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## Ethics and Morality in journalism; Islamic review, an analysis

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Almighty Allah has created human beings as his representative and sent them to the world as his representatives. Islam has designated as universal system of life as a complete code of life to guide human life in a beautiful and smooth way. In this system or code of life, the beautiful and well-ordered regulation of all matters of human life, there is no issue that has not been fully discussed in Islam.*

*Journalism is a noble profession. People of all classes, professions, religions and races of the world are involved in journalism and, mass media in one way or another. The scope of journalism and mass media is so vast that its importance human life is no less. This important issue cannot be imagined outside of Islam. Also, the important qualities closely related to journalism are ethics and morality. Islam has specific rules for journalism; if followed, this great profession will become human welfare and universal. In this essay, along with the introduction of journalism in the critical essay, what is the ethics of journalism and perspective of Islam in this regard; it will be discussed in detail.*

*Key words:* journalism, mass media, news media, ethics and morality etc.

### **Introduction:**

Journalism is an independent, free, intellectual and noble profession. Journalists are the conscience of the nation. Journalists bring the news of the society and the state to the nation through the media. The media is said to be the fourth pillar of the state. There is no doubt that objective and honest journalism is able to play a positive role in the welfare of the country and nation as well as the global human community. In the age of free flow of information, it is not possible to stay out of information or news at will. In the age globalization, the news happening in any part of the world is known instantly thanks to the mass media and journalists. One of the contributions of modern civilization is free, independent and neutral mass media, and the role of great profession called journalism is undoubtedly undeniable in enhancing the role of mass media in advancing human civilization. A conscious man can not imagine to spend a day without daily news. The news staff take us to the world civilization. Journalists do not help the people and person with the news and information but also play a role of a guard of nation of progress, advance, education, culture and civilization. Media and journalists have social role for improvement and progress in all branches of life in modern democratic country. The media has unlimited pioneer role to stop bribe, corruption, wrongdoing and the abuse of power. The media also has the immense importance of the rule of the law, equality and to protect human rights. For constructing welfare society, the journalists are highly committed in the open world. Whatever is good and positive to the society, journalists highlight their writings and so that something evil and concern, all are focused with their writings. Awareness in the society is created, public opinion is well-organized and thus, the society is being released from superstition, illiteracy and poverty by the outstanding contribution of journalism and mass media.

Honest and healthy journalism is to present positive and constructive news for the greater good of society and society with an unbiased and neutral perspective.

It is the responsibility and duty of honest journalists to expose the corruption, crime, abuse of power, injustice and oppression to subordinates in a brave and innocent way.

This integrity, responsibility and duty are called ethics and morality in journalism.

Disguising the truth as a prop for biased corruptors and dictators is undoubtedly unethical journalism.

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Unethical journalism is a threat to society, nation and public. Through this people can be easily blackmailed. Relying on this to become a criminal gang, the most transparent image of society!  
As Islam is a fully modern and universal religion, it has abolished this abominable unethical journalism and introduced eternal principles and ethics in journalism.  
At the same time, he gave great encouragement and enthusiasm to spread and publish true, beautiful and positive news.  
As Islam is a complete way of life, there is no aspect and section of human life which is not beautifully and fluently discussed in Islam. Here are modern acceptable solutions to all problems.  
This article will discuss the Islamic perspective on ethics and morality in journalism.

### **Meaning of journalism:**

The word 'journalism' is taken from the French 'journal' which in turn comes from the Latin 'diurnal'. Journalism is the production and distribution of reports on the interaction of events, facts, ideas and people that are the "news of the day" and that informs society to at least some degree. (Wikipedia).  
Journalism is publishing news and comments in mass media. (Sikandar Fayez, *songbad lekha o sompadona, Bangla Academy, page 16*).  
David Wel Bight said- "journalism is information. It's communication. it is the events of the day distilled into a few words, sounds or pictures processed by the mechanics of communication to satisfy the human curiosity of a word that is always eager to know, what's new. (shudansu shekhor ray, *shanbadikota shangbadik o shongbadpotra, Doleshori prokashoni, Dhaka, page 16*)

Analyzing the above definitions can be understood that the Journalism is the form and medium through which events of interest to the public reach the public.

