesty in Muslims through actual practice, i.e., through fasting and prayer.

Thus Islam builds the habit of honesty in the Muslims through direct instructions, rational arguments, reward and punishment principles, and practice.

Opposite of Honesty

1. Hypocrisy
2. Deceit
3. Bribery

The opposite of honesty encompasses behaviors that fundamentally undermine trust, integrity, and moral uprightness. In Islamic teachings, honesty is a virtue that is deeply emphasized, as it fosters a just and harmonious society.

The Quran explicitly states,

"And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]." (2:42)

This verse highlights the moral obligation to maintain honesty and reject deceitful practices. In contrast, behaviors that embody dishonesty—such as hypocrisy, deceit, and bribery—are not only frowned upon but are explicitly condemned in Islamic texts. The consequences of these actions can lead to social discord and a breakdown of community trust, ultimately distancing individuals from their faith and ethical principles. By recognizing the destructive nature of dishonesty, Muslims are encouraged to embody truthfulness, understanding that it aligns with their spiritual and moral duties.

1. Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy, or "nifaq," is a particularly dangerous form of dishonesty in Islam, as it reflects a profound disconnection between one's inner beliefs and outward actions. The vice of hypocrisy, like idolatry, is divided into two levels: greater and lesser hypocrisy. The greater hypocrisy (al-nifaq al-Akbar) pretends to have faith while hiding unbelief in his heart. Such an act is merely a form of unbelief. On the other hand, the lesser hypocrisy (al-nifaq al-asghar) is to have any amount of dishonesty in our deeds.

The Quran warns against hypocrisy in several verses.

Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

"When the hypocrites come to you 'O Prophet', they say, 'We bear witness that you are certainly the Messenger of Allah (SWT)'—and surely Allah (SWT) knows that you are His Messenger—but Allah (SWT) bears witness that the hypocrites are truly liars.(63:1)

They have made their 'false' oaths as a shield, hindering 'others' from the Way of Allah (SWT). Evil indeed is what they do!" (63: 2)

The above verses describe hypocrites as those who claim to be believers but act contrary to their professed faith.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the severity of hypocrisy, stating in a hadith,

"Whoever has three qualities is a hypocrite: when he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is entrusted, he betrays the trust" (Sahih Bukhari)

This highlights that hypocrisy not only damages one's relationship with Allah (SWT) but also erodes trust within the community. By drawing attention to the severe effects of hypocrisy,

Islamic teachings encourage believers to cultivate sincerity in their actions and align them with their faith, thus fostering authenticity and integrity in all aspects of life.

We can have elements of faith and hypocrisy in our hearts at the same time, as hypocrisy exists along a spectrum, as a matter of degree, rather than a discrete category. Again, it takes a constant struggle to maintain the virtue of honesty in everything that we do.

Perhaps the most important social aspect of honesty is to be faithful to all of our contracts (al-„uqud), promises (al-wu‘ud), covenants (al-„uhud), and trusts (al-amanah).

Allah (SWT) said:

“You, who believe, fulfill your obligations. (5:1)

2. Deceit

Deceit, characterized by misleading or manipulative behavior, is another violation of Islamic ethical principles. The Quran repeatedly warns against deceitful practices, highlighting their destructive nature.

In Quran Allah (SWT) states,

"O you, who have believed, do not betray Allah (SWT) and the Messenger or betray your trusts while you know [the consequence]." (8:27)

This verse emphasizes the gravity of deceit, especially when it involves violating trust.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) further elaborated on this concept, stating,

“Whoever deceives another Muslim or harms him or even dislikes him is not one of us.” (Sahih Muslim)

As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned us against deceiving people through this hadith, he also warned us against any deed which causes harm and hurts others. Whoever causes harm to others intentionally is not a believer, so it is obligatory for a believer to indemnify people for any harm caused by him to them.

Deceit not only leads to personal loss and conflict but also damages the broader fabric of society by eroding trust among individuals. Islamic teachings encourage transparency and honesty, emphasizing that truthful communication is essential for maintaining healthy relationships and upholding societal harmony.

3. Bribery

Bribery is another grave violation of Islamic ethics that disrupts justice and fairness in society. The Quran condemns corrupt practices in multiple verses, asserting the importance of integrity in all dealings. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran,

"And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers so that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful]." (2:188)

This verse highlights the immorality of using bribes to gain unfair advantage or influence decisions.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also denounced bribery, declaring,

"The curse of Allah (SWT) is upon the one who gives a bribe and the one who takes it" (Sunan Ibn Majah).

A curse from God or His Prophet (PBUH) points to the enormity of the sin. The recipient of a bribe deprives himself of the blessing of having his prayers answered.

In another hadith Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

"Allah (SWT) the Almighty is Good and accepts only that which is good. And verily Allah (SWT) has commanded the believers to do that which He has commanded the Messengers".

