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Breach of Promise

Various Responsibilities

Man comes to realize his responsibilities only when he reaches the stage of distinguishing between right and wrong. It is then that he can bear to observe the commands of the system of life and adhere to the chain of decisive decisions on which man's happiness and integrity depend. In other words, he is able to create harmony between his behavior and his bodily and spiritual needs.

Performing one's material and spiritual responsibilities is a necessity attested to by both reason and conscience, which call on man to steadfastly pursue advancement, and condemn such factors that cause disturbances in the system of living. Performing one's responsibilities plays a great role in furthering good manners and spirituality.

Despite some beliefs, responsibility is not slavery but real freedom. Responsibility draws for man the behavioral order that conforms to the most adequate system of living. Man's responsibilities exist as long as man exists but in varying forms. It is only appropriate to expect a person to fulfill his responsibilities if he is able and willing to do so.

Irresponsibility and violation of the rules is just ignorance of the fundamentals of life and an introduction to misery and destruction. There is not a greater mistake than carelessness about members of society. Therefore, we must prevent the process of eliminating individual duties for the sake of fulfilling our lusts. People who are captives of their own lusts prefer their own wishes and personal interests over their duties, which is the root of their failure and inability to reach human integrity at all.

According to Dr. Carl:

"A man who considers himself free to do anything is not like an eagle that roams the endless heavens but is like a runaway dog that finds himself in the middle of a street crowded with cars. This man can be compared to the dog that does whatever its cravings dictate, yet the man is more misguided than the dog for he does not know where to go or how to rid himself of the many dangers that surround him.

“We all agree that nature is subjected to certain laws. We must also realize that man’s life must contain a sequence of laws and regulations. We imagine ourselves as being totally independent of nature, and do whatever we wish. We do not want to admit that controlling our lives is not any different than driving cars from the viewpoint that both need adherence to certain rules. It is as if we think that the real goal for man is to eat, drink, sleep have sexual intercourse, and own a car, radio, etc...”

Obeying the rules is essential for human society, and this cannot be done without constantly observing the rules. Those who rely on their personal abilities can observe the facts of life with the light of reason and logic; and therefore, can bear to under–take various duties. They organize their lives according to the fundamentals of righteousness and truth and accept their duties without complaining. If a person fails in anyway, he still can find reason to be proud, for such failure comes not but after fulfilling his responsibilities.

We must search for happiness in real felicity. Felicity together with tranquility provide those who adhere to the calls of their conscience with success. The reward of those who observe their responsibilities is self–confidence and the harmony of both the mind and the conscience. This comforting feeling stems from the soul of those who carry out their responsibilities in life.

The Importance of Vows and Disadvantages of Violating Them

One of man’s vital duties in life is observing his vows. It is man’s nature to feel resentful for violating his vows and to feel satisfaction and goodness when fulfilling them in both individual and social cases, regardless of his religion. The fundamentals on which a person is brought up play a tremendous role in his future conduct. Thus, the necessity of an adequate upbringing and the development of its fruitfulness, and refraining from the things which damage man’s nature become readily obvious. Proper upbringing is the key to behavioral perfection.

Morality deems it necessary to observe and respect all verbal vows (agreements) that are contracted between parties, even if they lack legal guarantees. Violation of vows is considered as abandoning the rules of honor and dignity.

According to Buzarjumehr: “The violation of vows isolates honor.”

He who diverts himself from the right path by violating his vows (agreements) plants the seeds of refusal and resentment in the hearts of others. Eventually the violator’s actions will bring shame on him, he will then attempt to cover up his actions beneath excuses and contradictions and finally the people who know this person will see that he is a misguided hypocrite.

Violation of oaths is surely among the most active elements in creating social dissention and weakening ties between people. Undoubtedly, a society that is overwhelmed by dissention and mistrust will eventually loose the balance of its social life and as a result its members will not be able to trust anyone

not even the closest of relatives.

There is a type of individual who is not only careless about keeping his promises but he considers treason (betrayal of trust) to be cleaver and good management; these people even brag about their actions to others.

Fulfilling promises is essential for a person who wishes to live a social life; it is the basis for social happiness, development, and success.

It is narrated that a group of Khawarij were captured during the time of Hajjaj, who reviewed their cases and sentenced them as he wished. When the last man was standing in front of Hajjaj waiting for his sentence, time for prayer arrived. Hajjaj heard the call for prayer and turned the prisoner over to a noble and told him to bring him back in the morning.

The noble man left the palace with the prisoner. As they were walking the prisoner said: “I am not one of the Khawarij. I ask Allah by His Mercy to prove my innocence, for I am an innocent hostage in their hands. I ask you to let me spend the night with my wife and children so I can leave my will with them. I promise that I will return before the roaster crows in the morning.” After a moment of silence, the noble man agreed to the man’s insistence and permitted him to go home for the night.

A short time later the noble man fell victim to his fear and imagined that he would be the subject of Hajjaj’s fury. That night the man woke up terrified and was astonished to hear the prisoner, who he had given permission to go home, knocking at his door as he had promised. This noble man was overwhelmed with surprise and could not help but exclaim: “Why have you come to my door’?”

The prisoner replied: “He who recognizes Allah’s greatness and power, and makes Him a witness to his oath, must fulfill his promise.

