The Role of Keeping One's Promise in Consolidation of Social Relations According to Imam Ali

Sayyed Reza Mosavi[1]
Zeinab Ghasemi Ghoharrizi[2]

Abstract: *This paper aims to examine, based on Nahjul-Balaghe, the Imam Ali's view about the role of keeping words in strengthening social relations. Keeping word is one of most apparent moral and social values which can improve social relations and prepare the ground for healthy and humane relations. Keeping one's promise, in Imam Ali's attitude, is a divine obligation and is respected by all people, specially Muslims. Realizing this among all social classes requires some conditions including faith, honesty, piety, dignity and equanimity, and so on; and its effects are collective trust, improvement and progress, security, peace, justice, cooperation, order and so on. Therefore if society's members adhere to*

[1]Department of Islamic Studies, Baft Branch, Islamic Azad University, Baft, Iran Assistant Professor،Corresponding Author.R3131393@gmail.com .09139478064.

[2]Master degree student, Department of Sciences of Hadith, "Orientation of Nahjul-Balaghe" University of Quran and Hadith, Qom- z.ghasemi12@yahoo.com

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Imam Ali's guides and keep their promises, then collective trust spreads through the whole society so that sin and crime rate in the society will be decreased and relations will be formed according to honesty and justice. Then, the society makes its way towards progression and development, and all enjoy its advantages. This paper is based on descriptive-analytical research methodology and its method to collect data is library searching.

Keywords: Keeping one's promise, Consolidation, Social Relations, Imam Ali

Introduction

Human being is a social being and society needs laws and rules to strengthen and to preserve social relations in it and Keeping one's promise is one of the most important rules in this regard. Keeping one's promise is an important virtue of social ethics which humans understand its necessity intrinsically, and it has an important role in organization and elevation of the society, thus we can consider it as one of the most fundamental bases for happiness and healthiness of the society and an individual. Keeping one's promise is like a thread that consolidates and fastens social relations, and if there is no such obligation in a society then sound social relations will be collapsed and the society loses its creditability and position.

Keeping one's promise is discussed from many different aspects, but this paper tries to examine this subject scientifically from the aspect of "social ethics". Like many other ethical terms, keeping your promise also is a mutual matter and has two sides; it may occur between God and human or among humans, which here our focus is the latter.

Binding to promise and vow for Imam Ali is a principle which is accepted by all peoples, he said that: "there is no other obligation among divine obligations like keeping one's promise which is accepted by all peoples despite their different beliefs and worldviews."[1]

[1] Nahjul-Balaghe, letter 53.

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Therefore keeping one's promise is one of the most important social bases to which if we pay attention, then our life will form around the pivot of trust and all will be united, and moving on this way can assure the life's correct path, therefore the rate of crime, lies and betrayal will decrease in our society, but if we ignore this base what will happen is disorder and distrust among people, as high physical and verbal quarrels, emotional and legal divorces are some examples of negligence in doing this divine obligation. Therefore study on this matter is necessary aiming to know about its role in consolidation of social relations; also it is necessary to promote society gradually.

Mohsen Sa'idian in his book "Keeping Word or Essence of Manhood" (2009) collected Quran's verses and narrations from Imams and used stories and poems to examine keeping one's promise and trusteeship, and Mostafa Delshad in his "Sun's Countenance" (2012) analyzed Imam Ali's deeds in different individual and social fields, also he briefly discussed "the principle of keeping one's promise and vow". Kezem Rahbar in a paper titled "Vows and Covenants in Nahjul-Balaghe" (2007) has referred to kinds of vows and covenants in Nahjul-Balaghe.

The present paper seeks to answer this major question that what is the role of keeping one's promise in consolidating social relations in the view of Imam Ali based on Nahjul-Balaghe? The present paper's methodology is descriptive-analytical and its tool to collect data is Imam Ali's words which are found in narrations and specifically in Nahjul-Balaghe and its commentaries.

