

## MODULE 5

**Class Title:** Honouring commitments

**Aim of the lesson:** To understand the importance of honouring commitments

**Category:** Personal Development

**Lesson Format:** Power point presentation with discussion

(Greeting to students) *Assalamu 'alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*  
(*Ta'awwudh*) *A'oodhu billahi min Ash Shaytaanir Rajeem*  
(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*  
(*Du'a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul 'uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* [Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verses 25-28]

Slide 1:

Today *inshaAllah* we will talk about commitments and promises and their significance in our religion. I'm sure you all have an idea about it and it's not an alien concept for you. We will also be seeing it from the logical perspective.

Slide 2:

On his death bed, no body ever wished that he had spent more time attending parties. Do you agree with that? Can you imagine that one day when you are a hundred years old, and on your death bed, you are saying "Alas! I didn't go to enough parties." Do you think this is possible? You will hopefully be worried about more important matters...like Hell and Heaven and Allah (swt). You'll be thinking about all the good deeds you could have done, all the deposits that you could have made in your bank account which is with Allah (swt). There are deposits and there are withdrawals in our account for the hereafter. Deposits are good deeds, withdrawals are bad deeds. So the only desire one has at the end of our lives is, or at least should have, is, "I wish I had done more; because now this life is finishing, and there's another life beginning and I am worried."

Slide 3:

Mathematics is a very high scoring subject; it is possible to get full marks in it. Like wise, we can gather unlimited deeds in this deposit box, this bank account that we have with Allah (swt).

Slide 4:

We can score high for *Jannah* by working on our relationships with people around us; people around us are like mathematics - they are like numbers for us. If you mess around with them, the numbers will go really low, and if you have a good dealing with them your numbers can go really high.

Slide 5:

This is not just for the *Aakhirah*, even your day to day life becomes easier when you have good relationships. Having good relationships with people is like putting butter on both sides of the bread; one side is the *duniya*, the other side is the *Aakhirah*. It's a win-win situation.

Slide 6:

The catch is that you need to keep being nice every day to people around you in order to succeed in getting into their good books. It's not just a one time thing. Aaminah can be really nice to Khadijah one day, but if Aaminah really wants Khadijah to be in her good books, she will have to be nice to her every day; its not a one off thing. It's a constant struggle. A strong relationship is always the result of steady deposits, laid over a long period of time.

Slide 7:

According to Martin Luther King Jr., life's most urgent question should be, "What are you doing for others?" Why the urgency? We can understand its importance, but why is it urgent? Because we don't know how long we will live. Depending on the kind of relationship that we are trying to improve on, you don't know how long the other person will live for either; so whatever we want to do for others will have to start now in order to have the desired results.

Slide 8:

We have bank accounts with a lot of people and a lot of entities, like Allah (swt), our parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, friends, etc. and we need to keep on increasing on these deposits if we want to have a good solid account based in *Jannah* with Allah (swt). It's quite logical.

Slides 9 - 10:

Six very important deposits and withdrawals for our relationships; do you remember, the good deeds are the deposits and the bad deeds are the withdrawals?

Let's see what the deposits are and what the withdrawals are. I'll only talk about six of them.

Being honest is a deposit and dishonesty is a withdrawal.

Keeping promises is a deposit and breaking a promise is a withdrawal.

Acts of kindness are deposits and keeping it to yourself, being selfish, is a serious withdrawal.

Being loyal is a deposit and gossiping and breaking confidence is a withdrawal. Did you notice that they are almost opposite to each other?

The fifth one – listening, is a very good deposit and withdrawal is not listening, not paying attention to others, just keep talking yourself. Not caring what anyone else has to say.

And the sixth thing is saying sorry; a very powerful deposit. The withdrawal is being arrogant, not saying sorry; “It’s not my fault.” Even if it is, you will say that it’s not your fault.

Slides 11 -13:

Today we will focus on keeping promises. What does keeping a promise mean? It means holding your word to something; when you make a commitment then you have to hold on to it. You must do whatever you claim you’ll do; that’s keeping a promise.

