



KEEPING PROMISES

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Objectives >>>

Students should:

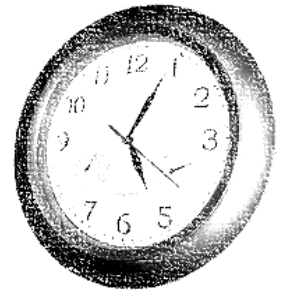
- Be reminded that keeping promises is a sign of a believer and breaking trust is a sign of a hypocrite
- Understand that a promise made to anyone must be fulfilled and failure to fulfil it (without a just cause) is a sin
- Understand briefly the rules of Nadhr and 'Ahd
- Understand that trust needs to be earned through being worthy of it

KEEPING PROMISES

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ

"Those who are faithfully true to their trusts and to their covenants" (23:8)

In the social rules of Islam, it is extremely important for a Muslim to keep a promise they have made, and this is one of the signs of a believer, as can be seen in the ayah quoted above. The Imams (as) would say that their promise was a debt they owed and they would not rest until they had repaid that debt.



THE PROBLEM OF BREAKING PROMISES

Unfortunately, breaking promises is a problem that is common amongst Muslims. We easily break promises we have made to other people, especially when it comes to turning up on time when we have promised to do so. Our gatherings always begin late and finish late, and we have become very used to this. We also often make promises we know we cannot keep. We promise our children an expensive gift, or promise a person we will help them with a problem, but later realise this promise is too difficult to keep and so we back out. These acts are not liked by Allah (SWT), who says in His Holy Book:

"O you who believe, why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that you should say that which you do not do." (61:2-3)

Therefore, before we speak and make a promise, we need to think first and see whether we can keep this promise or not. If we cannot, it is far better to not make the promise in the first place.

In fact, breaking promises is one of the signs of a hypocrite. The Prophet (saw) says:

“The signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he lies, when he makes a promise, he breaks it, and when he is entrusted, he betrays”ⁱⁱ

THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING PROMISES

As with fulfilling trusts, keeping promises is an obligation without exceptions, as we can see from this narration.

Imam al-Bāqir (as) said:

ثلاث لم يجعل الله عز وجل فيهنّ رخصة: أداء الأمانة
الى البرّ و الفاجر، و الوفاء بالعهد للبرّ و الفاجر، و بر
الوالدين برّين كانا أو فاجرين

“There are three situations where Allah (SWT) did not make any exceptions: respect to parents, keeping promises and fulfilling trusts”ⁱⁱⁱ

Even the people of the Age of Ignorance saw breaking promises as a bad and evil thing. Therefore, as Muslims, we must be extra careful to not do something that even the people of the Age of Ignorance knew was wrong.



As Muslims we **must** keep our promises to **anyone** we make them to. It does not matter whether the other person is young or old, Muslim or non-Muslim, good or bad. We also have an example from Imam Zainul Abidīn (as) who said that even if a person entrusted him with the sword that his father was killed with, and he promised to return it to the owner, he would do so.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NADHR AND ‘AHD

The following jurisprudential ruling also shows the importance of a promise. Nadhr and ‘Ahd are two specific types of promises. A nadhr is one someone promises to do something if a certain other things occurs (e.g. if I pass my exams, I will fast two days), and uses the name of Allah in making this promise. An ‘Ahd is when uses the name of Allah to make a covenant with Allah that he will do a certain thing, using the specific wording: ‘Ahadtul Allah’ or ‘Allaya ‘Ahdul Allah’.

If one makes a nadhr and later breaks it, the penalty is that he must feed ten poor people or fast three days. However, if he makes an ‘Ahd and then breaks it, then this is considered a bigger offence and he must feed sixty poor people or fast sixty days if he or she breaks the ‘Ahd.

EARN YOUR TRUST

In Islam it is wrong to simply trust anyone without first seeing the person’s actions and behaviour. For you to trust anyone, it is important to first know that he or she is a person who always speaks the truth. As we said earlier, the one who breaks their promise is a hypocrite – and trusting a hypocrite will only cause you loss and suffering.

Therefore when it comes to wanting your parents or teachers to trust you, you have to prove to them that you are a person who keeps your promises, does not lie and does not abuse the trust or responsibility that is given to you. If you can do that, your parents, teachers and even friends will trust you.

Homework

Q1. Keeping our promises has the benefit of:

- Earning us trust amongst people
- Earning us rewards from Allah (SWT)
- Both of the above

Q2. If a person makes a vow or promise to do something for the sake of God:

- They must do that thing or pay a penalty
- They do not have to do it
- They should not do it

Q3. The signs of a hypocrite are:

- He or she does not pray
- He or she does not fast
- He or she does not keep their promises

ⁱ References

Lecture by Sheikh Mansour Leghaei – Lesson 8 on Social Rules in Islam – Keeping Promises

Youth & Morals, by Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari - <http://www.al-islam.org/youth-and-morals-sayyid-mujtaba-musavi-lari/>

ⁱⁱ [al-Faqih vol.4 p.361]

ⁱⁱⁱ [al-Kaafi vol.2 p. 162]