

On Obligations

“O ye who believe! Fulfill all obligations”, (Qur’an, Chapter V; Verse 1).

The Verse is admirable for its comprehensiveness and clarity. The word used here is ‘Uqud’. Its literal meaning: ‘Bondages’. This word is used in the Islamic language, for every kind of obligation. And by using it God has reminded mankind that every promise, agreement and undertaking is a kind of bondage from which man cannot free himself except by its fulfillment. That is why we find in the Islamic traditions that “Man is a slave of his promise”.

Obligations can be of various kinds. There are some involuntary obligations: Obligation towards God: obligations towards our fellow human beings, towards our family, towards our neighbors, towards our friends and our enemies. We have no option but to fulfill them. There are other obligations which we impose upon ourselves – between employer and employee, ruler and ruled. There are obligations between trading partners. A nation concludes a treaty with another nation. All such obligations are self-imposed.

Islam had laid down, in clear words, all the obligations and responsibilities which a man has to face with in his life. And it has put, real emphasis on the spoken word. It knows that written documents are nothing but a symbol to convey the message of the spoken words. If a man cannot be trusted about his spoken agreement, he cannot be trusted at all. It is a sign of decay in our society that the real thing (spoken word) has ceased to have any importance. Everybody insists on writing. And once man reaches this stage, even the written documents and agreements become worthless. In our present society agreements are made to be broken; treaties are concluded with an eye on the loopholes which may provide escape in future.

The first victim is not the party wronged; it is the morality of mankind which suffers the mortal blow.
