

Honesty

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When honesty is lost, then wait for the Hour (the Day of Judgment). These are the words of Prophet Muhammad. They paint a picture of the time leading up to the Day of Judgement, when righteous people will be sorrowful due to the lack of honesty around them. In the 21st century, we live in a world where honesty is valued and yet shunned at the same time. We expect people to be honest in their dealings with us yet we watch and applaud television shows and movies that promote and encourage lying and deceitfulness.

Without thinking, we teach our children that dishonesty is acceptable. When we expect our children to tell the caller on the telephone we are not home, this is a lesson in deceit. When we refuse invitations and pretend we are busy, this is lying. We admonish our children for lying, yet the reality is we have been their teachers. Whether we tell lies, or whether we allow our children to live in a world surrounded by deceit, the lesson is learned and the honesty begins to disappear from the hearts of the next generation.

Honesty incorporates the concepts of truthfulness and reliability and it resides in all human thought, words, actions and relationships. It is more than just accuracy; it is more than just truthfulness, it denotes integrity or moral soundness. Islam commands truthfulness and forbids lying. God commands that a Muslim be honest.

“O you who believe! Fear God, and be with those who are true (in word and deeds).” (Quran 9:119)

Ibn Katheer, the renowned Quran scholar, explained the meaning of this verse. He said, “Being truthful and adhering to truthfulness, means you will be among the people of the truth and be saved from calamity and that it will make a way out for you from your problems”.

A true believer, one who is truly submitted to God, has many characteristics by which he can be identified. The most obvious of these noble characteristics are honesty of character and truthfulness of speech. Prophet Mohammad was a perfect example of honesty. Even before his Prophethood, he had earned the titles of Al Amin (the trustworthy one) and As Sadiq (the truthful).

Al Amin, the Prophet Muhammad once gathered all the people of Mecca and asked them, **“O people of Mecca! If I say that an army is advancing on you from behind the mountains, will you believe me?”** All said in one voice, **“Yes, because we have never heard you telling a lie.”** All the people, without exception, swore to his truthfulness and honesty because he had lived an unblemished and extremely pious life among them for forty years.

Abu Sufyan described his honesty. When Prophet Muhammad sent a letter to the Emperor of Byzantium inviting him to Islam, the Emperor, Heraclius sent for the Meccan trader, Abu Sufyan. Even though he was, at that time, a dire enemy of Islam, he spoke the truth about Prophet Mohammad when he said, “He neither tells lies nor betrays others, he bids people to worship God Alone and orders us to observe prayer, honesty and abstinence”.¹

This honesty, an essential ingredient of the Muslim character, includes being truthful towards God by worshipping Him sincerely; being truthful to oneself, by adhering to God’s laws; and being truthful with others by speaking the truth and being honest in all dealings, such as buying, selling and marriage. There should be no deceiving, cheating, falsifying or withholding of information, thus a person should be the same on the inside as he is on the outside.

Prophet Muhammad warned us of the dangers inherent in dishonesty, and the benefits of living in an honest way. He said:

¹ The full text can be found in Saheeh Al-Bukhari. Book 1/6

“Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. In addition, a man keeps on telling the truth until he becomes a truthful person. Falsehood leads to wickedness and evil-doing, and wickedness leads to the (Hell) Fire, and a man may keep on telling lies till he is written before God, as a liar”. (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

A true Islamic society is based upon honesty and justice, and is intolerant of dishonesty in all its various forms. Honesty in all business transactions is emphasised and the Prophet Muhammad exhorts Muslims to be scrupulously honest in all their dealings. Abdullah ibn Omar was once described as the “brother of the night.” He would stand at night performing prayer, weeping, seeking God’s forgiveness and reading Quran. One day, he was sitting among some close friends and he read the following verses:

“Woe unto those who give short measure, those who, when they are to receive their due from people, demand that it be given in full but when they have to measure or weigh whatever they owe to others, give less than what is due. Do they not know that they are bound to be raised from the dead (and called to account) on an awesome Day, the Day when all men shall stand before the Sustainer of all the worlds?” (Quran 83:1-6)

Abdullah wept until he was faint and kept repeating the words “the day when all men shall stand before the Sustainer of all the worlds.” He was amongst the most honest and trustworthy men, but being reminded of the punishment for those who are deceitful filled him with fear.

A Muslim seeking to please God and follow the path of righteousness should be aware of the dangers of deceit and dishonesty. However, equally he should know that God is all Merciful and all Loving, 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 learnt it from it) and also learnt from the sayings and traditions. Both the Quran and the traditions strengthened their honesty. (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

This is from among the many sayings of Prophet Muhammad, many of which forbade deceit and enjoined honesty. For those who wish to be among the truthful, Prophet Muhammad has left us with these words of guidance, **“Let he who believes in God and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent”**. (*Saheeh Muslim*)