So, Allah (SWT) said:

"O Messengers! Eat of the tayyib [all kinds of halal (legal) foods], and perform righteous deeds." (23:51)

And the Almighty has said:

"O you who believe! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you". (2:172)

One of the hadith

"Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) mentioned [the case] of a man who, having journeyed far, is disheveled and dusty, and who spreads out his hands to the sky saying "O Lord! O Lord!", while his food is haram (unlawful), his drink is haram, his clothing is haram, and he has been nourished with haram, so how can [his supplication] be answered?" (Muslim)

By accepting bribes, one consumes and provides for those in his care with unlawful gains. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

"He who feeds with unlawful gains will not enter paradise." (At-Tabarani)

Such teachings emphasize that bribery not only undermines justice but also spreads inequality and exploitation, leading to societal decay. Islam advocates for fairness and integrity in all transactions, promoting a just society where individuals are treated equitably without the corrupting influence of bribery.

Honesty and Trade

Honesty is an essential pillar of ethical trade, serving as a foundation for trust and fairness in commercial transactions. In any marketplace, the relationship between buyers and sellers hinges on transparency and integrity; without these qualities, commerce can quickly devolve into deceit and exploitation.

Allah (SWT) commands honesty in all dealings. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran

“O my people! Give full measure and weigh with justice. Do not defraud people of their property, nor go about spreading corruption in the land”. (11:85)

Allah (SWT) is mentioned in the Quran:

Woe to the stinters;

Those who, when they take from others by measure, take their full share;

But who, when they measure or weigh for others, give less than their due? (83:1-3)

This verse emphasizes the importance of fairness and integrity in business practices, warning against dishonesty and deceit.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also stressed the significance of honesty in trade, declaring,

He (PBUH) said:

"The seller and the buyer have the right to keep or return goods as long as they have not parted or till they part; and if both the parties spoke the truth and described the defects and qualities (of the goods), then they would be blessed in their transaction, and if they told lies or hid something, then the blessings of their transaction would be lost." (Sahih Bukhari)

This hadith highlights that transparency and truthfulness can lead to blessings in one's trade, reinforcing that ethical practices not only please Allah (SWT) but also foster trust and prosperity within the community.

When individuals engage in trade, their reputation is built on their honesty, influencing both current dealings and future opportunities. Ethical traders understand that maintaining honesty not only fosters a positive business environment but also attracts loyal customers who appreciate fairness. This principle is particularly vital in a world where misinformation can easily spread, eroding trust between parties.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) always emphasized fair dealings in business with the customers. He (PBUH) said:

"God shows mercy to a person who is kindly when he sells, when he buys, and when he makes a claim" (Al-Bukhari)

Islam encourages an honest trader greatly and offers a high rank on the Day of Judgment. A businessman will be honored along with the martyrs but the conditions are sincerity, truthfulness, honesty, etc. in dealings.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said about the honest trader:

"The Truthful and honest merchant is associated with the prophets, the upright and martyrs" (Al-Tirmidi)

In another hadith, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"Nobody has ever eaten a better meal than that which one has earned by working with one's own hands. The Prophet of Allah (SWT), David used to eat from the earnings of his manual labor."

Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

"Those who spend their wealth in charity day and night, secretly and openly—their reward is with their Lord, and there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve."(2/274)

These lines narrate the consequence and importance of charity, spending money rather than collecting it. The great & weighty thing is the fortune of reward from Allah (SWT) on the Day of Judgment which is the only successful part of every Muslim's destiny. The deeper meaning and dignity of these verses are enhanced if we link them with the coming verses.

Allah (SWT) says:

"Those who consume interest will stand 'on Judgment Day' like those driven to madness by Satan's touch. That is because they say, "Trade is no different than interest." But Allah (SWT) has permitted trading and forbidden interest. Whoever refrains—after having received a warning from their Lord—may keep their previous gains, and their case is left to Allah (SWT). As for those who persist, it is they who will be the residents of the Fire. They will be there forever."(2/275)

In these lines, Allah (SWT) specifies the basic Islamic ethics in trade and business. It is very clear and obvious that whoever obeys Allah (SWT)'s rules and standards and refrains from the interest in affairs in heaven is ready & prepared for him but the one who does not follow will burn in hell forever.

In Islamic tradition, a trader who embodies honesty earns respect and reputation, while dishonest practices can lead to social and spiritual repercussions, reminding us that integrity in trade is not just a moral obligation but also a means to achieve long-term success.

Honesty in Monetary Dealings

In monetary dealings, honesty is paramount, as it directly influences personal and societal welfare. The Quran explicitly advises against unfair financial practices.

