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The Twenty-Fourth Greater Sin: Short-Weighing and Cheating (in Business)

The twenty-fourth Greater Sin is short weighing or cheating in business. This is recorded in the Holy Qur’an and the tradition of Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) as related by Amash and the tradition of Imam Riḍa (a.s.) as reported by Fazl Ibn Shaz‘an. Imam (a.s.) says: "Decreasing (fraudulently) in measure and weight." (is also a Greater Sin). It is Harām for a seller to give less than the specified quantity or for the debtor to repay less than what is specified.

A terrible punishment awaits the doer of this grievous sin, according to the book of Allah (S.w.T.). A complete chapter of the Holy Qur’an deals with this topic. It says:

“Woe to the defrauders. Who, when they take the measure (of their dues) from men, take it fully, but when they measure out to others or weigh out for them, they are deficient. Do not think that they shall be raised again, for a mighty day, The day on which men shall stand before the Lord of the worlds?” (Surah al-Muḥaffifīn 83:1-6)

Deed in Sijjin

“Nay! Most surely the record of the wicked is in the sijjin. And what will make you know what the sijjin is? It is a written book.” (Surah al-Muḥaffifīn 83:7-9)

Sijjin is either the name of that register which contains the account of deeds of disbelievers and transgressors. Or it is a special corner of Hell where the disbelievers and sinners will be consigned. Hence the translation of the ayats will be as follows:

“They should be fearful for it is written down that the transgressors will go to sijjin. And what can explain to you what sijjin is? It has already been written about it (And a decision has been taken which cannot be changed).”

Hazrat Shoeb (a.s.) was preaching to his people:

“O my people! Serve Allah, you have no god other than He, and do not give short measure and weight. Surely I see you in prosperity and surely I fear for you the punishment of an all-encompassing day. And O my people! Give full measure and weight fairly, and defraud not men their things, and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief.” (Surah Hūd 11: 84-85)

A person who short-weighs is not a Mu'min

According to the Qur'anic ayats, one who resorts to short weighing and defrauding does not believe in the Day of Judgement and the Hereafter. If the person had any belief in the Hereafter, he would know that, even if he succeeds in fooling people, he would never be able to hide his fraud from the Lord of the worlds; he would realize that on the Day of Judgement he would have to account for whatever he has earned by defrauding and make good the loss.

A butcher who was an idol-worshipper used to give more than the prescribed weight. When people asked him the reason for this he pointed up towards the top of the wall and said, “I give more because of him.” When people looked up they saw an idol installed there. Another idol-worshipping shopkeeper was well known for his habit of casting a glance at the idol before he proceeded to weigh some goods.

When Hazrat Yūsuf (a.s.) and Zulekha were alone in the room, Zulekha covered the idol with a cloth. Hazrat Yūsuf (a.s.) asked her,

“Why have you covered the idol?”

She said, “I feel ashamed before it!” Hazrat Yūsuf (a.s.) said,

“You feel ashamed before a lifeless idol created by men, when it has no power of understanding. How can I not feel ashamed before the Almighty Lord Who is ever present and all-seeing?”

Saying this he fled from that place and saved himself from fornication.

It is a great pity that idol worshippers are ashamed to commit sins in view of their idols, which are lifeless objects, whereas Muslims have no qualms in committing sins before Allah (S.w.T.) for Whom nothing is hidden in the heaven and the earth.

Five sins and their punishments

The following tradition has been recorded from the Holy Prophet (S) in the book Tafsīr Minhaj us-Sādiqīn According to this tradition there are five types of sins which bring about five types of calamities.

“When the people of a community break promises and oaths, Allah makes their enemies to reign upon them.

When people order against the revealed Divine commands, poverty (certainly) is widespread.

When immorality is practised openly deadly diseases certainly increase.

When people short-weight and short-measure then there is a decrease in agricultural output. (Decrease in livelihood) and there is less rainfall.”

Advice of Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) for the businessmen

Whatever 'Ali (a.s.) found himself free from the administrative work, he used to go to the market place and announce,

“O people! Fear Allah! Weigh and measure with justice. Do not cheat people (by giving less) and do not spread corruption in the earth.”

One day 'Ali (a.s.) saw a saffron seller short-weighting. He had applied oil to his hand and very cunningly he applied it to the pan of the balance which held the saffron. 'Ali (a.s.) picked up the saffron from the balance and said,

“First rectify your balance, then if you like you can give more than that.”

Between mountains of fire

The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“One who does Khayanat in weighing and measuring is thrown into the lowest section of Hell. There he shall be placed between two mountains of fire. He will be told to weigh those mountains. He will be busy in this forever.”

The following incident is recorded in the book Tafsir Minhajus Sadeqaen:

A person by the name of Malik went to visit a friend who was sick. Malik says, “I saw him in a deplorable condition. He was screaming, ‘Two Mountains of fire are going to crash upon me.’ I told him, ‘It is only an illusion!’ He said, ‘No, it is true! Because I have two different balances. With one of them I used to short-weight while selling and with the other I weighed more while buying. I am punished for this so soon!’”

