

Chapter 48: Keeping Promises

The human society cannot function without the institution of promises and assurances of their fulfillment. People make agreements and covenants with one another that goes to make families and clans. There will be agreements between cities that meld them together.

People give great importance to these covenants because they are the basis of their collective lives. Keeping promises is an important aspect of human life and every person considers it very bad to do anything in infringement of a promise. Every person who enters into a covenant with another expects that the terms of the contract will be adhered to implicitly.

Whichever groups abide by the terms of their covenant will be termed as well organized units. The reason for their well being is that they will have trust on one another without any reason for conflict. The lives of their people will be successful and contented. To the contrary the people of an area that doesn't abide by its covenants with others will suffer from a feeling of uncertainty and unrest. They will be victims of perpetual conflict.

Every individual or society who respect the agreements made with others will have the respect and confidence of others. Those who break their covenants will be abhorred and looked down upon by the others. Islam is a religion of nature that lays great stress on fulfillment of promises.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

".... and fulfill (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning). " (Qur'an, 17:34)

At another place in the Qur'an it is said:

"Those who faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants" (Qur'an, 23:8)

The Prophet of Islam said:

"The person who has no covenant has no faith"¹

“Whoever has faith in Allah and the Day of Reckoning, should fulfill his promises.”²

‘Ali has said to Malik al Ashtar:

“Breaking promises makes others unhappy as also Allah will be unhappy.”³

“Where you cannot keep your promise, don’t make one. Where you cannot discharge a guarantee, don’t give one.”⁴

To perpetuate the habit of keeping promises and abiding by covenants in the society, it is imperative to train the people from their very childhood to be true to their word. This training starts with the childhood in the environment of the family. The child emulates the actions and words of the parents. The parents can set an example for the children.

By nature, the child expects that promises will be kept. When the parents fulfill their small promises the child gets trained in this important aspect of life. But if they take their small promises lightly and neglect them, the child takes the negative example and develops the habit of breaking his word. They start believing that promises are made to be broken.

If the parents make false promises to momentarily calm the child, they are inadvertently training the child to make false promises. Can such children grow into respectable individuals? To quieten the child the mother promises to buy him sweets, ice cream., toys etc. Sometimes she makes these promises to make him take the bitter medicine or to get him vaccinated.

She frightens him by saying that if he did a certain thing, she would send him to the police, report him to his Dad or deny him new dress for the festival. If you consider the lives of the people around you, or your own life, there will be innumerable instances of such false promises and threats made to the innocent children. Do the parents ever imagine what impact they are making on the impressionable minds of the children? This injustice is perpetrated on the innocent children quite innocuously!

The ignorant parents don’t know that they are sinning by making false promises and also they are training the child to follow in their footsteps.

This is the reason Islam requires the parents to keep the promises that they make with their children.

The Prophet of Islam has said:

“Love the children. Treat them with kindness and if you make a promise to them, fulfill it without fail. The children think that you are the provider of sustenance for them.”⁵

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“Whenever you make a promise to the children, definitely keep it.”⁶

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1. Bihar al-anwar, v75, p. 96
 2. Usul al-Kafi, v 2, p. 364
 3. Bihar al-anwar, v77, p. 96
 4. Gharar al-hukm, p. 801
 5. Wasail al-shiah, v 15, p. 101, Bihar al-anwar, v104, p. 92
 6. Mustadrak al-wasail, v 2, p. 106

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