

Combating Falsehood In Islam

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This text analyses the concept of falsehood and its perception from an Islamic perspective by referring to Traditions and verses of the Holy Qur'an on the dangers regarding it and counteractive measures within Islamic law.

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Combatting Falsehood in Islam

إِنَّمَا يَفْتَرِي الْكَذِبَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Those who tell lies have no faith. (The Holy Qur'an, 16: 105).

علة الكذب اقبح علة

The sickness of falsehood is the worst sickness.

Imam Ali (‘a), Al-Bihar, 72/262/45 and 77/212/1.

أقل الناس مروءة من كان كاذبا

The most unmanly person is he who tells lies.

The Holy Prophet (S), Amali, Al-Saduq, p. 14.

إن العاقل لا يكذب وإن كان فيه هواه

A wise man tells no lies even if he may wish to attain his carnal desires through falsehood.

Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far (‘a), on the authority of Hisham bin Al-Hakam. Al-Kafi, 1/19/12.

ينبغي للرجل المسلم أن يتجنب مؤاخاة الكذاب إنه يكذب حتى يجيء بالصدق فلا يصدق

It would be proper for a Muslim not to foster friendship and brotherhood with a liar.

Imam Ali ('a), Al-Kafi, 2/341/14/1.

إن الكذب هو خراب الإيمان

Falsehood destroys the foundation of faith.

Imam Al-Baqir ('a), Al-Bihar 72/247 and 22/259.

Man has been created with a true and honest nature. If he keeps that original nature without being diverted by external factors and inclinations, he will always proceed towards virtue and chastity, and avoid vices and impurities. Man is by nature truthful, honest, chivalrous and noble. But various factors such as education, environment etc., may check these qualities and replace them with vices. One of the most significant missions of divine prophets and messengers is to aid man's nature against external factors, so that through their resplendent teachings they may reinforce natural and inherent powers, and prepare the ground for emergence of noble human qualities.

Falsehood is contrary to man's nature, and drags him away from honesty and probity towards dishonesty and corruption, and it may act as an infectious disease and spread from a father to his offspring, from a teacher to his pupils, from a buyer to a seller and so on, and deviate natures from their original form.

Many people may consider falsehood as trifling and unimportant, whereas the extent of damage caused by falsehood is not comparable with that of any other sin and the dangers to human society produced by lies are too many to count. It has often happened that an impostor, in order to attain his designs, has claimed prophethood and with a single falsehood has misled thousands of people from the direct path towards total perversion and misfortune. Or another swindler has claimed Babism or pivotism and their likes, and has thus misled many groups of people.

Can such sins be compared with other sins, or the damage caused by them be compared with other losses? That is why Islam regards falsehood a peculiarity of irreligious people and the Holy Qur'an says explicitly:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ

These are they on whose hearts and their hearing and their eyes Allah has set a seal, and these are the heedless ones. (16: 108).

Imam Ali (‘a) considers falsehood as the worst and ugliest act, and says:

لا سوء أسوأ من الكذب

“Nothing is worse and uglier than falsehood.” [1](#)

Imam Al-Baqir (‘a), the fifth Imam, considers falsehood as something that annihilates religion and says:

إن الكذب هو خراب الإيمان

“Falsehood destroys the foundation of faith.” [2](#)

Imam Ali (‘a) considers an understanding of the truth of faith to be dependent upon the abandonment of all kinds of lies, and says:

لَا يَجِدُ عَبْدٌ حَقِيقَةَ الْإِيمَانِ حَتَّى يَدَعَ الْكَذِبَ جِدًّا وَهَزْلًا

“One never attains the truth of faith unless one abandons falsehood, whether it is told seriously or as a joke.” [3](#)

قيل: يا رسول الله، أيمكن المؤمن جباناً؟

قال: نعم

قيل له: أيمكن المؤمن بخيلاً؟

قال: نعم

قيل له: أيمكن المؤمن كذاباً؟

قال: لا

“The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (S) was asked: “Can a man of faith be a coward?”

He said, “Yes”

They asked, “Can he be envious?” He answered: “Yes”,

They asked again: “Can he be a liar?”