### **Aims and objectives:**

Every job has a specific goal and objective. Journalism being a noble profession undoubtedly has a goal and objective. Journalism's first and foremost job is to convey accurate and precise information to readers, listeners and viewers. (sikander Fayez, *songbad lekha o sompadana. Bangla Academy, page 01*) The events that happen in the society without any addition, subtraction, replacement and change the social disharmony as it plays a leading role in the establishment of justice, the main goal and objective of journalism.

### **Meaning of morality and ethics:**

Morality is derived from latin 'moralists'. it means manner, character, proper behavior etc. Otherwise the 'Ethics' is derived from the ancient Greek Word 'ethikos'. It also means same meaning of morality. Morality is the distinction and separation of good or right, bad or wrong things. Morality refers to a set of standards or principles that may come from a particular ideology, religion or culture, and may also come from things that all people consider to be good. Morality is also called rightness or fairness.

### **Morality and ethics in journalism:**

Journalistic ethics means presenting news with sincerity, impartiality and honesty. It is the ethics of journalism not to serve or present purposefully baseless sensational news. Essentially, publishing news by following the statutory rules of news collection, processing and publishing is called ethics in journalism.

### **Importance of ethics and morality in journalism :**

The importance of ethics and morality in journalism is immense. As a result of journalism with ethics, the human rights of people remain intact and equality and equal rights are established in the society. A type of

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anarchy is created in unethical journalism. The change in professionalism begins with worshipers of untruths and falsehoods. Common people today are alarmed, anxious and worried due to the fear of unethical and yellow journalism. At any time under the glare of the media, the achievements of life, respect, finances and career can be lost. Relying on this, unscrupulous opportunists can easily become central character of wealth and power. Today the noble profession of journalism is being called into question by some dishonest media workers. There was a time when the common reader took any newspaper news as truth. That is why the criminal gangs were always careful that their activities did not get any news in the newspapers. The world of news has gone far from being a place of people's faith and trust to put people's colors on the news. A survey by the Management and Resource Development Initiative, a non-governmental organization, found that only 14 percent of readers in the country believe that news reports are completely true. Capitalizing on noble professions like journalism, dishonest and opportunistic individuals seek to establish themselves as legitimate extortionists by using their credentials. Today it is the same picture not only in the city but also in rural areas. All sections of the village, even the day laborers, are engulfed in the coral of unethical journalism. For fear of reporting defamatory news, many times common people are forced to pay gifts to journalists to keep them happy.

#### **Principles and ethics of journalism in domestic and international law:**

When a media worker collects a news and submits it to the media office, it is not published, but it is published after being refined and analysis by checking the rules and regulations of journalism in the national and international legal framework. That is why the media is called the guardian of unbiased and authentic information. A true professional journalist collects information and discloses it to the public following the established rules and norms of journalism. Journalism is a disciplined, statutory and intellectual profession. A media worker collected the news as he wanted and published it, no such cheap process and method practice has a place in journalism. Independent journalism is accorded dignity in the constitution, the supreme law of Bangladesh, Article 39 (2) of the Constitution provide for the freedom of the press. (*Sikander Fayez, songbad lekha o sompadana, Bangla Academy, page 01*). So it can be said that independent journalism is a constitutional right. The Right to Information Act 2009 Act is recognized as a safeguard for the collection of information by journalists. Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh passed a law in 2011 called "Public Interest Disclosure Act 2011" to promote independent journalism. Independent and free journalism has been recognized as one of the elements of ethics in international law. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought and expression. This right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to impart, disseminate and receive information and ideas through any media. (*bn.m.Wikipedia*). The declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December. Article 19 of that Declaration states – Everyone has the right to hold and express opinions. ([www.nhrc.org.bd](http://www.nhrc.org.bd)). Moreover, the International Conference on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on Free and Unbound Journalism were passed. (*bn.m.wikisource.org.*) Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights mentions freedom of expression and independent journalism.