Keeping small commitments and promises is very, very vital to building trust. If a person does not keep a promise, will you trust that person next time? Let me give you some magical advice for building trust; give promises sparingly, and then do everything you can to keep them. Make few promises in your life, and then hang on to those claims. Some people are very nice and polite, and out of that politeness they make a lot of promises which they can’t keep. That’s not a good idea. It’s a serious withdrawal in your book. So, the trick is, make few promises and the promises that you make, make sure that you honour them.

Slide 14:

If you can’t keep a commitment, let the other person know why. For example, you can’t say, ‘I called you to tell you that I’m not coming. I told your servant.’ You have to tell that particular person; s/he has to be informed and it’s your responsibility to do so. Or if you’re sending a text informing the person that you won’t be able to keep a commitment, make sure you get a reply. You can’t just blame it on the network or a third person in between. If ever you are not able to keep a commitment then the least you can do is to let the other person know that you can’t make it.

Slide 15:

If you keep your commitment to your parents; if you tell them that you’re going to do something and then you actually do it, it’s a very big deposit in your parents’ account. You will really get into their good books; and it’s not just parents, it’s with friends as well. Won’t you prefer to be friends with somebody who actually walks her talk or somebody who means what she says? It would be a huge compliment for me if somebody said, ‘You know, the good thing about you is that when you say something, you honour your word; you make sure you do it.’

Slide 16:

Withdrawals in commitments take long to rebuild. If somebody breaks their promise, will you trust them next time? It takes a lot of time to build the confidence that’s

really required in a relationship and it breaks very easily. One commitment gone and the relationship is down on the ground, flat on the face. Then it takes a long time to rebuild, weeks and months and years to build that confidence. Hence it is extremely important to maintain this.

Slide 17:

Sometimes it is even irreversible; once it's gone, it's gone. The other person may never, ever trust you again.

Slides 18 -19:

When you use the term 'commitment', what does it include? It's not just making a simple promise to your friend; it can be more than that. It could be expressing acceptance or rejection of an agreement; perhaps even a written document. For example, when you joined Perceptions, there was an admission form. Either you or your parents signed the form. That signature told us that you had made a commitment that you will be coming to Perceptions from this time to this time. Or buying or selling a property; you sign a form, and after a couple of steps you have a new piece of property, or you have sold property. So what's the significance of the signature?

Slide 20:

It's a claim that you are making that you have read the whole document. Taking an oath is a verbal commitment. It can be in a court of law, scouts, it can be anywhere. An oath means that now whatever you are going to say will be the truth or whatever you do, will be according to the law.

Slide 21:

Promising to do something in the future is also a commitment and the biggest promise we make is to Allah (swt).

Slide 22:

Let's talk about the major issues where commitment is important. Marriage is a commitment; it is a commitment that you will lead the rest of your life with a particular person, on certain terms and conditions.

Slide 23:

Another major issue is peace treaties amongst nations. You must be familiar with the Treaty of Hudaibiyah; some of the things it said, was that that the Quraysh and the Makkans would not fight the Muslims as long as they didn't get come to Makkah, they were not to go for Hajj and if someone escaped from Makkah to Madinah they were to turn that person back; so there were a lot of clauses and the Muslims agreed to that treaty. That agreement in itself was also a commitment.

Slide 24:

The responsibilities of a job are a commitment too. Have any one of you ever done an internship? When you do an internship you sign a paper, and there are certain responsibilities that you are given. Your fulfilling those responsibilities is also a promise, a commitment. I'll come at this time, leave at this time.... I'll be working for you for X number of months; it's a proper commitment.

Slide 25:

Let's talk about some petty issues, like telling a friend you'll call her tomorrow and then not doing so. Often we only say it for the sake of saying it. Please remember that that was actually a commitment you made and dishonoured.

Slide 26:

Another issue is submitting work on time. You were supposed to submit an assignment on Monday, and you say, "O what the heck I'll give it in on Tuesday." you are breaking a promise because when your parents signed the admission form there was an understanding that you would obey the teachers; so again, you are actually breaking a promise.

Slide 27:

When promising your mom you'll clean your room, you say, "O yeah I'll just go and clean my room." Even if you don't use the word Promise and you say I'll go and clean my room, it's still a commitment.

Slide 28:

Promising to return your friend's book; "O I'll return it tomorrow. I just need it for today, for one day." and then that book lies there with you for a week. That's breaking a promise.

