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Fulfilling Promises

Fulfilling one's promise shows one's true personality and being true to one's word plays a great role in strengthening social ties. It is one of the greatest virtues which can be witnessed in every aspect of the Prophet's life, in family relations and social and political interactions alike.

Both before and after he was appointed as a prophet, when it came to fulfilling promises he (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) held a high position and a well-deserved station. He would fulfill his promises under all circumstances, whether they were made to friends or enemies. If the other party had not negated their side of the agreement, he would always honor his word. Not even one case has been related where the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was the first to fail to act in accordance with an agreement. Instead, he tried to fulfill his promise at any cost, even when doing so caused him harm. Mention will be made of some examples demonstrating the importance he placed on this characteristic.

- 1. Abu 'Abdullah (Imam as Sadiq, peace be upon him) is quoted as saying, "The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) made an arrangement with a man that they would meet next to a boulder and so he said, 'I will wait for you here until you come back.' Then the heat of the sun began to beat down where he was standing and his companions urged him, 'O Messenger of God, what would happen if you were to just move to the shade?' He (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, 'I promised him (I would meet him) right here so if he doesn't come, he will be the one to have violated his oath."'1
- 2. In the Age of Ignorance (the period before the dawn of Islam) a number of youth from the tribe of Quraysh contracted an agreement called "hilf al-fudhul" aimed at defending the rights of the oppressed. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was one of those who took part in this agreement. Not only did he fulfill his word prior to his prophetic mission but also afterwards, whenever reference was made to this agreement, he would say, "I'm not willing to violate my oath even if I were to be offered the most valuable possessions to do so."2
- 3. 'Ammar Yasir has said, "I would graze our own sheep. Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) would also graze sheep. One day I said to him, 'I know of a good pasture located at 'Faji'.

Would you like to go there tomorrow?' He answered, 'Yes.' The next morning I saw that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) came sooner than I but he had not taken his sheep to the pasture. I asked, 'So why are you standing (here)?' He replied, 'I made a promise with you that we would take our sheep to the pasture together and I didn't want to violate my oath and take my sheep to the pasture before you."'3

4. It was the month of Dhu'l-Qa'dah and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) had decided to set out for Mecca in order to perform the lesser pilgrimage ('umrah'). He invited all the Muslims to take part in this journey with him. Then the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) headed for Mecca with a group of his followers. While on their journey, they were told, "(The tribe of) Quraysh (in Mecca) have learned of your journey and have prepared themselves for war, having set up at Dhi Tuwa, swearing not let you enter Mecca."

Since the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) had not set out with the intention of engaging in war, but had intended to perform 'umrah, he (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) started negotiations with them and they made a treaty that came to be known as the treaty of Hudaybiyyah. In this treaty, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) agreed to a number of things, including: "Any individual from the Quraysh who runs away from Mecca without his guardian's permission and becomes Muslim and joins the Muslims, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) must send him back to the Quraysh. But if a Muslim runs away and goes to the Quraysh, they are not obliged to return the Muslim."

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) made this pact with Suhayl, the representative of the Quraysh. However, Suhayl's son, Abu Jandal, who had become Muslim, and had been imprisoned by his father, ran away from Mecca and joined the Muslims.

When Suhayl saw him he said, "O Muhammad, this is the first case where you can fulfill your promise. If you want us to have peace, you must return him to us."

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) accepted to do so. Suhayl took his son by the collar and headed towards Mecca.

Abu Jandal cried, "O Muslims, are you going to allow them to take me back to the idol worshippers and be in their clutches?"

The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, "Be patient, Abu Jandal. God will provide relief for you and others like you. We have made an oath with them and we cannot violate our oath."4

5. One of the clearest examples of the Prophet keeping his word in social matters is the incident concerning Abu Basir. Abu Basir was one of the Muslims in the battle of Mecca who fled to Madinah after the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah. The elders of the Quraysh wrote a letter to the Messenger of God

(peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and gave it to a particular individual who, along with his slave, was to take it to Madinah in order to implement the law in regards to Abu Basir and bring him back to Madinah. When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) received the letter, he requested Abu Basir to come and he said to him, "You know that we have made an oath with the Quraysh and it is not right for us to violate our oath. God will provide relief for you and others like you."

Abu Basir said, "O Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family)! Are you going to return me to the enemies who will cause me to forsake my religion?

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, "Go back, Abu Bas'ir. God will provide relief for you and others like you."

And so Abu Basir headed back with the two that were sent to take him. When they arrived at Dhil Halifah, they stopped next to a wall. Abu Basir looked at the man and asked, "Is that sword of yours sharp?"

"Yes it is," the man replied.

"Can I see it?" asked Abu Basir.

"Yes, if you would like," replied the man. Abu Basir took the sword and killed the man without hesitation. His slave, who saw this incident, ran to Madinah out of fear. The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was sitting in a mosque when all of a sudden the slave entered. As soon as he (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) saw him he said, "This man has seen a frightening scene." Then he asked, "What has happened?"

"Abu Basir killed that man," he replied.

At this point, Abu Basir arrived and said, "O Messenger of God, you were faithful to your oath in turning me over to these two men. But I feared my faith was in danger..."

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, "If this man has supporters, this event will cause a great war." Abu Basir realized that if he stayed in Madinah the Makkans would send people after him once again. So he left Madinah and headed for the shores of the Red Sea. There, the Qurayshi caravans would pass by on their way to the province of Sham5.

When the Muslims who were enslaved in Mecca heard the story of Abu Basir and what the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) had said to him, they escaped at all costs in order to join Abu Basir. After a while, his supporters numbered about 70 in all. At this point, they had become a serious threat to the caravans of the Quraysh that passed by. They killed all members of the Quraysh that they could. And they would harass the Qurayshi caravans that passed that way.

In order to put an end to this harassment, the Quraysh wrote a letter to the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) urging him to request these men to come to Madinah and thereby relieve the Quraysh of this hardship. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) summoned them and they came to Madinah.

- 1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 95.
- 2. Sirah al-Halbi, vol. 1, p. 131.
- 3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 224.
- 4. Sirah ibn Hisham, vol. 3, p. 332.
- 5. Modern Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Syria
- 6. Sirah ibn Hisham, vol. 1, p. 337.

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