#### **Domestic and international laws to protect journalistic ethics:**

Although there is freedom of media or journalism, there are domestic and international laws to prevent unethical and yellow journalism. An organization called Press Council has been established in Bangladesh to protect the quality of journalism and prevent unethical or yellow journalism. A retired judge is appointed as its chairman. Any aggrieved person who feels that he has suffered as a result of yellow journalism, can file a case against the concerned media or editor in the Press Council. Although Article 39 of the Constitution of Bangladesh talks about independent journalism, unethical journalism is blocked according to the clauses (2) of Article 39. Sub-section (2) states – “Subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of

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national security, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency and morals or in respect of contempt of court, defamation or incitement to criminal organization. Although free journalism has been declared in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yellow and unethical journalism has not been approved. Article 12 of the Declaration states – “There shall be no arbitrary interference with the privacy of any person or with his home, family and correspondence or any injury to his reputation. Everyone has the right to a remedy at law against such interference or injury.

### **Islam's perspective on ethics in journalism:**

Islam is a universal complete code of life. There is no aspect and division of human life that is not in Islam, there is no problem that does not have a fair solution in Islam. Mass media and journalism are inextricably linked with human life. As such, the principles of journalism must be in Islam. Here journalism is not only legitimized but also recognized as an act of much encouragement and virtue. Here fake and baseless news must be excluded and there is a strong urge to publish true and constructive news seriously. Many times journalists present misleading news by resorting to yellow journalism by mixing truth and falsehood. The Holy Quran discourages such journalism. It came in the Quran- For a journalist in any situation, the truth and real events of the news would serve his own interests: it is not permissible to hide the news with the intention of endangering the opponent. Because Allah Ta'ala has directly forbidden to do such work. He who does journalism through lies is a known liar to all. Such false news is strictly prohibited in Islam. That is why it is called - "The lie is the mother of all sins". The greatest human being of all time, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exposed the hideous character of lying yellow journalists in numerous hadiths. Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) informed mankind the prehistoric events that mankind did not know. He has presented the complete news of the paranormal and unseen worlds as clear as daylight before the people of the world. He is a role model for all journalists in the world. Moreover, he did not condone yellow journalism but played an effective role in preventing it. Yellow journalism is recognized as a sign of hypocrisy in the eyes of Islam. The Prophet, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him, said, “ there are three things which are sign of hypocrisy: if a lie occurs, if a promise is broken, and if it is entrusted, it is betrayed.”(Al Bukhari, Islamic Foundation, hadith no 32). The punishment for those who earn the reputation of hypocrisy by doing yellow journalism will also be very severe. Even the lowest place of hell will be their abode. Allah said that the hypocrites are in the lowest depths of Hellfire. (Al Quran, 4:145). By publishing false news, those who practice yellow journalism become hollow in their personalities. It comes in the Holy Quran -"In their hearts is a disease, so Allah has increased their disease, and the most painful punishment is because they were lying." (Al Quran, 2:10). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said about the purveyors of false news- "Lying leads to immorality, immorality leads to Hellfire, and a man lies until he is written with Allah as a liar."(Al Bukhari, Islamic Foundation, Hadith no 5664). False and yellow news is strictly condemned in Islam. It is even said that a believer (Mu'min)can do many wrongs but cannot lie. Muhammad sallallahu alayhi wasallam said that a believer can have all habits in his nature but not betrayal and lying.(Al Mosnad). Yellow journalists will be silenced on the Day of Judgment when they deny their crimes. Their hands and feet will testify to the crime committed. Allah Ta'ala says about this-"Today we shall seal their mouths, and their hands shall speak to us, and their feet shall bear witness to what they used to earn." (Al Quran, 36:65). Those who spread false news will surely be held accountable for their deeds on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) declared that practicing yellow journalism is against faith(Al Iman). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Keep away from lies because lies are against faith."(Mosannaf, Hadith no 26115). Cursed are those who write, publish and spread false news. The Qur'an declares the curse of Allah upon them. It came in the holly Quran, "Allah's curse is on the liars." (Al Quran, 3:61). Angels of mercy go away from a journalist when he commits yellow journalism and lies. Lying is referred to as the stench of hadith. It came in the hadith "When a servant tells a lie, the stench of his lie causes the angels to move a mile away". (Al Tirmidi). The Qur'an declares that those who violate the proper principles of journalism and practice journalism for dishonest purposes will not find the path of