Slide 29:

Coming to class on time and leaving after it's over is also a commitment that you've made. If there is an emergency then you can excuse yourself; you give an application telling the other party, the school or the institute or here at Perceptions, you let the administration know that there was some kind of emergency, some kind of problem because of which you will either be coming late or leaving early. Otherwise, you need to follow the timings.

Slides 30 -32:

And as we mentioned earlier, we also make a commitment to Allah (swt). In Surah An-Nahal *ayah* ninety-one, Allah (swt) says :

"Allah forbids Muslims to break their promises after they have confirmed them."

It is absolutely forbidden for Muslims to break their promises. After you say something, it doesn't matter if it is a serious promise, a big promise, or if it's a non-serious or small promise, it doesn't matter. If you say something, if it comes out of your mouth, it is a commitment that you have to abide by. There is an *ayah* in Surah Al-A'raaf, *ayah* one-seventy two, where Allah (swt) says:

“.. and He made them testify concerning themselves ...”

Who is this “He”? Allah (swt). “Them” are the souls of human beings. The spirits of all the people had actually promised Allah (swt) that they would accept *tauheed* when they are sent to Earth. All the spirits; your spirit, her spirit, her spirit, my spirit, all our souls promised Allah (swt) before we were born that we would accept *tauheed* when we are sent to Earth. Allah (swt) had gathered all the spirits and He (swt) continues in this *ayah*,

“Am I not your lord who cherishes and sustains you? And they said yes we do testify.”

This was now a commitment that we consider Allah (swt) our Lord and we are going down on this Earth to abide by His (swt) rules. All the souls made that commitment. So it really doesn't matter if you are a Muslim or a non Muslim; a child or an adult - we all made that commitment, not only the Muslims.

Then when we are born we all forget it; but it's built in, it's somewhere inside us. *Alhamdulillah* we Muslims don't have to make any changes, but the non-Muslims don't really remember, though sometimes they realize it, e.g. often when they hear the words of Allah (swt), they embrace Islam. The word that we usually use for people who convert from other religions to Islam, is Reverted Muslims or Reverts; because we were all born Muslims, but because of our parents, some became Christian some became Hindus, etc. so we use the word reverted Muslims, meaning that they came BACK to Islam.

Slide 33:

In Surah Aal-e-‘Imran *ayah* 26, Allah (swt) said;

“Yes whoever fulfils his pledge and fears Allah much, verily then Allah loves those who are *Al-Muttaqoon* (the pious).”

So fulfilling your pledge is a sign of a *mu'min*; that is very significant.

Slide 34:

There is a *hadith* in Muslim and Bukhari, where Prophet Muhammad (saw) said:

“Four traits; whoever possesses them is a hypocrite and whoever poses some of them has an element of hypocrisy until he leaves it.

1. The one who, when he speaks, he lies.
2. When he promises, he breaks his promise.
3. When he disputes, he transgresses.
4. And number four, when he makes an agreement, he violates it.”

So you see, when he promises, he breaks the promise, when he makes an agreement, he violates it. It is coming twice. See how important this is.

Slide 35:

As far as breaking a promise is concerned, there are two categories.

Category number one is making a promise with no intention of keeping it. E.g. your mom says that you had better start your studies because your exams are around the corner, and you say yeah mom I'll start from tomorrow and you know in your heart of hearts that you won't start it, you just said it for the sake of saying it. That basically comes in the category of breaking a promise. Did we ever consider that as breaking a promise? There are so many times when just to get away with something we casually say, "I'll do it tomorrow." That's breaking a promise and that's one category of breaking a promise. It's also lying!

And the second is making a promise intending to keep it and then later deciding to break it. So you say yes I'll do it, and you really do intend to, but later you change your mind and decide you don't want to. That's also breaking a promise and both are big sins. So both categories are wrong.

Slide 36:

There are certain exceptions in permissibility to break a promise, just as there are exceptions in many other things; there are exceptions in permissibility to lie, and there are exceptions in permissibility to say something unpleasant about someone in his absence, etc.

