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33) Telling Lies

Another factor that causes division in a society is the indecent habit of telling lies which is prohibited by the Holy Quran, the Sunnah, consensus, and reason.

Telling lies is a major sin which disgraces and discredits human beings. It is a source of scandal, shame and misfortune.

A liar is miserable, impious and faithless. In this connection, God says: ***"Only they forge the lie who do not believe in Allah's communication."***[1] He also says: ***"Woe to every sinful liar."***[2]

A liar has been described as cursed, a dweller of hell, oppressor, misled and ruined by the Quranic verses.

When telling lies is so horrible, it requires the observing of Taqwa.

Imam Sajjad (AS) used to say to his son: "Keep away from little and big lies whether you are serious or kidding! Whoever tells lies in childhood, will do so in adulthood. Do you not know that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) has said: 'A servant may keep on speaking truthfully until God records him as a very truthful one, and a servant may keep on telling lies until God records him as a very lying one.'"[3]

It is inferred that one must not tell a lie even for fun, for he shall be considered as a liar.

In traditions, two kinds of lies are mentioned; the small lie and big lie. Perhaps, it is meant by a big lie that when one tells a lie about God, a prophet, or an infallible Imam. It is a major sin which makes fasting invalid. Such a lie is blameworthy and causes a society to dismember. This happened in the early days of Islam and its consequences have continued to exist until our time. Whatever losses Muslims suffer today arise from the same liars who created deviation in people's beliefs.

If ordinary lies cause division, bloodletting, and destruction, telling lies about God and the Messenger of Allah have not only the consequences of ordinary lies, but they ruin the beliefs and faith. An example is the fabrication of traditions by certain narrators.

Telling lies is worse than other sins and it is more harmful than the others are.

Imam Baqir (AS) has been reported as saying: “God Almighty has made locks for evils and has made the drinking of wine as the keys to these locks. Telling lies is worse than the drinking of wine is.”[4]

Commenting on this tradition, the late Allamah Majlesi says: “Wine here means all the intoxicants and locks here mean all that which prevents us from committing evils. Drinking wine makes intellect and thinking perish. What is worse than the drinking of wine is to tell lies about God, and about His proofs (authorities) which is equal to disbelief.”

Imam Ali (AS) has been reported as saying: “No God’s servant will enjoy the taste of faith, unless he abandons lying, both seriously and jokingly.”[5]

Imam Sadiq (AS) narrated that Jesus (AS) said: “Whoever tells many lies, shall lose his worth and dignity.”[6]

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: “Whenever a believer tells a lie without having any excuse, seventy thousand angels will curse him. A bad smell comes out of his stomach which will reach the heaven. Those who carry the Throne (angels) will curse him. God will write for him the sin of seventy commitments of adultery…”[7]

Some man came to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) saying: “Tell me about a virtue which entails the good of this world and the hereafter.” The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: “Do not tell a lie!” The man said: “I was in a state (of disobedience) that God was not pleased with me. I used to do all evil things, but I abandoned them all lest someone may ask me: did you commit so-and-so evil act? I had either to commit sin and say “yes” and be disgraced, or I had to tell a lie which was against the instruction of the prophet. So, I abandoned all the kinds of sin.”[8]

Therefore abandoning lies means abandoning all sins. Evidently, by abandoning sins, human beings will gain a lot whereas one who tells lies will not only suffer losses in the hereafter, but will suffer in this world and be ruined.

In the annotation of Makhlat, on page 174, it has been narrated: “Ahmed ibn Touloun was still a child when he came to his father, saying: ‘There are some poor people at the door. Write something for them.’ The father said: ‘Fetch me a pen and ink.’ When he went to bring a pen and ink, he saw one of the slave girls of his father having an indecent relation with one of the servants. Saying nothing, he brought the pen and ink for his father. The slave girl said to herself: ‘Ahmad will certainly tell the whole story to his father.’ So, she went to Touloun, saying: ‘Ahmad has molested me.’