He said: “No” [4](#)

On another occasion the Prophet of Islam (S) said:

شر الرواية رواية الكذب

“The worst and indecent word is a lie!” [5](#)

Imam Ali (‘a) says:

اعتیاد الكذب یورث الفقر

“The habit of lying causes poverty and distress” [6](#)

The Prophet of Islam (S) says:

ألا أخبركم بأكبر الكبائر: الاشرار بالله، وعقوق الوالدين، وقول الزور أي الكذب

“I warn you of the greatest of great sins namely: polytheism, maltreating and annoying parents and telling lies.” [7](#)

A well-known psychologist says: “Of all vices and blameworthy qualities lying is the worst and ugliest. This bad habit is caused by moral decadence and corruption or by weakness and cowardice. It is very strange that most people look upon this matter so carelessly and indifferently that they give even servants the lesson of lying and charlatanry. Naturally they should not be surprised or enraged if they see that their servants tell them lies in their turn.” [8](#)

Imam Al-Askari (‘a) the Eleventh Imam considers falsehood as the key to all uncleanness and says:

جعلت الخبائث كلها في بيت وجعل مفتاحها الكذب

“All the sins and impurities are concentrated in a house, the key of which is falsehood.” [9](#)

This means that lying and being contaminated with it pave the way for pollution with all vices. In Islam, Muslims are not only forbidden to tell, lies, but are also disallowed to associate or form friendship with liars.

Imam Ali (‘a) the first leader of the Shi’as, giving advice to his son, Imam Al-Hasan (‘a), says:

يا بني إياك ومصادقة الأحمق فإنه يريد أن ينفعك فيضرك. وإياك ومصادقة البخيل فإنه يبعد عنك أحوج ما تكون إليه، وإياك ومصادقة الفاجر فإنه يبيعك بالتافه. وإياك ومصادقة الكذاب فإنه كالسراب يقرب عليك البعيد عليك القريب

“O my son! Avoid friendship with a fool; for though he may wish to benefit you as he is unable to distinguish between profit and loss and hence he will cause you a loss. Also avoid friendship with an envious person since owing to his envy, he denies you what you need badly. Also avoid friendship with a libertine; for, he sells his commodity to you very cheaply, and avoid friendship with a person who is addicted to the evil of falsehood, since he is like a mirage that deludes you into thinking a remote thing as something near, and a near thing as something remote.” [10](#)

Consequently, he keeps you away from attaining the goal. In other words he with his lies, shows what is easy as difficult, and what is hard as easy, and thus he deters you from attaining your goal. In the same way that falsehood polluted a person with other sins, the abandonment of falsehood and repenting it will preserve a person against many sins.

A man went to the Seal of Prophets (S) and said: “I perform my prayer, but am also polluted with lying and adultery, and wish to repent one of these two sins. Which of them should I repent?” The prophet said: “Repent telling lies.” The man agreed to the prophet's command and promised never to tell a lie. He had repented telling lies alone, but this repentance made him wary of committing other sins, too, since on desiring to commit adultery, he thought: “If the prophet asks me whether I have committed adultery since the day of my repentance about lying and I say ‘no’, I would be lying and have acted against my promise; and if I say ‘yes’, I will be confessing adultery and exposing myself to punishment.” The same thought occurred to him in the case of other sins, and thus repenting falsehood made him repent and be saved from other sins, too. [11](#)

Here a point should be mentioned that, as we have already said, falsehood has a mental origin, and in order to cure liars, it is necessary to know the cause of this ailment, and then treat it, since without this discovery, the disease will not be diagnosed and cured.

The Prophet of Islam (S) says:

لا يكذب الكاذب إلا من مهانة نفسه

“A liar does not resort to falsehood except for the abjectness and inferiority that he feels internally.” [12](#)

For this reason, a brief study of the state of a liar clarifies the fact that weakness of mind, incompetence, inferiority complex and similar psychic conditions are the reasons for it.

The Prophet of Islam (S) says also:

أقل الناس مروءة من كان كاذب

“The person most lacking in manliness is a liar.”¹³

One who has moral courage never pollutes himself with falsehood. It is a person, who feels weakness and abjectness within himself that resorts to lies. In fact, it can be said that falsehood is the refuge of a stupid and incompetent person.

Imam Ali (‘a) says:

لو تميزت الأشياء لكان الصدق مع الشجاعة، وكان الجبن مع الكذب

“If things are classified according to their homogeneity and origin, truthfulness stands by courage, and falsehood by cowardice.”¹⁴

A psychologist says: “Lying is the best weapon of the weak, and the quickest means of removing danger temporarily. For this reason, lying is so common among colored people who are constantly under the yoke of the white race, and their heavy pressure and expectations, and they feel the power and influence of this group. In some cases, lying is nothing but the reflection of feebleness. When we say to a child: “Have you taken some of these toffees?” or “Is it you who have broken this vase?” if he feels that a confession would involve severe rebuke and punishment, the instinct of self-defense compels him to deny it.¹⁵

This malady is often noticed in children, and if it is not remedied in the same period, through proper instructional methods, it produces many dangers and becomes incurable. The first and most important duty of parents and teachers, in general, is not to lie to children and not to make false promises to them.

