

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

Home > Jurispudence Made Easy > Dialogue on votive offering, pledge and oath

## Dialogue on votive offering, pledge and oath

A friend of mine complained to me that his mother favoured his younger brother over him. I asked him, "In what way?". He said, "By making a sacrificial offering, as a token of thanksgiving to The Almighty for His grace in restoring the health of my ill brother". I said to him, "Did you ask her why?". He replied, "Yes, she said to me that making a vow for the speedy recovery of my brother does not mean she favoured him over me. She also said that my parents had already slaughtered a sheep for me, by way of aqiqah (meaning will follow) when I was only seven days old and that they sacrificed an udhhiyah (meaning will follow) for me".

There I stopped him because the words aqiqah and udhhiyah did not make any sense to me. I promised him to resume talking about it after I had asked my father.

- \* What is agigah and udhhiyah?
- Aqiqah, my son, is an authentic sunnah (Prophetic practice, i.e. by word and/or deed), for those who can afford it. It was enjoined by the Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w). A sheep or a cow is sacrificed on the seventh day after the birth of the infant, male and female, when his/her hair is cut.

It has been related from the Prophet (s.a.w.) that he uttered adhan in the ears of Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain (a.s.) when they were born and offered a sacrificial animal on the seventh day after their birth.

Those of us whose parents could not afford aqiqah at the time, may do so themselves.

- \* Well, this is agigah. What is udhhiyah?
- Udhhiyah is to sacrifice an animal on the day of Eidul Adhha. It is an authentic sunnah of the Prophet (s.a.w.) too. The meat of the sacrificed animal may be donated on behalf of the dead and the living, both young and adult. It may be done every year.
- \* Now, can I take you back to the tale of my friend and his mother. Is it compulsory that the woman fulfils her vow, or is it mustahab, like agigah and udhhiyah, the practice of which follows the sunnah?

- Let may say this to you.

To vow means that you commit yourself to doing a particular thing, or forsake a particular deed or word, for the sake of Allah, the Most High.

Fulfilling a vow is not always viable, unless certain criteria are met.

- \* What are these criteria?
- These are:
- 1. The wording of the vow, be it in Arabic or any other language, should be couched in such a way that the ultimate objective is to seek the pleasure of Allah Almighty, and that such wording should include His name, i.e. Allah or any of his other exclusive names and attributes.
- \* Should the person making the vow not say, "I am indebted to Allah, God, or the Merciful (ar-Rahman)", what will happen?
- There shall be no obligation to fulfil the vow.
- 2. The thing offered for a votive offering should be ethically and religiously viable, especially when it comes to certain actions emanating from the vow.
- \* What if it was not acceptable, yet it could be reprehensible, damaging, or permissible?
- A vow is not in order, if the deed contingent on the vow was reprehensible or damaging. If it was permissible, it shall be deemed sound when the ultimate intention leads to a lawful action. For example, if you make a vow to drink water to be more able to worship God, your vow shall become binding.
- 3. The person making the vow must be adult, sane, intent on carrying out the vow, have free choice and access to that which is related to his vow.
- 4. That which is vowed should be identifiable and affordable.
- \* So, should I take it that, if a person makes a vow according to the conditions you have mentioned, he should be expected to fulfil such a vow?
- Yes, it becomes binding on him to carry out his vow, be it commission or omission of an action, during a prescribed period or for a lifetime, or donating anything.
- \* What if the person, who made the vow, does not comply with it out of choice?
- Kaffarah shall become due. That is emancipating a slave, or feeding ten poor people, or clothing the same number of poor people.

- \* If the person could not do that because of want, for example?
- He should fast three consecutive days.
- \* If a person makes a vow to donate some money to the holy shrines, what could be the avenues of spending that money?
- It could be spent on repairing, maintaining, lighting, carpeting, heating and air conditioning the shrine. That is, if the donor did not specify any of these avenues, or others.
- \* Should the person making the vow specify his donation to the person of, say, the Prophet (s.a.w.) or the Imam (a.s.), rather than the building, how is it going to be spent?
- The donated money could be distributed to the poor among the visitors of the shrine or spent on maintaining the building.
- \* Should a person have a strong inkling that they made a certain vow, is it compulsory on them to fulfil it?
- Yes, if they were absolutely sure.

If someone made a pledge to Allah Almighty to do something or refrain from committing a certain action, he must fulfil that pledge.

- \* Does this mean that a pledge is like a vow, in that it shall not be in order, unless it caters for a particular wording that includes the Name of Allah?
- Yes, and furthermore the commission or omission of the action should be acceptable, from a personal standpoint, and lawful from a religious perspective.

It is worth noting, though, that the same conditions, I explained earlier, which apply in the case of a vow, apply in the case of a pledge.

- \* Should the person who made the pledge deliberately choose not to fulfil it, what shall be the ruling?
- He must make up for flouting the pledge by paying a kaffarah (expiation). In this case, it is either setting a slave free, feeding sixty poor people, or observing fasting for two consecutive months.

Insofar as oath is concerned, it should be fulfilled. If it was intentionally broken, the kaffarah shall be either emancipating one slave, or feeding or clothing ten poor people. In the event of inability to come up with any of these, fasting three days in a row should suffice.

Central to the oath is the wording, i.e. it should be linked to the Name of Allah, such as "By Allah, or I swear by the Almighty, I shall do this or that". The action, or otherwise, resulting from fulfilling the oath

ought to be acceptable and affordable; it should also be lawful from a religious standpoint. It should still be sound, if he swore for a worldly gain. The person making the oath should be adult, sane, exercising free will, and clear in his mind as to the consequences of the action.

- \* If someone said to another, "By God, you have to do this or that", would this be deemed as oath?
- An oath does not extend to include asking, or ordering, other people to carry out certain actions. Also, it does not cover the past. Thus, such oaths have no consequence,

An Oath shall not become binding on the son, if his father banned him from doing certain things. Neither shall it become binding on the wife, if she flagrantly disobeyed the orders of her husband.

If either makes an oath without the permission of either the father or the husband, they can undo the oath.

- \* A person could make an oath on the veracity of his honesty, for example. Is it all right?
- Genuine oath is permissible, yet makrouh.

As for false oath, it is forbidden; it could be among grave sins, unless it is made out of necessity.

- \* In what way?
- For example, if the person making the oath was aiming at warding off oppression from himself or his fellow believers. The circumstances may warrant the engaging in false oath to avert danger to one's life, honour, or those of his brethren. However, if there was room for equivocation (tawriyah), [he may resort to it].

## Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/jurispudence-made-easy-sayyid-ali-hussaini-sistani/dialogue-votive-offering-pledge-and-oath#comment-0