Touloun accepted what she had said without making any investigation. He wrote a letter as follows: ‘As soon as you receive the letter, kill the one who carries the letter! He handed it over to Ahmad, saying to him: ‘Give it to so-and-so servant!’

Ahmad, who was unaware of the content of the letter, took hold of the letter. On the way, he met the slave girl who asked: 'What is the letter about?' Ahmad said: 'It is very important. The Amir has given it to me.' The slave girl took the letter and gave it to the same person with whom she had had sexual relation. She meant to increase the Amir's anger. The servant took the letter by accident and gave it to the meant person, who, after reading the letter, beheaded the servant immediately and brought his head to the Amir.

The Amir called Ahmad and asked him to tell what he had seen. Ahmad told the story of the servant with the slave girl. The Amir ordered the slave girl to be killed. Ahmad found a good position with the Amir where he was appointed as the governor of Egypt and Damascus."[9]

Telling lies affects speech as well as deeds and character. Sometimes, a human being does something that indicates his good nature, whereas his intention is not good. May God save us from such people who are like hypocrites.

Sometimes, a man may pretend to be God-fearing, one who remembers God a lot, who asks for forgiveness, who thanks God, who surrenders himself to God, who is a man of knowledge and piety, whereas he is really not so.

It is for the same reason that when some man, in the presence of Imam Ali (AS), said: "I seek forgiveness of Allah". Imam Ali (a.s.) said to him: You're your mother lose you! Do you know what the asking for Allah's forgiveness is? It is the degree of the exalted ones (in Paradise)."[10]

Sometimes, one may give a false testimony, may pretend not to know what he knows and has not to conceal, may break his promise, may take a false oath, and may deny the truth, though he has seen it with his own eyes. All these cases will disrupt the society. Social 'Taqwa' requires man to refrain from practicing such acts; otherwise, he has not observed 'Taqwa'.

It is worth mentioning that sometimes telling a lie is permissible and even necessary. The late Allamah Majlisi has written: "Some scholars have said: telling lies is not forbidden by itself, rather it is forbidden because it entails losses. Hence, if it entails no loss, or if it entails benefits for human beings, it is not only not unlawful, but recommended and sometimes obligatory. Examples on this are that when you make peace between two persons. When you play a trick on the enemy in Jihad … and when you ward off a loss from yourself or another Muslim whether it is a life loss or something financial or related to the honor of some one. Moralists have considered all these cases as exceptions.

Man can also use equivocation if the situation requires that, in a way that you both convince the other party and do not tell him a lie.

To sum it up, every Muslim's duty is to refrain from telling lies about God or people. When, in prayer, one says: ***"You do we serve and You do we beseech for help"*** he must truthfully say it.

When he says: “I have turned my face to the One who originated the heavens and the earth”, he must truthfully say it and should do away with anything other than God.

One of the other issues, which receive little attention while they are noteworthy, is the listening to backbiting, slander and lies as, unfortunately, a source of amusement. Imam Sadiq (AS) said: “If someone listens to a speaker, (as if) he worships him; if the speaker speaks of God, he (the listener) worships God, and if he speaks of Satan, he worships Satan”.[11]

Imam Sadiq (AS) was asked about the meaning of this saying of God: ***“And as to the poets, those who go astray follow them.”***[12] The Imam (AS) said: “They are story-tellers.”[13]

Imam Sadiq (AS) said: “Finding a storyteller in the mosque, Imam Ali (AS) sent him out.”[14]

It is inferred that as telling lies is not praiseworthy, listening to false statements is not praiseworthy as well. In this respect, one must observe piety (Taqwa).

1. Qur'an, 16:105.
2. Qur'an, 45:7.
3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 234.
4. Ibid., p. 236.
5. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 249.
6. Ibid., p. 250.
7. Ibid., p. 263.
8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69 p. 362, Anwar an-Nu’maniyyah, p. 274.
9. Al-Kalam Yajurr al-Kalam, vol. 2, pp. 144, 145.
10. Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 2, p. 1281.
11. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 246
12. Qur'an, 26:224.
13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 264.
14. Ibid., p. 265

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