Slide 37:

Number one: forgetting. Allah (swt) has forgiven us for forgetfulness when, for example, obligatory actions are omitted or *haram* actions are committed, because Allah (swt) says in Surah Al-Baqarah *ayah* 286;

“Our Lord! Punish us not if we forget or fall into error.”

This is what Allah (swt) says in Surah Al-Baqarah and there is a *hadith* in Muslim, where Prophet Muhammad (saw) said while explaining this *ayah* that Allah (swt) said “Yes.” meaning , that He (swt) is going to forgive us if we forget something.

So for example you promise your mother that on the way back from school you will drop something to her friend's house; that was a promise, but if you did intend to drop it, and it just didn't come to your mind and you just forgot about it, it's not a sin. If

you took the matter casually however and you forgot because of carelessness, then that's a different story; you have to try to make sure that you don't forget but sometimes things still skip your mind. If that's the case then Allah (swt) forgives you for that.

Slide 38:

Exception number two is being forced to break one's promise, being detained from fulfilling one's promise, or being threatened with a painful punishment.

Let's say you promised your friend that you would do combined studies and unexpectedly your mom says no way, you are not going. Now if she says you are not going, you can't say I'm going, because if I don't go I'll break my promise. Your mother is not allowing you to go; it's as simple as that; and she can have any reason for that. If you call your friend and say, 'I wanted to come but my mom says I can't go, I don't have permission.' then that's not really breaking a promise; you wanted to go but you were stopped by your mother.

So if you wanted to do something and somebody stops you, or there is some kind of a threat, then if you don't fulfil your promise, it comes in the category of exception.

Slide 39:

The third thing is promising to do something *haraam*, or promising not to do something *fard*.

For example, if God forbid you say that you promise that you're not going to offer your *salah* from tomorrow, now it's a commitment that you have made, a very stupid commitment, but nevertheless a commitment. But then if you go and honour it, because what you had said was a *haraam* thing, it's not something a Muslim should do, so if you just change your mind and say may Allah (swt) forgive me and I was not in the right state of mind when I said it and you go and offer your *salah*, then its fine. You can't say, 'I can't commit another sin by breaking a promise on the claim that I have made.' When you make a promise to do something *haraam* or to stop doing something which is obligatory, that becomes an exception in, as we see in Bukhari and Muslim both.

Yes you pay *kaffarah* for breaking a promise.

“Whoever promises to do something, then sees something else which is better than it, then he should bring about the thing which is better and complete the *Kaffarah* of breaking his promise.” (Mentioned In Ahkaamul Quran by Abu Bakr Jassas).

Another evidence is the verse of the Quran in Surah Noor, verse 22: “And let not those who possess dignity and ease among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to fugitives for the cause of Allah. Let them forgive and show indulgence. Yearn ye not that Allah may forgive you? Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”



This verse was revealed regarding Abu Bakr (ra) when he made a promise that he will not spend on Mistah bin Athaathah because he was spreading the rumor of Aishah (ra). Allah (swt) then ordered him to turn away from this promise spend money on Mistah(ra).

Slide 40:

Number four, if something unforeseen happens. In Surah Al-Baqarah, *ayah* two eighty six, Allah (swt) says,

“Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope.”

So let's say you were given an assignment and you fell ill; now if you don't do your assignment that will not come in the category of breaking a promise, or breaking a commitment. That's absolutely fine.

Slide 41:

Now what should we do when a promise is broken; besides these exceptions? If we make a commitment and do not honour it, then in Surah Al-Ma-idah verse eighty nine Allah (swt) tells us,

‘He says Allah will not call you to account for what is futile in your oaths but He will call you to account for your deliberate oaths.’

What does ‘futile oaths’ mean? Sometimes you say something like, ‘I swear I don't like this.’ You are using it as a figure of speech; Allah (swt) will not hold you accountable for that.

But if it is an actual commitment that I've made to another person, and the other person also feels that what you have said is a commitment, then for expiation, feed ten poor persons with the same kind of food that your families eat, or clothe them, or give a slave his freedom. If it's beyond your means, then fast for three days. That is the expiation for the oaths you have broken. Either you feed ten people and clothing and food should be the regular food and clothing that you do for yourself, and if not that, then you have to free a slave and if that's beyond your means, then you have to fast for three days. So sometimes the punishment itself tells you how serious a thing is.

