

zyāayyuhā alladhīna āmanū awfū bil-‘uqūdi (Surah al-Maida 5:1)

Oh ye who believe! Fulfil obligations, your promises

We live in a world where promises are broken every single day. People change plans at the last minute, parents fail to keep their word to their children, colleagues miss a deadline, friends do not repay their loans. These instances are very common. Just fifty years ago, a broken promise could shatter someone; today, it is often accepted as a normal part of life. Commitments are disregarded. This widespread disregard for commitment weakens and destabilizes the very fabric of a society or a community.

Breaking promises erodes trust and can significantly harm relationships, whether personal or professional. When a promise is broken, it often leads to feelings of betrayal, making it difficult to trust that person again. Consistently breaking promises also damages our reputation, making it harder for us to be taken seriously in the future. Beyond interpersonal effects, broken promises can contribute to stress, anxiety, and disappointment for all involved. Even breaking promises to ourselves can lead to self-doubt, lack of confidence, uncertainty about one's competence and self worth, and make it harder to achieve personal goals.

Allah hates and finds it repulsive that a person makes intentions that they do not mean to actually fulfill. In the first verse of Surah al-Ma'idah, Allah called upon the believers: "Oh you who believe! Fulfill your promises." In Surah Maryam (19:54), Allah also praised the Prophet Ismail (as) for fulfilling his promise: "He was true to his promises; He was a Messenger and a Prophet." In Surah al-Isra (17:34), He said "And keep the promise; the promise is a responsibility."

Breaking promises is considered a serious sin in Islam and, according to Hadith, is one of the defining traits of a hypocrite. Such a weakness stands in direct opposition to the qualities of a true believer. Failing to uphold a promise is regarded as a manifestation of hypocrisy. We are taught to honor every commitment, whether it is made to others, to ourselves, or to Allah Ta'ala. Neglecting or breaking a promise is closely linked to dishonesty and hypocrisy. It is narrated that the Prophet (saws) said: "There are three signs of a hypocrite: When he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he betrays his trust." Imam Al-Ghazali (ks) explains that this hadith is applicable to those who promise something while already intending not to fulfil it, or those who, without an excuse, decide later not to fulfil the promise. Those who promised but could not fulfil those due to proper reasons

are not hypocrites. But we should be careful not to present a false excuse, as Allah knows our inner thoughts and intentions.

When we say something we should be extremely careful, because as soon as we say something it is written. Allah the Almighty says in Surah Qaf (50:18): "Not a word does he utter, but there is a watcher by him ready to record it." So, before we make a promise, we should consider whether we can fulfil it, and we should always keep promises. When we make a promise to someone, we are making that promise to Allah, so we must speak carefully.

One of the companions of Rasulallah (saws) said, "I was a young boy, I was playing outside, and my mother said to me, 'Come home, let me give you something,' trying to entice me to come inside the house. And the Prophet (saws) heard her calling me and asked, 'Did you actually intend to give him something?' And she said, 'Ya Rasulallah, I was going to give him a date,' something to get the child back into the house. And the Prophet (saws) said, 'Had you not been telling the truth, Allah would have written a lie upon you. Don't say things you don't intend to do.'"

When we embrace Islam, we make numerous promises to Allah. These vows encompass every facet of our lives, from fundamental acts of worship, affirming that "We will only worship You and we only ask from You." We pledge not to lie, steal, hurt, or cheat, and to follow the exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad (saws). Essentially, our promises cover everything from how we live to how we behave. It is crucial to understand that we will be tested on everything that we have promised. Sometimes, we make promises during moments of vulnerability or uncertainty. We might declare, "If I am in that situation, I will act a certain way." We say, "Oh Allah, if You grant me this position, I'll do such-and-such," or "If I reach this financial milestone, I will give back," or "If You bring this person into my life, I'll change," or "If this problem is resolved, I will do better." We make these heartfelt promises repeatedly, yet often fall short of fulfilling them. Allah-u Ta'ala will indeed test us precisely based on those words.

Breaking our promises with Allah-u Ta'ala creates a distance between us and our creator. It is easy to make promises to ourselves and to Allah, especially in moments of sincerity or desperation. But how often do those intentions translate into lasting action? We must establish deep, personal reflection on the promises we have made and often broken. Such reflection will guide us toward a more honest and committed spiritual path.

We can take a number of steps in order to become sincere people who keep our promises. Sincerity is a quality that Allah likes most. First we must remember all the promises that we have made to Allah and recommit them now. This means consciously aligning our actions with our deepest intentions. Then we must repent for broken pledges. We must acknowledge the times we have not followed through, and failed.

We must seek sincere repentance for these unfulfilled promises. This step is about humbly recognizing our shortcomings and asking for forgiveness. Then, we must be deeply introspective in order to understand the underlying reasons for our inconsistency. Recognizing the traits and state of mind that lead to hypocrisy is crucial. Additionally, we must seek righteous company who are dedicated, inspiring us to maintain our commitments. Finally, we must beg Allah for firmness and consistency in our faith and actions.

May Allah make us among those who are truthful and sincere in our commitments. We seek refuge in Allah from being a people who say what they have no intention to do. Oh Allah, make us a people whose intentions are even better than what they are able to materialize in their actions. Let our tongues match our hearts and let our deeds match our tongues. We ask Allah subhana wa ta'ala to include us among people of truthfulness. May Allah make us truthful in everything that we say, and that we plan to do. May Allah allow us to fulfill our promises to Him, and may Allah subhana wa ta'ala fulfill His promise to us, as Allah subhana wa ta'ala never betrays His promise.

Yurdaer Al Latif Al Jerrahi