22845 - The phenomenon of cheating

the question

The phenomenon of cheating is widespread in society. What is the attitude of Islam towards this phenomenon?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

In the Quran, Allah has condemned cheating and the people who do it, and has warned them of bad consequences. This may be understood from the words (interpretation of the meaning):

“Woe to Al-Mutaffifoon (those who give less in measure and weight).

Those who, when they have to receive by measure from men, demand full measure,

And when they have to give by measure or weight to (other) men, give less than due” [Al-Mutaffifeen 83:1]

This is a severe warning to those who cheat (by giving less) in weights and measures, so how about those who steal, embezzle and withhold from the people the things that are their due? These are more deserving of the warning than those who cheat in weights and measures.

The Prophet of Allah Shu’ayb warned his people against reducing the value of people’s property and cheating in weights and measures, as Allah has told us in the Quran.

Similarly the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cautioned us against cheating and issued a warning to the one who does this. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) passed by a pile of food and put his hand into it, and his fingers touched something wet. He said, “What is this, O seller of the food?” The man said, “It got rained on, O Messenger of Allah.”

He said, “Why did you not put it (the wet part) on top of the pile so that the people could see it? He who deceives does not belong to me.” According to other reports, “He who deceives us is not one of us,” or, “He is not one of us who deceives us.” (Narrated by Muslim).

The wording of the version narrated by al-Nawawi, “he is not one of us”, is sufficient warning against cheating and sufficient deterrent against indulging in this heinous sin.

We need desperately to instill this message in our hearts so that we might stir the conscience and be aware that Allah is watching all that we do, without the need for any human supervisor.

The way we deal with this phenomenon and other destructive phenomena that exist in society should not be like a patient who has a problem in his appendix and needs surgery, but instead they heat up a poultice for him and put it on that spot to relieve the pain… for then the patient will die before they even think of calling the doctor.

Here we will examine the phenomenon of cheating, now that you know the warnings that apply to it.

Definition of cheating:

Al-Mannaawi said: Cheating is that which mixes bad with good.

Ibn Hajar al-Haythami said: the forbidden type of cheating is when the owner of the goods knows something which, if the would-be purchaser knew about it, he would not pay that amount of money for it.

Al-Kafawi said: cheating causes blackness of the heart and frowning on the face, hence this word (ghish = cheating or deceit) is also used (in Arabic) to refer to hatred or enmity.

Where cheating takes place:

The one who thinks about what happens in real life will find that many people engage in some form of cheating in all areas of their lives. Examples of that include:

1 – Cheating in buying and selling:

How often this happens nowadays in the marketplaces of the Muslims! It may take the form of concealing faults in goods or other ways such as deceiving people about the quality of a product, or its components, quantity, weight, essential features or source.

These are some of the ways in which that cheating is manifested:

1-Some fruit-sellers put a lot of leaves or papers in the bottom of the basket of fruit, then they put the best fruit at the top. In this manner they deceive the purchaser and cheat him by making him think that the basket is full from top to bottom, and that all the fruit is of the same quality as that which he sees on the top.

2-Some of them get food oil and mix it with perfume, with the larger proportion being of oil. Then they put it in glass bottles, and this substance smells like perfume, and they sell it for a low price.

3-Some traders buy a product in a very light wrapper, then they put it in a much thicker wrapper, maybe five times thicker. Then they sell the wrapper and its contents, weighing the whole lot and charging for both the wrapper and the contents.

4-Some traders do some light mending on clothes, then they sell them without explaining that they have been mended, rather they swear by Allah that they are new – may they perish!

5-Some of them may wear a garment until it loses its value, then they shorten it and put some starch in it, to make people think that it is new, and they sell it as if it is new.

6-Some perfume-sellers put some products, such as saffron, near water so that they may absorb the moisture, thus increasing the weight by approximately one-third.

7-Some vendors and shopkeepers make their stores very dark by using coloured lights, so that rough products will look smooth and ugly ones will look beautiful. The Shaytaan makes their evil deeds attractive to them.

8-Some goldsmiths mix gold with copper and the like, then they sell it as if it is pure gold.

9-Some of them buy clean second-hand gold, then they offer it for sale at the price of new without telling the purchaser that it is second-hand.