The noble man proceeded with the prisoner to the palace of Hajjaj, and narrated to him the complete story. Hajjaj, who is known for his ruthlessness, was so moved by the man’s honesty that he allowed him to go free.

Now suppose that a commercial establishment disregarded its commitment in fulfilling its duties and regulations. Would this behavior lead anywhere but down, for the establishment would lose its credibility among the people.

There is not a more stabilizing factor than exchanged trust between members of a society. Interpersonal relations would not become stable, nor would trust become manifested in any society unless everyone gave as much importance to their verbal commitments as he does to his official and legal contracts. For example, a merchant should transfer goods on time to his clients, a borrower should pay his debts to his lenders.. .etc. It is then that disputes can be eliminated, and life can reach its ultimate goal.

It is essential for a person to review his capabilities before making any promises, and to refrain from

commitments that are outside his reach. Even if a person cannot fulfill his promises or meet his commitments he is responsible for them. Thus, if a person is not careful of what he says, he makes himself subject to blame and criticism.

Islam Prohibits Breach of Promises

Man is bound to behave reasonably so as to be considered a human being. The success of human societies is totally dependent upon the unity of its members. Therefore, it is of special importance that every person conduct his life according to the fundamentals of truth and righteousness, and wholeheartedly endeavors to refrain from any action that may cause dissention or disunity.

Furthermore, if the sanctity of oaths and promises stem from one's faith and morality they are more likely to be observed.

Islam so greatly condemns the violation of promises that it has made it illegal and unethical for its followers to violate their oaths even if they were made with tyrants and desolates. Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) said: "There are three affairs for which Allah gave no license (permission to violate): Conveyance of trust to both the righteous and the fallacious; Fulfillment of promises to both the righteous and the fallacious; And kindness to the parents whether they are righteous or sinful."[1]

The Holy Qur'an describes the believers in the following way:

"And those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenants." **(*23: 8*)**

Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah (S) counted breach of promises among the signs of hypocrisy. He said: "There are four traits that if one possess he is considered a hypocrite. If one of them is found in a person he has the characteristics of hypocrite unless he abandon it: (The four characteristics are) He who lies when he speaks; He who breaks his promises; He who betrays when he makes a vow; and He who erupts when he quarrels (with someone)."[2]

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) wrote the following to Malik Al Ashtar:

"Refrain from bragging to your subjects about your kindness (to them), and from preferring yourself (as governor) to your subjects, or to promise them and follow your promises with betrayal: for bragging thwarts kindness, preference conceals the light of righteousness, and betrayal deserves Allah's and people's resentment. Allah. Glory be to Him, said: it is a great resentment to Allah that you say that which you do not do:"[3]

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

"Fulfillment (of promises) is twin to truthfulness, and I know of no shield better than (truthfulness)." [4]

Islam gives special importance to the raising of children. It has clarified to parents their moral duties

towards their children through strict and comprehensive commands. Unless parents perform their duties in accordance to these moral principles, they cannot teach their children to adherence to moral excellence.

This is because actions speak louder than words. Therefore, the Messenger of Allah (S) prohibited men from breaking promises to their children. He said:

“And a man shall not make a promise to his child and not fulfill it.”[5]

Dr. Alindi said:

“A sixteen old boy who robbed a car every day was brought to me for treatment. I discovered that when the boy was seven or eight years old, his father had forced him to give his toy to an aristocrats daughter, for whom his father worked. That toy, to the boy, represented an ultimate dream for he had worked hard to get it. The boy’s father promised to buy a substitute toy but had unintentionally forgot. The hopeless boy sought revenge by stealing a piece of candy from his father’s pocket. A day later the boy broke into a house and stole some items.

“It was not difficult to treat the boy when he was brought to me. It is possible that the boy would have come to be a dangerous criminal if he was not properly treated. But now his chances of becoming a reasonable and self-confident individual are much greater.’[6]

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) emphasizes the way one should behave with his friends. He said:

“If you adopt an intimate friend, be his servant and grant him authentic faith and true sincerity.”[7]

Only people who possess excellent qualities and good morals are eligible for love and relationships.

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“The happiest among people is he who associates with kind people; he who does not oppress people when he deals with them; he who when he speaks does not lie; and he who when lie promises does not betray. He is of those whose valor is perfected, whose justness is manifest, and whose brotherhood is essential.”

According to Dr. Smiles:

“When you associate with spiritual people who possess noble traits, you feel an invincible power calling your souls and manners to excellence and majesty. Friendship with those who hold strong reason, noble traits, and more experience is a very valuable matter for such a relationship gives an opportunity to achieve high spirits, teach us new ways of appropriate behavior and direct our views about others to the righteous paths.”

Associating with kind people teaches us goodness and kindness, for good manners are like a light which

lights that which is around it and all that is near it. In conclusion, all men should know their responsibilities towards vows and promises.

1. al-Kafi v.2, p. 162
2. Bihar al-Anwar v. 15, p. 234
3. Mustadrak al- Wasa'il v.2, p.85
4. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 228
5. Nahj al -Fasahah p. 201.
6. Ma Wa Farzandane Ma.
7. Ghurar al-Hikam p. 223.

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