Islam. It comes to the holy Quran "If he be a liar, on him will be his lie, and if he be truthful, there will befall you some of that which he threatens you (with); surely Allah does not guide him who is extravagant, a liar (Al Quran, 40:28)".

**Not to spread conceptual news:**

Practicing journalism based on ideas is also yellow journalism. There are many media outlets and media workers who present mouth-watering sensational news that is based on their whims and fanciful ideas. Allah Almighty has forbidden such speculative news. Allah says that "O you who believe! avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin" (Al Quran, 49:12). There are many journalists who are desperate to cover the news as soon as they get the slightest clue of the news. They do not feel any need to verify the truth or falsity of the news. Even if the news is true, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade publishing the news without verifying it. Rasulullah Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam said - "It is enough for a person to be a liar that he says what he hears." (Al Muslim). Not only that, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) compared the talker with listening to the evildoer. It is enough for a man to be a sinner that he narrates what he hears. (Mosannaf hadith no 25617). Not only that, a lying journalist can never be a believer. It came in the hadith- "You refrain from presuming. To have an impression on someone is the biggest lie" (Shahih Bukhari, Islamic Foundation, hadith no 5638).

**Providing verified news:**

Before publishing any news to the public, the authenticity of the news must be verified. Accepting and publishing news obtained from unreliable sources is forbidden in Islam. This is mentioned in the Qur'an "O you who believe! if an evildoer comes to you a report, look carefully into it, lest you harm a people in ignorance, then be sorry for what you have done" (Al Quran, 49:06). In the light of this instruction, it is fard (Farad) for Muslims to verify the person's personal integrity and accuracy in providing information before accepting any news or information. Unchecked yellow journalism can lead to ethnic, religious and rivalries riots. In response to some fake news, the conflicting parties are fighting in such a way that they don't even know what they are fighting about. Islam prohibits such abominable news reporting. It came in the hadith- "There will be a time near Qiyamah when knowledge will be removed. At that time stupidity will descend, indiscriminate killings, fake gossip and stupidity etc. will increase." (Al Muslim, Islamic Foundation, hadith no 6544).

**Do not serve fictional news:**

Unscrupulous journalists most of the time create panic and anxiety in the public mind by presenting fictional news. The Holy Quran strictly forbids the publication of this worldly fictitious news. It came in the Quran "And follow not that of which you have not the knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that" (Al Quran, 17:36).

severe sin:

Media is the mirror of society. So the media workers should also be transparent like a mirror. Journalists should not only broadcast political and city-centric news, but should provide objective and constructive positive news about the common people of marginal areas. News should be published while maintaining communal harmony without disturbing the peace and order of the society and without hurting anyone's religious values. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) emphasized on this matter- "Shall I speak to you of the greatest of the graves? They said: Yes, O Messenger of Allah. He said associating partners with Allah and disobedience to parents. He said and he sat and was leaning back. He said, "And false

testimony or false speech.” And the Messenger of Allah continued to say it until we said, “If only he had been silent.” (Al Tirmizi).