10-Some vendors at car auctions put thick oil in the car engine so that the purchaser will think that it is in good condition.

11-Some of them turn back the odometer, if it shows that the car has traveled a great distance, to trick the purchaser into thinking that the car has only been used a little.

12-Some of them, if they have a car that they want to sell and they know that it has a hidden fault, will say to the one who wants to buy it, “Try this car if you want to buy it,” without telling him anything about it. By Allah, this is cheating and deceit.

13-Some of them describe many faults in the car which are not real, with the intention of concealing the real faults of the vehicle behind these imaginary faults.

Even worse than that is when they do not mention the faults until after the sale has been made and the deposit paid, and the purchaser is not able to inspect the car and is not allowed to do so.

14-Some of them, if they have a car that they want to sell, will praise it and swear by Allah that it is good, and they will fabricate reasons why they want to sell it, but Allah knows all secrets and that which is yet more hidden.

15-Some of them agree with their friends to increase the price so that someone else will take it. This is the najsh (artificial inflation of prices) which the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade.

16-Another kind of cheating in selling is when butchers inflate the animal carcass that they want to sell so that the purchaser will think that it is all meat.

17-Some vendors at sheep auctions and places where chickens are sold feed the animals salt [to make them drink more and thus look fatter], so that the purchaser will think that they are fat when they are not.

18-Some owners of cattle etc. tie up the teats of milking-animals a few days before selling them so that this will look like milk when it is not.

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I leave it for you to add more examples of cheating in buying and selling that may cross your mind. May Allah protect you, if you are a seller or a buyer, from cheating or doing any of the things described above.

2 – Cheating in matters of marriage

These are some of the ways in which this cheating is manifested:

1-Some fathers may offer a man who comes to marry one of his daughters his youngest daughter who is still a virgin, then on the wedding night he finds out that he has been given the older, previously-married daughter. Some men can find no escape and no way out from such a marriage.

2-Some fathers and guardians of women show the suitor the daughter who is beautiful, then on the wedding night he finds out that he has been given a different daughter who is ugly, but he has no choice but to accept the situation.

3-Some fathers may conceal some sickness or fault that may be present in the daughter, not telling the suitor so that he may have a clear picture. Then when he goes in unto her on the wedding night he discovers the sickness or fault.

4-Some fathers and guardians of women, if the suitor asks to see the woman – which is permissible so long as the conditions stipulated in Islam are met – give him permission to do so after they fill her face will all kinds of colours and dyes, i.e. “make-up”, so that she will appear beautiful to him, but if he looked at her without that mask of make-up he would not be pleased with her. Is this not cheating which leads to great corruption of the rights of both husband and wife?

5-Some guardians marry off the female under their care without making the effort to find out about the suitor and how religiously committed he is or what his attitude is like. This is a kind of cheating and wrongdoing against the wife.

6-Another kind of cheating in marriage is when the suitor pretends to have what he does not, to make it appear that he is a man of status and that he owns a lot of real estate and cars. He may even go to the extent of hiring a luxury car, spending hundreds of riyals, to give the impression that he owns it, when in fact he does not own anything.

7-Another kind of cheating is when some people praise the suitor before the people whose daughter he wishes to marry, speaking of him in the highest terms and describing him as one who prays and is righteous, even though this suitor does not even know the way to the mosque.

Enough of this cheating and deception which destroys homes and breaks up families!

8-A form of cheating done by some women – especially those who are older – is when they file their teeth to create nice-looking gaps between them, thus making an older woman look young, so that the suitor will think that she is young, then when he marries her he discovers that she is very old. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cursed the women who file their teeth for the purpose of beauty and alter the creation of Allah.

3 – Cheating in naseehah (sincere advice)

The whole point of giving advice is to help a person meet his worldly objectives or his religious objectives. One of the mutual rights of brotherhood among the believers is to be sincere towards one another, and the hypocrites are cheats.