Slide 42:

So it's a very serious sin. Unfortunately we normally ignore these kinds of promises. We say, ‘Whatever, I don't care.’, ‘Give me a break, I need a break.’, ‘But I didn't mean it.’ Although you know you meant it, but we take these things very casually, don't we?

Slides 43 - 45:

There are basically two types of sins; major sins and minor sins, *kabeerah* and *sagheerah*. A minor sin is what is deleted from our Book of Deeds when we do small good deeds like *wudhu*, or we make some kind gestures. Scholars say that anything which is not a major sin is a minor sin.

Minor sins are the day to day bad deeds that you do, and they are deleted. For example, getting irritated; being irritated is not mentioned in the Qur-an where there is some kind of punishment mentioned along with it, or a serious displeasure of Allah (swt) mentioned for it. Or laziness; it's not really mentioned in the Qur-an unless of course I'm so lazy that I skip my *salah*; in which case it becomes a major sin. Minor sins are also milder forms of a lot of sins. Getting angry, wasting food, fighting and hurting other persons' feelings; you don't get this list anywhere. It's just that these are the things which, when they are done in a mild manner, then they are not really mentioned in the Qur-an where Allah (swt) talks about a particular kind of punishment attached to these sins. Extravagance, e.g. is mentioned in the Qur-an, where Allah (swt) talks about some punishment or being thrown in the Hellfire; but this can lead you to a lot of major sins. These sins are such that they start from minor sins and slowly and gradually develop into major sins.

Slide 46:

Now coming to the major sins; what are the major sins? Scholars say that any sin for which the Qur-an has fixed some kind of punishment or the curse of Allah (swt) is mentioned for it, or a warning of the Hellfire is described, is considered a major sin. There are a lot of sins mentioned in the Qur-an and along with them there are warnings too. When there is a warning, or Allah (swt) is displeased with it, then that is considered a major sin.

Slide 47:

In Surah An-Nissa *ayah* 110, Allah (swt) says,

“If anyone does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks Allah's (swt) forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft Forgiving and Most Merciful.”

So we need to do a lot of *istaghfaar* and *taubah*, because it's very difficult to differentiate between major and minor sins; a sin is a sin, and we shouldn't be taking it for granted that I'll do *wudu* and that will take care of itself. We must always do *taubah* if we feel we've made a mistake.

Slide 48:

Breaking a promise; is it a major or a minor sin?

Slide 49:

It is actually a major sin! It's a major sin because Allah (swt) talks about the promise in Surah Al-Isra *ayah* thirty four;

“And fulfil the promise; surely every promise shall be questioned about.”

And in Surah As-Saff Allah (swt) says in *ayahs* two and three,

“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.”

So you see here, Allah (swt) is showing his displeasure at breaking promises. That means it falls in the category of major sins.

Slide 50:

Just to understand the kind of major sins the Qur-an talks about, one of them is associating partners with Allah (swt) (*shirk*), killing others unjustly, misusing an orphan's wealth, slandering pious ladies, disobeying parents, disrespecting the house of Allah (swt), backbiting. These are the intense sins, and breaking promises is one of them, so that tells you the seriousness of this sin.

Slide 51:

Now think how many times we commit this sin in a day. Very small things; a friend tells you not to leak her secret; you think no harm in telling “only” your best friend. It's major sin.

Slide 52:

Or your mom's friend called while she was away and left a message for her, but you didn't inform your mother. If you forgot to inform her that's a different thing, but if you just decided to ignore it, then you broke a promise; you had made a commitment to her friend that you would tell her.

Slides 53 – 55:

Or even coming late for class, unless there is a genuine reason, it is like breaking a commitment. Do you remember when we did time-management; we talked about “Tony”, which is a mental block we have. Some of us have a mental block that stops us from understanding the seriousness of this habit. And what is that mental block? “I didn't use the word promise.” So if I don't use the word “promise” it is not really a major sin? It's not really a commitment? That's wrong. If you said it, it's a commitment, it's enough; you don't have to use the word “promise”.

Slide 56:

Now coming to damage control; what are the things that will help you to not break your promises?