Definition of Ahd (Vow)

"***Vafa***" (loyalty to duty) means "accomplishing something"[1]. "***Ahd***" means "keeping and observing something continuously, and "***covenant***" is called as Ahd because it is "necessary to observe it"[1].

[1] Ghoreshi Banayi, 1986, vol 7

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Vafa or Ahd (keeping vows) means that promises should be accomplished fully as they were promised[2]. According to Holy Quran: 5, 1, "***O, you who believe! Fulfill the promises",*** keeping one's promise is an obligation[3].

Consolidation means strengthening and fastening[4]. And the term "relations" as plural of relation means ties or connections[5] and something that makes a connection. Social relation in sociology is used for the description of conditions in which two or more persons are engaged in a behavior in which each of the sides interprets it meaningfully.[6]

Social Effects of keeping one's promise

Keeping one's promise has a direct effect on all aspects of individual and social life.[7] Therefore it leads to more equality for social life. Here some effects of keeping one's promise on society will be introduced.

1. Collective Trust and Consolidation of Social Relations

The most valuable property of a society is mutual trust among its members. Principally it is mutual trust that can connect separate individuals to be like a chain, links to each other.

Keeping one's promise leads to firmness of all social relations. As Imam Ali said: "keeping word, surely, is a companion of veracity and I know no other shield more preserver than keeping word"[8].

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[1] Ragheb Esfahani, 2001, see Mesbah Yazdi, 1999, vol 3
[2] Ghoreshi Banayi, Ibid
[3] sajadi, 2000, vol 2 and 3
[4] Mo'in, 2007, vol 1
[5] Ibid. vpl 2
[6] Weber, 1994
[7] Tabatab'i, 1994, vol 5
[8] Sharif Razi, Ibid, sermon 41

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On the other hand, breaking word and not keeping promises have most effect on development of pessimism and distrust among friends. In this regard Imam Ali said: "don't trust in a friend who doesn't keep his word."[1]

However, what brings consistency in society is collective trust, and keeping word has a direct effect to produce this trust. The greater binding to vow among people leads to more trust among them and through increasing the trust, more consistency will happen among society's members, therefore social activities take place on a correct way.

2. Growth and Development of Society

On one hand, keeping word assure healthiness of relations, and on the other hand, is a base for development of society and better realization of its goals; All social affairs will be destroyed through violation of vow and covenant and trust turns into distrust and a hard obstacle will be placed on the way of society's progression and achieving organizational goals. Binding to vow and promise is the way of reaching best individual and social achievements, as Imam Ali said: "being trustee is a virtue for its owner"[2]

Naturally in a country whose people regard loyalty to their promise as a human, moral and religious duty for themselves and are diligent to observe it, financial commitments and trade contracts will be formed according to full trust and confidence, so this may lead to the country's economic growth and peoples' healthiness, because in this way debtors will pay their debt in due time and sellers will deliver goods according to their commitments to purchasers, thus economy's wheel will turn smoothly and continuously .

More than everyone, Imam Ali has emphasized that his relatives and families keep their vows with people, as when Aghil, his brother, insisted

[1] Tamimi Amadi, 1987

[2] Tamimi Amadi, Ibid

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to be given some money from public properties, Imam Ali brings close a heated iron to his body as a warning and said "like a mother moaning over her child death, moaners cry for you, you complain of an iron which a man heated it playfully, but you push me towards a fire which is flamed by God's Rage, thus you cry for pain but don't I cry for ignition of God's Rage?"[1]. Therefore keeping word and vow brings about power and respect, but breaking it causes weakness and destruction.

3. Security and Peace

If vows and covenants are observed in a society, then security and stability for this society are guaranteed and people can do their work without concern and anxiety. As Imam Ali in a letter to Malek Ashtar said: "if you enter a covenant with your enemy or promise him mercy, keep your word and do it and defend your word by your life! … with His blessing and mercy God places a vow which is announced in His name as a shelter for His creatures to be in peace there and for their works invoke Him".[2]

Any covenant which does not oppose rightness and divine canon is a divine one, thus for Imam Ali, any such covenant with anyone, even enemy, is a divine covenant.