#### Reporting with integrity:

A journalist must report the news with 100% fairness and impartiality. As an ethical journalist, news presentation should keep itself neutral. He is not in favor of anyone but justice and honesty. This is mentioned in the Quran. "When you speak i.e. present any kind of news, do justice even if he is your relative"(All Quran, 06:152). Another despicable feature of yellow journalism is its overzealousness in presenting negative news happening in the society which is insulting to the society and humanity. Islam discourages such journalism and prefers to present constructive, public welfare positive news instead of all kinds of bad and negative news. It is said to avoid bad scenes and sounds, and present elegant sounds and clean images. "And tell my servants, they say which is better."( Al Quran, 17:53).

#### Disseminate news with confidence and trust:

Instead of yellow journalism, Islam has emphasized reporting news with trust and honesty. It is a great crime to present a true story before the nation by covering it with a lie. It is absolutely forbidden to publish any news by changing and modifying it partially or completely. "O believers! Fear Allah and speak the truth."(Al Quran, 33:70). Any information and news is sacred deposit to the journalist. Islam has imposed a strict ban on presenting yellow news by betraying the said deposit, blinded by the lust of any material interest. It mentioned in the holly Quran “ O you who believe! be not unfaithful to Allah and his Prophet, nor be unfaithful to your trusts while you know”(Al Quran, 08:27). It is yellow journalism to hide the real truth because it is against personal interest, party interest or one's own thoughts. Islam does not support hiding such news. Concealing true news and evidence is a sign of sick journalism in the eyes of the Qur'an. Allah says that “ do not conceal testimony, and whoever conceals it, his heart is surely sinful” (Al Quran, 02:283). It is a punishable offense to do yellow journalism with the intention of defaming any person, group or community out of revenge. It came in the Quran “ O you who believe! Be Upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is Aware of what you do” ( AL Quran, 05:08).

#### Don't impersonate a person:

Islam does not allow the private faults of any citizen to be brought before the public unless it is related to the national interest. Rather, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) encouraged people to hide their personal faults. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Whoever conceals the faults of his Muslim brother in this world, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and the Hereafter. (Al Bukharin, Tawhid prokashoni, hadith no 2442). However, if a person's faults are of such a level that another person, society or state is severely damaged by him, then there is no Islamic prohibition to unmask him. Allah says: Allah does not like to preach evil, but if someone is wronged, it is different. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Al Quran, 04:148) The purpose of this verse is to complain against the wrongdoers on behalf of the oppressed people and to make the matter public.

#### Journalism with integrity:

Publishing and spreading news by compromising with falsehood is considered as yellow journalism. The demand of Islam is to report the news fearlessly without bowing down to evil forces. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: The best Jihad is done by a person who speaks the truth in front of a tyrant. (Ibn Majah) On the authority of Abuzar Ghiffari, he said: The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: You will tell the truth even if it is bitter. Let not the blasphemy of Allah affect you (Shahih

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Ibn Hibban, page no 449). The characteristic of a journalist is to hold the pen for truth, beauty and justice. If it is interrupted, it becomes a disaster for the country, caste and religion. Today, many countries are dominated by media outlets that support individuals, political parties, business groups, and dictators. This is a major reason for the spread and patronage of yellow journalism. The Qur'an has issued a stern warning against such media. In the Qur'an, do not lean towards those who do wrong. Otherwise the fire of hell will touch you. You have no friend except Allah. Will not get help anywhere else. (Al Quran, 11:113) Rumors, fabrications, lies, propaganda and information terrorism fueled political and religious tensions. Communal harmony was destroyed and anarchy and chaos broke out across the country. So it must be excluded. Allah says: "He does not create evil in the world. Indeed, Allah does not like the wrongdoer." (Al Quran, 28:77)

**Do not serve obscene news:**

A form of profligacy and obscenity can be seen in the media called entertainment journalism. Colorful images of nude women in the media tickle sexually young boys and girls. There is a strong possibility that they will go astray. Journalism that leads the nation's precious resource youth to moral degradation, that journalism is undoubtedly unethical or yellow journalism. Islam has imposed strict restrictions on such news practices. It comes to The Holy Quran "Surely (as for) those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter; and Allah knows, while you do not know" (Al Quran, 24:19). Therefore, the media and media personnel should not present obscene and unpleasant news under any circumstances.