Slides 57 - 59:

Ask forgiveness. If you already feel that you have broken a lot of commitments, then you need to ask Allah (swt) for forgiveness. And not just asking Allah (swt), you actually have to feel it. And if you feel that somebody has been harmed because you broke your promise, then you have to go and ask forgiveness from that person also. And just saying "I'm sorry." is not enough, you need to say, "Please forgive me." because this actually pinches your ego; so you need to ask serious forgiveness from that person and from Allah (swt) too.

Then make up for the loss. If the person has suffered because you broke a promise, then ethically it should be your responsibility to make amends for it. If your friend wanted your exercise book because she wasn't coming to school and you said you'd take it the next day and you didn't take it the next day, you broke a promise. Then you need to make it up and drop it to her house.

Slide 60:

And then of course, seek Allah's (swt) sincere forgiveness, by saying *astaghfirullah* with a sincere heart as many times as possible during the day.

Slide 61:

We must also remember never to honour only a part of a promise; because if you promise to return a friend's notes to her tomorrow at four o' clock, then those are three promises. What are the three promises in it?

Slides 62 - 64:

The first promise is that you'll return her notes, the second promise is that you'll return them at four and the third promise is that you will return them the next day. Three promises made. Now you better fulfil all of them because if you don't, you'll still be breaking a promise. So you say well I said I'm going to return it, so what if I didn't return it at four, I returned it at five, that's incomplete; the promise is still broken. And it's a major sin. It's a major sin because you did not completely fulfil the promise.

Slides 65 - 67:

How should we go about it? First of all the words *inhsha Allah* have to be used with understanding, and we should mean it when we say *inshaAllah*. It should not be used to show that you don't really care, and that you'll see. It shouldn't be a way to take the easy way out. We have to be very serious about intending to do whatever we're

talking about when we say *inshaAllah*. It's like a commitment and after saying *inshaAllah*, try your utmost to do so.

Slide 68:

And then don't just say *inshaAllah*, what you need to say is, I'll do it *inshaAllah*. It will show seriousness. And it is going to give it seriousness for you also, that you have involved Allah's (swt) will in it and therefore you must try your level best to do what you have committed to.

Slide 69:

And be flexible. Why? How? Rather than telling your friend you'll go to her place at four o'clock and then by breaking a promise by going at four thirty, tell her you'll go between four and six. So you need to be a little flexible if you want to stop yourself from breaking promises. Say, "I'll try to come tomorrow.", rather than saying, "I'll come tomorrow." Play around with your words.

Slide 70:

If for some appropriate reason you couldn't fulfill the commitment, then you can always talk it out with the concerned person and re-negotiate with him; but try to do it beforehand. And then whenever we re-negotiate with the other person, make sure he gives his consent; it shouldn't be one sided. Make sure the other person knows and both of you agree to a particular thing; otherwise there can be a lot of confusion.

Slide 71:

Another thing is that we all must get into the habit of making systems. What kind of a system do you have to remember your promises?

Maintaining a diary is the most dangerous thing that you can do. You are depending on the diary but you use it only sometimes; the time you actually need to read it, you are not reading it. So diaries are not a good idea if you are not reading them when you need to.

How about just putting a reminder? It is a very serious thing we are talking about; our *Aakhirah*. The most important thing in honouring a commitment is to remember to do so. So you can have this very simple system; you all have mobiles, put a reminder for yourself. Also, e.g. if you have to go to a friend's house at four o'clock, please don't put a reminder for four o'clock; put it for two o'clock and the reminder should say, let's say if Maha has to go to Eesha's, then the reminder should say, 'To Eesha's at four'. So please let's all of us get into the habit of putting reminders. Note books and diaries are not a good idea because the time that you really need to be reminded, what will remind you to go and check your diary?

Slide 72:

And we must remember that breaking a commitment must not be taken lightly by us because it alone is very easily enough to lead us to the Hellfire because it's a major sin. Breaking a commitment must not be taken lightly.

Slide 73:

May Allah (swt) give us the wisdom to protect ourselves from the Hellfire by honouring our commitments.

*(Du'a for end of a gathering) Subhana Rabbika Rabbul 'Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salaamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'aalameen*

*(Parting salutation to students) Assalamu 'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*