

# Integrity – a way of life

[Philosophy](#), [Personal Philosophy](#)



Integrity, as a virtue, is a favourite of everyone; it is a quality that all people would like to see mentioned in the same breath as their names. Integrity has come to signify the wholeness, purity - uncorruptedness - and intactness of character. We are subject to various conflicting desires throughout our life and integrity - or the lack of it - decides which desires we give in to. We must live with the basic drives we inherit, strive for excellence, and yet follow the laws of society and everything it encompasses.

Our will is therefore tested too often by the temptation of the easy over the right. Integrity decides whether we live with an intact character or give in to an unreflective satisfaction of incongruent desires; whether we acknowledge, examine and act with certainty or indulge in the irresponsibility of not knowing which side to pick. Integrity refers to the consistency of actions, values, principles and outcomes, and is tested whenever we have to act. To live with integrity, therefore, is to act upon principles that are rationally endorsed by our present self and shall be endorsed by our future self. And that certainty and consistency, is worth having. It has been said famously, that integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching. This is of the utmost importance in today's world where greed is rampant and the concerns - both moral and environmental - that were subdued earlier are unavoidably urgent and significant now. We see spectacles of corporate greed all around us, and observe how corruption can destroy faith in strong institutions.

The scams and scandals that form our newspapers' headlines and become the subject of conversation in households lead to the erosion of the faith the society has, and continues to need to have, in our democratic institutions. A

society where cynicism and corruption are rampant imposes higher costs on development and leads to stunted growth and weakened moral values. The cynicism that all are tainted with the same brush of immorality leads to a form of parasitic normalcy where corruption is accepted as a way of life and integrity is considered as a foolish ideal. However, all is not lost. There are indeed some things to be derive hope from. Over the recent past, we have seen examples of honesty and integrity in some leaders. Their actions have been acknowledged and rewarded. The world has been a better place through their efforts.

Organisations like Transparency International are doing exemplary work to promote such values and reduce corruption. United Nations Convention against Corruption has 140 signatories and has done seminal work to impose sanctions against those who are corrupt. Technology has greatly enabled e-governance and has contributed to the cause. It is optimistic to feel happy with such institutions in place, but it is pragmatic to understand that such a task needs the support of the masses. The cost that corruption imposes is immeasurable and it is paid by the masses. Hence, it must be the masses that rise up against it. There have been some developments along the same lines. One such example is the Honesty cafes, which have sprung up in places throughout the world where it is up to the customers to pay the right amount for their food they order in a dish by the door. Young people, it has been found, pay more often than they steal. Another story is of Uganda where the school funding allocations of various schools were published in the local newspapers, which led to reduced corruption. There are countless stories, but the underlying message is of optimism: these battles can be

won. Integrity, like corruption, can be learned. And so it can be taught. It can be taught to people of all ages, and hence the damage can be undone. As with all forms of moral teachings, it begins early, in homes and in schools.

Along with such efforts, it is also important that the same is practiced on national and international platforms. Leaders with integrity provide a vision to aspire for, and contribute to the process of cultivating entrenched integrity among the masses. Integrity is a way of life, and as it is with all ways of life, it needs to be learnt through careful guidance and consistent action. An individual, and by extension, a society and a nation which rewards integrity is rewarded in return.