**Not publishing news against human rights:**

Islam never supports yellow journalism in the name of publishing false news against humanity. Islam forbids this type of journalism. It comes to The Holy Quran "And whoever commits a fault or a sin, then accuses of it one innocent, he indeed takes upon himself the burden of a calumny and a manifest sin" (Al Quran 04:112). All activities of anti-humanity, conspiracy and propaganda news distributors will be protected by Allah and will be punished accordingly in the Hereafter. Allah says "Angels are recording the full details of your plots, tricks and propaganda." (Al Quran, 10:21). It is not permissible in Islam to deliberately twist and serve nepotistic news. This is mentioned in the Quran "O you Who believe! be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness of Allah's sake, though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; if he be rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in compassion; therefore do not follow (your) low desires, lest you deviate; and if you serve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do" (Al Quran, 04:135). Not only that, Islam has compared yellow journalism to the heinous shirk of idolatry. Allah says - "Beware of idolatry and beware of false witness." (Al Quran, 22:30). Innocent men and women often face serious threats under the grip of yellow journalism. Islam forbids publishing such news. This is mentioned in the Quran "And those who speak evil things of the believing men and the believing women without their having earned (it), they are guilty indeed of a false accusation and a manifest sin" (Al Quran, 33:58).

**Do not hide the news:**

Concealing the truth is a cognizable offence. The announcement of severe punishment for concealing news has come in the hadith. The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "Whoever conceals what he knows, Allah will give him the reins of the Fire on the Day of Resurrection." Almighty Allah also forbids hiding the truth in the Holy Qur'an. Allah says "Do not conceal the evidence. Whoever conceals it, his heart will be full of sin. Allah is well aware of what you do." (Al Quran, 02:283) It is a serious offense to publish yellow news by denigrating any individual, group or community. In the hadith, it is enough for a man to be evil that he humiliates his Muslim brother, (Al Muslim, Islamic Foundation, hadith no 6309). Allah Almighty calls those who spread rumors as hypocrites "If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease

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and the agitators in the city do not desist, we shall most certainly set you over them, then thy shall not be your neighbors in it but for a little while”(Al Quran,33:60).

Benefits of doing journalism with ethics:

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) declared those who convey the truth to be the best witnesses. The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: Shall I inform you of the best witness? He is the witness who testifies before being summoned. (Al Tirmidi, Islamic Foundation, hadith no 2306). The Holy Qur'an declares those who deliver truthful, objective and constructive news to be true believers. Allah has compared honest journalism to faith and piety. Allah says: "O believers! Fear Allah and be with the truthful." (Al Quran, 09:119). As a blessing for those who do not practice yellow journalism, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "May Allah make the face of the one who heard something of mine and then mastered it fully and conveyed it to the one who did not hear it." (AlTirmizi). Journalism with integrity not only honors a journalist in the world but also leads him to heaven. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Truth leads to virtue. And virtue leads to paradise. People who are established on truth are finally considered as 'Siddiques'. (Al Bukhari, Islamic Foundation, hadith no 5664).

**Conclusion:**

Journalism is not only an independent profession but also a human service. The role of journalism is immense in protecting the fundamental rights of people. Journalism is not a new word or profession but the first man and prophet Hazrat Adam Alaihi Salam is the first prophet and man of the world as well as the first journalist. The principles of journalism are thoroughly described in the Qur'an-Hadith. If journalism is practiced in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah, it is declared in the Qur'an that there will be an unequivocal announcement of the great reward of this time as well as the supernatural reward. At the same time, the pros and cons of honest and dishonest journalism have been described in detail in the hadith. Finally, it can be said that all journalists should practice journalism according to Islamic rules and achieve success in this world and hereafter.