

Fast 17: Honest dealing

- The last verse in the section on fasting is as follows:

“And do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of (other) people wrongfully while you know.” (2:188)

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَ
تُدُلُّوا بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ
أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾

A most important lesson that fasting teaches us is not to take anything, unlawfully and immorally, which belongs to someone else.

- It is also stated elsewhere in the Quran:

“O you who believe, do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means except that it be trading by your mutual consent.” (4:29)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ
بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَن
تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ ۗ

“Trading by your mutual consent” includes all kinds of contracts, freely entered into by both sides, whereby, for example, things are bought and sold, and labour is exchanged for payment. This verse occurs close to those speaking of women’s right to property, as the verse: “For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn” (4:32). So, although it is general, it is particularly directed to guarding women’s right to property. To cheat and deceive women out of their property has, in most societies in history, been commonplace and easier than cheating men.

- Fair and honest dealings with others in all kinds of transactions are emphasized in many places in the Quran:

“Woe to the cheaters, who, when they take the measure (of their dues) from people, take it fully, but when they measure out to others or weigh out for them, they give less than is due!” (83:1–3)

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ إِذَا
اِكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ
﴿٢﴾ وَ إِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ
يُخْسِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

This refers not only to literally weighing and measuring, as in buying and selling, but to all kinds of human dealings. It includes dealings between the state and the individual, where the state is quick to demand that people obey the law but is slow in providing them with their rights, or where a person ensures that he receives all state benefits due to him but fails to pay his taxes in full. Then there are mundane examples, such as a person in a queue or line wants those behind him to wait their turn, but he is himself trying to jump the queue over those ahead of him.

- The same is also emphasized elsewhere as a part of basic Islamic morality:

“And give full measure when you measure out, and weigh with a true balance. This is fair and better in the end.” (17:35)

وَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ إِذَا كِلْتُمْ وَزِنُوا
بِالْقِسْطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ ذَلِكِ
خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ﴿٣٥﴾

“Give full measure and do not diminish. And weigh with a true balance. And do not wrong people of their dues, nor act corruptly in the earth, making mischief.” (26:181–183)

وَزِنُوا بِالْقِسْطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ
﴿١٨٢﴾ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ
وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ
﴿١٨٣﴾

As stated in the first verse above, in the end it is better if people are honest. There is not only fairness for all, but also more mutual harmony, trust and happiness in society, if the principle of giving full measure, using a true balance, is followed. Breaching this principle may give temporary advantage and personal gain to some individuals, but it leads to feelings of mistrust and suspicion between people in society as a whole and breakdown of human relationships.

- The Holy Prophet is reported as saying about dealing between a seller and a buyer:

“... if both the parties speak the truth and make everything clear (i.e., as to the defects and qualities of the goods), they would be blessed in their transaction, and if they conceal and tell lies, the blessings of their transaction would be lost.” (Bukhari, 34:19)

فَإِنْ صَدَقَا وَبَيَّنَّا بُورِكَ لَهُمَا فِي
بَيْعِهِمَا، وَإِنْ كَتَمَا وَكَذَبَا مُحِقَّتْ
بَرَكَتُهُ بَيْعِهِمَا

- Modern consumer law is based on the above principles.