Short changing is also Harām

As it is Harām to short-weight it is also Harām to short-measure like measurement of cloth or land which are sold by measure, must not be short measured. It is absolutely Harām. In the same way those items which are sold by number, like eggs or fruits; if someone sells them to a person and gives less than the

specified quantity, he is counted among those who short-weight and short-measure. Shaykh Ansari has mentioned it in his book Makasibul Muharrama.

The Seller who cheats is a debtor of the buyer

The amount of goods given less by the seller is owed to the buyer. It is obligatory to give the balance amount to the buyer. If the buyer is dead he must give it to his heirs. If he does not know the buyer he must with the permission of the Jurist pay a similar amount as sadqa on behalf of the buyer.

If the seller does not know how much less he has given, he must give him some amount that will satisfy the buyer. If the buyer is dead he must satisfy his heir. If the buyer is unknown the Mujtahid must be satisfied.

Defrauding is like selling short

It is short weighing and short measuring when the seller gives less without the knowledge of the buyer. The buyer does not realize that he is being given less than the stipulated quantity but it is defrauding when the seller sells some goods of an inferior quality and makes it out to be of a good quality. In this case too the buyer is unaware of being cheated.

The seller may also adulterate the goods. In this case there is no short weighing but it is Harām all the same, because it is a kind of fraud. For example a grainseller adulterates 95 kg of wheat with 5 Kg of mud and sells it as a hundred Kg of wheat; or a milkman adulterates milk by adding water. Similarly a shopkeeper sells a kilo of ghee but surreptitiously puts a quarter kilo of stone beneath the layer of ghee. A butcher commits a fraud if he adds more than a reasonable amount of bones while selling meat. Vegetable sellers increase the weight of vegetables more by pouring water over them than required. All these types of frauds are included among the sin of underweighing, even if the seller is weighing the adulterated goods accurately.

Adulteration is Harām

To mix an inferior quality of wheat with one of a good quality or to adulterate pure ghee is also Harām. Shaykh Ansari says in his book Makasibul Muharrama, “The tradition prohibiting adulteration is Mutawatir.”

Shaykh Saduq has recorded the prophetic tradition:

“One who sells adulterated goods to Muslims is not from us. He will be raised with the Jews on the Day of Qiyāma, because an adulterater is not a Muslim.”

The Holy Prophet (S) said,

“One who gives us adulterated goods is not from us.”

He repeated this sentence thrice then said,

“And Allah will remove barakat from the livelihood of the Muslim brothers. (Allah) will destroy his economy and leave him upon his own condition.”¹

An edifying incident is mentioned on page 309 of the book *Dar-us-Salam* by Aqae Iraqui: The respected Aqae Abdul Husain Khawansari has related to me the following incident: “An honest perfume seller of Karbala had fallen sick. He tried the treatment of every doctor in the town but it was of no use. He spent all his property for his treatment but he was not cured. One day I went to pay him a visit. I saw him perturbed. He was instructing his son to sell off the household items. He was saying, ‘Sell off everything! I do not want anything. Either I will die or be cured!’ I asked him, ‘What do you mean?’ He sighed and answered, ‘At the beginning of my career I was not so rich. During that time an epidemic fever broke out in Karbala. The doctors prescribed lime juice as its cure. Since the disease was widespread there was a great demand for limejuice.

I began to adulterate limejuice by mixing yoghurt in it. I sold it at a very high rate. Gradually the stocks of limejuice with the other shopkeeper were finished. They began to direct their customers to me. Soon the stock of limejuice in my shop was also sold out. Now I began to sell only yoghurt by adding colour and a sour material to it. I sold this concoction as limejuice. My coffers became full and I continued to amass wealth. Today I find that all this property is of no use to me. My disease is incurable. So I wish to get rid of all the things that I obtained in this *Harām* manner, in the hope that after doing this, I may be cured.’ Not much time had elapsed after this incident when the perfume seller departed from this world. He was definitely indebted to those whom he had sold the adulterated limejuice.”

Hazrat Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) says:

“One day the Holy Prophet (S) was passing through the *bazār* of Madinah. He (S) told a wheat seller, ‘Your wheat is of a good quality.’ Then he put his hands inside the pile and found inferior quality of wheat below He said, ‘I see that you have gathered the provisions of *Khayanat* and adulteration.’”²

Allamah Hilli says that a man asked Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.), “If a person has two types of goods one is of a superior and expensive quality and the other is of inferior and cheap quality, can he mix these two and sell at a special rate?”

Imam (a.s.) replied,

“It is not correct for him to sell the adulterated goods to Muslims. However (there is no harm) if he informs them (of the adulteration).”³

Dawūd Ibn Sujān asked Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.): “I had two varieties of musk. One was wet, the other dry. I sold the wet and fresh musk but no one was prepared to buy the dry one at the same rate. Is

it permitted for me to make it wet so that it is sold out?” Imam (a.s.) told him,

“It is not allowed. However if you inform the buyer that you have made it wet, it is another matter.”