God has laid vow among His creatures in order to develop peace and security in society by committing to it, thus Imam Ali said: "anyone whom loyalty has laid in his heart, people are secure from his disloyalty".[3]

Anybody who has placed loyalty in his heart and stood resolute about it, although it is a concealed matter, his heart will be influence and he will

[1] Sharif Razi, Ibid, sermon 224

[2] Ibid. letter 53

[3] Jamal Al-Din Khansari, 1990, ch 5

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be secured from disloyalty and will become a friend of others, but in contrast, disloyalty causes lack of security".[1]

4. Emergence of Social Justice

Justice means placing everything in its proper place.[2] Social justice can be realized in the light of keeping one's promise, and if because of power or any other excuse, some people are able to break their promises freely, then social justice is the first thing that will be collapsed. After taking power, Imam Ali immediately attempted to spread justice among people and insisted on his vow for fulfillment of social justice. He returned to public treasury that was given to specific persons by Osman and said: " I swear to God that I will return public treasury to people, even if they are spent on wives' dowries or spent to purchase female slaves, because justice (for all classes of society) is an openness, and someone who feels that justice is tight (and bitter) for him, oppression is tighter for him"[3]. "Justice is the cause of prosperity in society and public consent, it extinguishes riots".[4] Maintaining justice equals enforcing the highest divine order under whose light everything become alive and firm. "The generous God makes justice as the pillar of humans' life and their survival, and also the cause of removal of cruelties and sins and enlightening of Islam's light".[5]

Declaring people's rights upon him and his rights upon people, Imam Ali believed that his most important right upon people is their loyalty after their covenant with him: "Oh people, I have a right upon you and you

[1] Ibid.
[2] Sharif Razi, Ibid, fragment 437
[3] Sharif Razi, Ibid, sermon 15
[4] Makarem Shirazi, Ibid, vol 1
[5] Tamimi Amadi, ibid

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have a right upon me … and my right upon you is that you be loyal about the allegiance you pledged to me".[1]

Allegiance is a covenant that is established between Imam and people, a firm and binding covenant based on which Imam and the ruler must always considers people's prudence, develop security, and prepare necessary conditions for society's progress, and also people are obligated to back their Imam and act as his powerful arm and never do a thing opposed to their covenant with him.

Someone who, according Islam, has a covenant with others, must enforce it because observation of social justice is more necessary than individual interest and all dissonances are because of injustices. Imam Ali said: "by justice, I covered you with the robe of successfulness and healthiness".[2]

5. As a Cause for Friendship and Superiority

Keeping one's promise is the best tool in a friendship. As Imam Ali said: "loyalty leads to intimacy"[3], also he said: "loyalty is fortress of lordship".[4] Loyalty is the ornament of brotherhood, as Imam Ali said: "loyalty is companion of trustfulness and ornament of brotherhood".[5]

Those who are loyal to their vows are respectful for each other and this makes them friend, but disloyal ones aren't favorable and no one tended to have a relationship with them, thus social relations go towards destruction and destabilization.

If people respect their vows and are loyal to them, then unity will be preserved among them and this prevents enemy's domination, because as

[1] Sharif Razi, Ibid, sermon 34
[2] Sharif Razi, Ibid, sermon 78
[3] Agha Jamal Al-Din Khansari, Ibid, vol 4
[4] Tamimi Amadi, Ibid
[5] Ibid

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Imam Ali cited from prophet Muhammad, when people break their words, then enemy will dominate them.[1] Thus Keeping one's promise is the cause of friendships and preserves them.