The Prophet of Islam (S) says:

قال رسول الله (ص): رحم الله من اعان ولده على برة

قيل: قال قلت كيف يعينه على برة؟

قال: يقبل ميسورة و يتجاوز عن معسوره و لا يرهقه و لا يخرق به

قال رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وآله): رحم الله من أعان ولده على بره

قال: قلت: كيف يعينه على بره؟

قال: يقبل ميسوره ويتجاوز عن معسوره ولا يرهقه ولا يخرق به

“The Holy Prophet (S) says: May God bless a father who aids his offspring in being good to himself.

The narrator asked: ‘How can he help his offspring?’

He gave four counsels in answer:

Firstly, he should take into consideration the capacity of his offspring and accept the task he has performed in accordance with that capacity.

Secondly, he should not impose a task beyond the offspring's capacity on him. Thirdly, he should not force him to commit an offense and rebellion. Fourthly, he should not lie to him or resort to foolish acts in his presence.” [16](#)

One of the reasons for children's act of falsehood is the imposition of heavy tasks on them, and to have undue expectations from them. The strictness of parents and improper expectations which are beyond children's capacity, force them towards telling lies, thus awakening this vice in them. [17](#)

Bertrand Russell says: “The possibility of lying does not first enter a child's mind. This possibility is revealed to him rather later on. He observes it actually in the adults, and fear compels him to resort to it. A child discovers that adults lie to him, and if he tells them the truth, it would pose danger to him. Consequently, he resorts to falsehood. Thus if you avoid such stimulants and agents, a child will never think of telling lies.” [18](#)

Raymond peach says: “I know a young girl who is now an incurable liar. When she was seven, she attended a class of twenty-five pupils. A nurse took her there every day and brought her home after school. Her duty was to see that the girl did her homework and learn her lessons. Thus, she was responsible for the girl's education. In those days, the prevalent method of education was based on a system which is now considered useless and futile. The pupils were classified every day, according to their written tests, in terms of top students.

Every day as soon as she left the class with her bag, she faced the eager and monotonous questions of; her nurse who asked what her rank was in the class that day, and if she could say she was top student, everything went alright. But it happened once that on three successive days, she was third in the class, which was really a fine position in a class of twenty-five. But the nurse was not a person who could comprehend this fact. For two days she tolerated it, but on the third occasion she could not bear it anymore and to the girl's consternation and panic, the nurse shouted: “So your securing third position

has no end, you must come first tomorrow, do you hear? First!"

All that day the girl was preoccupied with this hard and serious idea and the next day at school she felt the same panic. She used all her care and attention for her lessons and class-work. All her subtractions and additions were correct. She gave right answers to all her lessons and by dictation time near noon everything was satisfactory. But she had four mistakes in her dictation and so, on that day she was once more placed third. This meant a day of disaster for her.

When the bell was rung for the end of the day's classes, the nurse was lying in wait at the door of the classroom and the moment she saw the girl, she cried out: "What news?" The girl who dared not tell the truth, said: "I am first," and thus began her habit of lying. How many parents there are who act like this and are to be blamed for the fault and falsehood on the part of their children?"[19](#)

Bertrand Russell says: "If a child engages in lying, it is the parent's duty to criticize themselves. Not him or her and then to find a remedy to cure the child. This means that they should remove the cause or causes, and calmly and logically explain why it is better not to tell a lie. For a remedy one should never resort to punishment and beating, since such an act only increases fear as a stimulus of falsehood."

Obviously if you wish your children not to learn falsehood, the adults should take care to tell the truth in the presence of children.

The parents who tell their children that telling lies is a sin, while the children notice that the parents themselves engage in falsehood, naturally lose all their moral power and influence with their children.

Another kind of falsehood which is very bad for children is to threaten them with some punishment without intending to carry it out. Dr. Bollard explains this matter emphatically in his interesting book entitled "Changing school." He says on page 112: "Do not threaten, but if you do, let not anything prevent your carrying out the threat."[20](#)

The alertness and watchfulness of parents and teachers can protect children against being afflicted with falsehood. If a child is not humiliated and his personality not suppressed, if adults do not teach him falsehood, if such factors of resorting to lies as fear, threat etc. are removed, if parents do not show him unnecessary strictness and not act despotically, and in short, if they treat him kindly, gently, wisely and alertly, he will not become a victim of such a disastrous disease. Parents are greatly enraged at children's lies, especially when a lie may be extraordinary and the liar a novice. Why does a child tell a lie? Sometimes children do so because they are not allowed to tell the truth. When a child says to his mother that he dislikes his brother, she may slap him in the face for this truth. But if that child, with evident falsehood, claims after some moments that now he loves his brother, his mother may involuntarily come all over him with kisses, or even give him a nice reward. What conclusion would a child draw from this experiment? He may conclude that truthfulness causes vexation, and falsehood produces satisfaction, and his mother rewards a small liar.