Allah (SWT) says:

"And eat up not one another's property unjustly (in any illegal way e.g. Stealing, robbing, deceiving neither etc., nor give bribery to the rulers (judges before presenting your cases) that you may knowingly eat up a part of the property of others sinfully" (2/188)

In another verse Allah (SWT) says

"O believers! Do not devour one another's wealth illegally, but rather trade by mutual consent. And do not kill each other or yourselves. Surely Allah (SWT) is ever Merciful to you."(4/29)

This verse underscores the prohibition of deceitful financial transactions and the exploitation of others for personal gain. Dishonest practices, such as fraud or misrepresentation, can lead to significant consequences, not only harming the individuals involved but also undermining the entire financial system.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) further reinforced this principle when He (PBUH) said,

"Who cheats is not one of us." (Sahih Muslim)

This clear statement summarizes the severe implications of dishonesty, urging Muslims to uphold integrity in all financial interactions.

Our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Says:

"Leave what makes you doubts for things and do not make you doubt" (Al-Tirmidhi)

A lot of examples are there in the Quran and Hadith which clearly explain to us the importance of Islamic ethics in any business.

In another place, our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"The buyers and the sellers have the option to cancel or to confirm the deal as long as they have not parted or till they part and if they spoke the truth and told each other the defects of the things, then blessings would be in their deal and if they hid something and told lies, the blessings of the deal would be lost" (Sahih Muslim /Ahmad vol 34-296)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Umer (RA) said "A person came to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and told him that he was always betrayed in purchasing. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told him to say at the time of buying 'no cheating'.

This event emphasizes the elevated and lofty position of honesty in business. The importance of honesty in monetary dealings not only preserves justice and fairness but also cultivates a sense of trust within the community.

Among all the religions, Islam is the only religion, which tells us the significant ethics in business and also presents Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a role model. If once we follow the Quran and the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); the Muslims can emerge as the driving force of the whole world. By being truthful in financial matters, individuals contribute to a healthier economy and a more cohesive society. The emphasis on honesty serves as a reminder that our financial practices reflect our faith, and maintaining integrity is a vital aspect of our spiritual and communal responsibilities.

Need and Benefits of Honesty in Islam

Honesty is an essential virtue in Islam, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Holy Quran Says about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

"You are the best nation that has been raised up for mankind; you enjoin right conducts, forbid evil, and believe in Allah" (3:110)

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also says:

„I have been sent for the purpose of perfecting good morals" (Ibn Hambal)

Honesty is crucial for fostering trust, maintaining justice, and promoting harmony within communities. The Quran states,

"O you, who have believed, fear Allah and be with those who are true" (9:119)

Honesty cultivates healthy relationships, as it encourages open communication and accountability, leading to stronger bonds between family and friends. Furthermore, it establishes a sense of integrity that enhances one's character and spiritual well-being, ultimately contributing to a just society where individuals feel safe and respected.

It is the mannerism of the high path of Islam, to be honest when one speaks. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

"Honesty certainly leads to goodness, and goodness leads to paradise. Truly, a man keeps speaking the truth until he is inscribed as being true through and through. And lying leads to going wrong, and going wrong leads to hell. Truly, a man lies and lies until he is inscribed as being a liar through and through" (Sahih Bukhari and Muslim).

A Muslim seeking to please Allah (SWT) and follow the path of righteousness should be aware of the dangers of deceit and dishonesty. However, equally, he should know that Allah (SWT) is all Merciful, willing to forgive even the gravest sins for those who strive for His sake.

Honesty is very important in the life of a believer.

"Honesty descended from the Heavens and settled in the roots of the hearts of men (faithful believers), and then the Quran was revealed and the people read the Quran, (and learned it from it) and also learnt from the sayings and traditions. Both the Qur'an and the traditions strengthened their honesty." (Sahih Bukhari)

So, Islam instructs the Muslim to be honest and trains him to be so. The outcome is a healthy self and a healthy social atmosphere that leads to the happiness of both the individual and the community.

Reward and Punishment of Honesty in Islam

In Islam, honesty is highly rewarded, both in this life and the Hereafter. The Quran assures believers that those who are truthful will receive Allah's (SWT) blessings and mercy.

"Indeed, the righteous will be in a secure place" (54:55)

The acts of honesty lead to increased faith and righteousness, fostering a sense of peace and fulfillment. Conversely, dishonesty is severely condemned, with warnings of spiritual and social consequences. The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) taught that dishonest behavior can lead to distrust and societal decay, while also incurring divine punishment.

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said, *"Whoever lies intentionally let him prepare for his place in Hellfire"* (Sahih al-Bukhari)

This duality of reward and punishment emphasizes the importance of maintaining integrity in all aspects of life, reinforcing the belief that honesty is integral to a faithful and ethical existence.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a Living Example of Honesty in Islam

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the quintessential embodiment of honesty, earning him the title "Al-Amin," or the trustworthy, even before his prophethood. His commitment to truthfulness is evident in his interactions, as he consistently advocated for integrity. A notable Hadith states, *"Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise"* (Sahih Muslim)

Through his life, the Prophet exemplified that honesty is not only a moral obligation but also a reflection of one's faith in Allah. His unwavering adherence to truth serves as an enduring model for Muslims, encouraging them to strive for honesty in their own lives.