6. Beneficence and Receiving Divine Reward

Beneficence and goodness are fruitful if they are occurred by loyal people, as Imam Ali said: "beneficence doesn't lead to a good effect unless it is done by a loyal person".[2] If one makes a vow and keeps it and is loyal to it, then God will reward him. Imam Ali said: "keep your promise, so it brings you good rewards".[3]

7. Reduction of Crime and Sin in Society

If keeping word is predominate in a society, crime and sin decrease in that society, while breaking vow and disloyalty result in growth of sin. In this regard Imam Ali said: "breaking word will make sin doubled".[4] He in another place said: "breaking one's word will increase burden of sin and will decrease the value of man"[5]

8. Cooperation and Order

With attention to their conditions, people are necessitated to cooperate with each other, and this cooperation is visibly beneficial to families, unions, organizations, the urban society, and at international level. The sense of cooperation is placed inside human being intrinsically so that in hardships they help each other.

Keeping one's promise is one of the elements that make durable cooperation have meaning among people, because if one doesn't bind to his vow then everything becomes disordered and no one can trust others.

[1] Sheikh Sadoogh, 2006, vol 2
[2] Agha Jamal Al-Din Khansari, Ibid, vol 6
[3] Ibid, vol 3
[4] Tamimi Amadi
[5] ibid

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Therefore no cooperation may be occurred in social affairs, and finally those who have power will be able to do everything they want and protect their interests.

In the light of obedience to law and social rules, cooperation can protect order and prevent chaos in society. If vows are broken in a society cooperation will be damaged hardly and disorder will dominate over things. Imam said: "orderly activities will be destroyed because of discordance and wrong doings"

In Malek Ashtar covenant, Imam Ali insistently has advised about discipline in works. "Work of everyday must be done in same day, because every work has a specific time for itself".[1]

Avoiding hastiness and laziness about doing works are necessary for Imam Ali, as he said: "avoid hastiness at a work whose time isn't due or laziness at a work that is allowed time".[2] Thus if one is committed to his obligations and does them in the proper time and avoids disloyalty, the spirit of cooperation and order will be preserved in society.

9. Individual Value and Evaluation

Life is the scene of examination for reaching the human perfections and growth, and elevation of human owes to the degree of perfections which one reaches to, such perfections give beauty and merit to both form and essence of life, and also are the cause of happiness in eternal life for human beings. Keeping one's promise is the base of humanity and a relying point for all ethical matters, and human's humanity is evaluated on the basis of keeping word. It is expressed in a saying of Imam Ali: "the value and worth of people are evaluated by their keeping word".[3]

[1] Sharif Razi, Ibid, letter 53

[2] ibid

[3] Agha Jamal Al-Din Khansari, Ibid, vol 7

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It is the relational abilities that determine a person's personality, and a person with Quranic personality is one who has ability to be present in society in a balanced and sound way. Keeping one's promise is the criterion for evaluation of a person's value and credit, and we mustn't be deceived about his science, since science is as a shell and keeping word is as the core; and human is like a tree whose roots are his commitment to his words. The one who has healthier roots will regard moral matters as principle and will do his best to insist on them.

In Ghase'ah sermon Imam Ali said: "if there is no way but to be extremist, then direct your extremism towards generosity and to do good deeds … thus insisting on doing good deeds like loving your neighbors and keeping your words".[1] The most perfect moral trait for Imam Ali is keeping his promise.

About description of pious persons, holy Quran also said that keeping one's promise is a trait for them: ***"when pious ones enter a covenant they will bind to their word"*** *(the holy Quran, 2:177)*.

Conclusions

1. Keeping one's promise has valuable effects on social life among which one of the most important one is mutual trust among society members. This trust is the most significant social property and is the origin of many other effects. It can be said that growth, development, security and peace of the society, consolidation of friendly relations, cooperation and order can be reached in the light of mutual trust.

2. Social justice for Imam Ali may be emerged through keeping one's promise. And this leads to public consent and placing right in its place. If keeping one's promise is promoted in a society, then crime rate and sin will be decreased, and social relations will be healthy and firm.

[1] Sharif Razi, Ibid, sermon 192

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