Therefore, if we wish to teach sincerity and truthfulness, we should, with the same coolness and tranquility when we listen to a child's sweet facts, also listen to his bitter facts. When a child is punished for his truthfulness, he will naturally resort to falsehood in self-defense and love of the self. Parents should not ask such questions that compel their children to resort to falsehood in self-defense. Children do not as a rule, like to be subjected to parent's interrogation, especially when they know that the answer is already evident. Our only aim should be to make the child realize that there is no need to tell us a lie.²¹

The most important matter in this case is to draw the attention of children to their religious duty to see that falsehood is a sin and God Almighty considers a liar as an enemy. If a child's education be based on religious principles, and his morals in harmony with divine teachings, no deviation will result, for, no principle can guarantee the enforcement of laws and regulations as does religious faith. It is this principle that prevents the pollution of religious people with falsehood and every other sin, and gives them a spiritual and mental immunity.

A description of the damages caused by falsehood and combining it with historical examples, have a noticeable effect in checking people's affliction with this disease. The late religious scholar, Naraghi says: "The way to remedy the sickness of lying is to pay attention to the Qur'anic verses and narrations that reproach falsehood, so that one may realize that it will result in eternal annihilation. Moreover, in addition to eternal destruction, one will also be deprived of social respect and popularity, and he will be automatically disgraced when his falsehood is discovered by people."²²

Dr. Alexis Karl says: "Of all the habits, nothing is more damaging to mental exaltation than lying, incitement, and calumny towards fellowmen, treason to them, theft and desiring everything for oneself. Man's mind never moves towards sublimity amidst corruption and falsehood."²³

Imam Ali (a) says:

أَلَا فَاصْدُقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ وَجَانِبُوا الْكَذِبَ فَإِنَّ الْكَذِبَ مَجَانِبُ الْإِيمَانِ، أَلَا وَإِنَّ الصَّادِقَ عَلَى شَفَا مَنْجَاةٍ وَ
كَرَامَةٍ أَلَا وَإِنَّ الْكَاذِبَ عَلَى شَفَا مَخْزَاةٍ وَهَلَكَةٍ

*"Tell the truth, for, God is with the truthful. Avoid falsehood, for, it does away with faith. A truthful person is at the threshold of salvation and lordship, while a liar is at the precipice of abjectness and destruction."*²⁴

1. Amali As-Saduq, 72/259/23; Al-Bihar, 72/259/23.

2. Al-Kafi, Vol. 2; Al-Bihar: 72/247/8 and 22/259.

3. Al-Mahasin, Ahmad Bin Muhamad Bin Khalid Al-Barqi, vol. 1, p. 118; Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 261.

4. Wasa'il al-Shi'a, Vol. 3; Muwatta' of Malik al-Jami, 1862.

5. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 259; Amali Al-Saduq p. 292.

6. Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 15, pp. 347-348, h. 20704.

7. Al-Mustadrak - Testimony Book - Chapter 6; Makaseb, p.50.

- [8.](#) Samuel Smiles, Ethics, p. 281.
- [9.](#) Mustadrak, Vol. 2; Jami'a Al-Akhbar p. 173.
- [10.](#) Nahj ul-Balaghah, Letter 31.
- [11.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Vol. 2.
- [12.](#) Bihar, 72/262/45 and 77/212/1
- [13.](#) Iqtisas, p.232; Amali, Al-Saduq, p. 14.
- [14.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam, 1662, 572, 1700, 7597, 1820.
- [15.](#) Raymond Peach.
- [16.](#) Kafi, 2; Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 15, p. 199.
- [17.](#) A Child From The Viewpoint Of Heredity And Education.
- [18.](#) On Education, p.146.
- [19.](#) We And Our Children.
- [20.](#) On Education, Bertrand Russell, p.148.
- [21.](#) Parent's Relations with Children, pp. 79-83.
- [22.](#) Jami'a As-Sadat, vol.2, p.256.
- [23.](#) Way of Living, p.98.
- [24.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Allama al-Majlisi, vol. 69, p. 260; Amali, Al-Saduq, Vol. 1, p. 220.

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