

# Lying, Backbiting and Slander (part 1 of 2)

**Description:** This lesson explains the issue of lying in Islamic ethics.

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## Objectives

- To learn what is a lie and understand some reasons why we lie.
- To understand that there are degrees of lies.
- To understand the severity of lying in the Quran and *Sunnah*.
- To learn the circumstances in which lying is allowed.

## Arabic Terms

- *Sunnah* - The word Sunnah has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

## What Is a Lie?

A lie is the opposite of truth. Therefore, anything spoken or written that is untrue and deliberately meant to deceive is a lie. A lie is something which is baseless, unreal, made-up, distorted or it can be an exaggeration. Lying is forbidden in Islam and condemned by Allah and His Messenger.



## Why Do We Lie?

- To get what we want.
- To keep a secret.

- To hide the truth.
- To protect our body or possessions.
- To save ourselves from embarrassment.
- To preserve our image.
- To avoid further inquiry.
- To justify our behavior.
- To avoid a responsibility.
- To avoid conflict.
- To preserve the status quo.
- To inflate our ego.
- To hide our feelings.
- To manipulate someone.
- To make a fool of someone.
- To get back at someone who has lied to us.

## Degrees of Lying

All lies are not equal. The worst lie is to falsely attribute something to Allah and His Messenger. Allah says in the Quran:

**“And if he (Prophet Muhammad) had made up about Us some sayings, We would have seized him by the right hand; then We would have cut his aorta.” (Quran 69:44-46)**

Lying in a testimony is also very serious:

**“...And do not conceal testimony, for whoever conceals it, his heart is indeed sinful...” (Quran 2:283)**

Mixing truth with falsehood is a vile sin:

**“And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know it.” (Quran 2:42)**

Hypocrites who conceal disbelief in their hearts, but pretend to have belief on their tongues are liars because they lie to themselves. Allah tells us about them:

**“In their hearts is disease, so Allah has increased their disease; and for them is a painful punishment because they used to lie.” (Quran**

2:10)

**“...Allah knows that you (Prophet Muhammad) are His Messenger, and Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars.” (Quran 63:1)**

## The Quran on Telling the Truth

Allah commands us to be true and mentions it in over one hundred places in the Quran. Truthfulness is the quality of a believer. A few beautiful passages from the Quran on truthfulness:

**“O you who believe! Fear Allah and speak the truth.” (Quran 33:70)**

**“O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true.” (Quran 9:119)**

**“That Allah may reward the truthful for their truth...” (Quran 33:24)**

**“The believers are only the ones who have believed in Allah and His Messenger and then doubt not but strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of Allah. It is those who are the truthful.” (Quran 49:15)**

## The Quran Condemns Lying

**“...the curse of Allah be upon him if he should be among the liars.” (Quran 24:7)**

**“...Indeed, Allah guides not him who is a liar, and a disbeliever.” (Quran 39:3)**

**“...Indeed, Allah does not guide one who is a transgressor and a liar.” (Quran 40:28)**

## Prophet Muhammad on Lying

Prophet Muhammad was well recognized to be a truthful person before Allah chose him to be His Prophet. He was known as ‘*al-Amin*,’ ‘the Trustworthy.’ Even his enemies recognized him to be truthful and trustworthy. The Prophet emphasized the value of truthfulness in numerous sayings:

“I urge you to be truthful, for truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. A man will continue to be truthful and seek to speak the truth until he is recorded with Allah as speaker of truth (*siddeeq*). And beware of lying, for lying leads to immorality and immorality leads to Hell; a man will continue to tell lies until he is recorded with Allah as a liar.” ( *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

Someone asked Prophet Muhammad, “O Messenger of Allah! What do you think is the most

dreadful thing for me?" The Messenger caught hold of his tongue and said: "This!"<sup>[1]</sup>

"Destruction is for the man who tells lies for the amusement of other people. Destruction is for him." (*Tirmithi*)

"The biggest breach of trust is that you tell a thing to your brother who believes it to be true, whereas you have lied to him." (*Abu Dawud*)

## Can Lying Be Justified?

Islam is the religion of truth that recognizes the human condition and it's frailty. There are a some situations in which lying is justified. One can lie in some exceptional circumstances such as:

- To save an innocent life. Our scholars tell a story of an ancient tyrant who ordered an innocent man to be executed due to his perceived lack to manners! Hearing this, the man began cursing the king in his native language. Baffled, the tyrant inquired what the man was saying from his advisor who understood him. The advisor was a man of wisdom. Instead of telling the truth, he told the tyrant that the man was apologizing for his behavior and was pleading for the king's mercy! The impulsive despot thus spared his life.
- To maintain harmony in a marriage. These are known as "sweet little lies," or "kind lies," like "Your food is the best ever!"
- To make peace between two parties. The mediator can convey a partial truth of what one side said about the other in order to bring peace between them.

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Endnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> *Tirmidhi*

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