Giving less in the rights of Allah (S.w.T.) and Prophet (S)

People have been ordered not only to refrain from defrauding each other, but they must also not cheat and defraud while fulfilling their obligations towards Allah (S.w.T.), the Holy Prophet (S), the Holy Imams (a.s.) and all the creatures.

Allah (S.w.T.) is not deficient while fulfilling the rights of people. He has taken upon himself to give sustenance to one and all. He bestows man with unlimited favours. He listens to his entreaties and fulfills his wishes in keeping with his well being. So it is incumbent upon man to be faithful in fulfilling his duties towards Allah (S.w.T.). Man can do this by being thankful to Allah (S.w.T.) for His blessings, by obeying His commands by carrying out all his obligations. Thus one who succumbs to Satan and his own selfish desires, has disobeyed Allah (S.w.T.) and he has not fulfilled Allah (S.w.T.)’s right. His prayers are not answered immediately, he becomes impatient and does not realize that he himself is deficient in fulfilling Allah (S.w.T.)’s rights. Allah (S.w.T.) says in the Holy Qur’an.

“...and be faithful to (your) covenant with Me, I will fulfill (My) covenant with you.” (Surah al-Baqarah 2:40)

It is nothing but His Beneficence that inspite of our failings Allah (S.w.T.) listens to our prayer.

Hazrat Imam Zainul ʿAbidin (a.s.) says in Du’a Abu Hamza Thumali:

“All praise be to Allah Who responds to my call. Whereas when He calls me, I am lazy in my response. All praise be to Allah Who gives me whatever I ask Him. Though when He asks me for a loan I am stingy. (All the good deeds are a loan to Allah. He shall repay men on the Day of Qiyāma).

And all praise for that Allah who sees my infamies but acts magnanimously (He does not send immediate punishment). He is so forgiving as if I have not committed a single sin.”

What you desire for yourself

S̄di Shirazi says in a couplet,

“You usurp the property of Muslims but when someone usurps yours you protest and claim that no one is a Muslim anymore.”

If one desires not to be cheated by others one must be honest in ones dealings with others. Justice demands this. The traditions also state that one must wish for others what one desires for oneself.

Justice and equity is best

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“Three actions are the best. People should receive complete justice from you so much so that you desire for them what you desire for yourself. You must co-operate monetarily with your brothers in faith. You must remember Allah in every condition. That remembrance is not merely Subhanallah (Glory be to Allah) or Alhamdu lil-Lah (Praise be to Allah), (it is remembering Allah, always). When some duty comes upon you which Allah has ordered, you must fulfill it, and when some prohibited act comes before you; leave it.”⁴

The scales of justice

Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) advises his son Imam Hasan Mujtaba (a.s.) in his will:

“O my child, make yourself the measure (for dealings) between you and others. Thus, you should desire for others what you desire for yourself and hate for others what you hate for yourself. Do not oppress, as you do not like to be oppressed. Do well to others, as you would like good to be done to you. Regard bad for yourself whatever you regard bad for others. Accept that (treatment) from others which you would like others to accept from you.”⁵

Everything has a measure

In Surah al-Hadid, Allah (S.w.T.), the Almighty says:

“Certainly We sent Our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity.” (Surah al-Hadid 57:25)

By the word ‘balance’, Allah (S.w.T.) means justice and Allah (S.w.T.) has appointed a ‘balance’ for everything. The belief of men and the truth and falsehood is also tested on this basis. The good and bad morals and qualities are also evaluated on the scales of justice. If men conform to justice in their speech and actions and belief and deeds they will be able to establish true justice in the world.

‘Ali (a.s.) is the scale of deeds

In one of the Ziarat of Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) we read:

“Peace be upon the balance and the scales.”

Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) is the measure for distinguishing truth and falsehood. He is the touchstone for differentiating between good and evil. He is the scale for evaluating morals and deeds. After the demise of the Holy Prophet (S), the Holy Qur'an and Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.), especially 'Ali (a.s.), is the channel for

and the criterion of faith. By comparing the deeds and faith with the speech and actions of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.) we distinguish good from evil. If our belief and actions conform to the standards of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.) they are correct and if not then they are of no use.

Justice demands that we must not go to the extremes. We should neither exceed the limits nor remain deficient. The scales of justice are very accurate and can detect even the weight of a single strand of hair. After recognising the path of justice it is a formidable task to remain firm upon it. One who is successful in recognising the true path and wishes to follow it, is bestowed Divine help. It is this person who is proved correct by the scales of justice on the Day of Judgement. He crosses the difficult bridge of Sirat with ease and swiftness. One who is not just in this world is proved wrong in the Hereafter. He will stumble from the bridge of sirat and drop into hell. The noble Qur'an says:

“And there is not one of you but shall come to it, this is an unavoidable decree of your Lord. And We will deliver those who guarded (against evil) and We will leave the unjust therein on their knees.” (Surah Maryam 19:71-72)

May Allah (S.w.T.) guide us upon the way of justice and equity. May Allah (S.w.T.) include us among the pious and enable us to be saved from falling into Hell.

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1. Iqbal
 2. Iqbal
 3. Iqbal
 4. al-Kafi
 5. Nahjul Balagha

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