The believer is the mirror of his brother, so if he sees some fault in him he should correct it. Sincerity means refraining from harming the Muslims, teaching them about matters of their religion of which they are unaware, and helping them to adhere to it in word and in deed, covering their faults, filling their gaps, warding off harm from them, bringing things that will benefit them, enjoining what is good upon them and forbidding what is evil in a kind and sincere manner,

showing compassion towards them, respecting their elders, being merciful towards their young, giving them good advice and choosing the appropriate time for doing so, loving for them what one loves for oneself of goodness and hating for them what one hates for oneself of disliked things.

Al-Haafiz Abu'l-Qaasim al-Tabaraani narrated with his isnaad that Jareer ibn 'Abd-Allah al-Bajali (may Allah be pleased with him) commanded his freed slave to buy a horse for him. So he bought him a horse for three hundred dirhams, and he brought the horse and its owner to him so that he could pay him the money. Jareer said to the owner of the horse – look at this sincerity – "Your horse is worth more than three hundred dirhams. Will you sell it for four hundred dirhams?" He said, "Yes, O Abu 'Abd-Allah."

He said, "Your horse is worth more than four hundred dirhams. Will you sell it for five hundred dirhams?" He kept increasing it by one hundred each time, with the owner agreeing and Jareer saying, "Your horse is worth more than that," until he reached eight hundred, for which price he bought it. And he said concerning that, "I gave my oath of allegiance (bay'ah) to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that I would be sincere towards every Muslim."

4 – Cheating in positions of authority

It was narrated that Ma'qal ibn Yassaar al-Muzani (may Allah be pleased with him) said during his final illness: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: 'There is no person whom Allah has put in a position of authority and he dies on the day he dies cheating those under his authority, but Allah will forbid Paradise for him.'" This was narrated by al-Bukhaari and Muslim; this version was narrated by Muslim. According to one of the two versions narrated by al-Bukhaari: "There is no Muslim whom Allah places in a position of authority over people and he is not sincere towards them, but he will not smell the fragrance of Paradise."

This is a stern warning which includes everyone whom Allah has placed in a position of authority, whether great or small, starting from the individuals of a royal family. Everyone must be sincere towards those who are under their authority, and not cheat or deceive them.

So an employee must be sincere in his work and do it in the manner required by sharee'ah,

without cheating or deceiving anyone, and without delaying work for people. He should realize that he will stand before Allah and that Allah has only given him this job so that he can be sincere towards the Muslims.

Similarly a father must be sincere towards his children and not neglect their upbringing, rather he must do all that he can to save himself and his children from a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones, over which are appointed angels stern and severe (cf. al-Tahreem 66:6).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “How many people have caused misery to their own children, the apples of their eyes, in this world and in the Hereafter, by neglecting them, not disciplining them, encouraging them to follow their whims and desires, thinking that they were honouring them when they were in fact humiliating them, that they were being merciful to them when in fact they were wronging them. They have not benefited from having a child, and they have made the child lose his share in this world and in the Hereafter. If you think about the corruption of children you will see that in most cases it is because of the parents.”

(Tuhfat al-Mawlood, p. 146)

5 – Cheating in exams

How many ways and means of cheating there are among the students! The reason for that is the lack of any religious deterrent, weakness of faith, and the lack of any sense that Allah is always watching.

Our Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “It was narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Whoever cheats us is not one of us.’ This includes cheating in dealing with others and cheating in exams, including English-language exams. It is not permissible for students to cheat in exams in any subject, because of the general meaning of this hadeeth and other similar reports. And Allah is the Source of strength.”

These are some of the ways in which cheating is manifested, and there are others, for this is just a drop in the ocean,

“so that those who were to be destroyed (for their rejecting the Faith) might be destroyed after a clear evidence, and those who were to live (i.e. believers) might live after a clear evidence” [Al-An’aam 8:42 – interpretation of the meaning]

To everyone who has committed some form of cheating, whether it is mentioned here or not, we say: fear Allah and remember that the Knower of the Unseen is always watching you. Remember His punishment and torment:

“Verily, your Lord is Ever Watchful (over them)” [Al-Fajr 89:14]

Realize that this world is transient and that the Reckoning will examine the smallest details; righteous deeds benefit one's children while bad deeds adversely affect them. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And let those (executors and guardians) have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So let them fear Allah and speak right words” [Al-Nisa’ 4:9]

Whoever ponders the meaning of this aayah will fear the bad effects that evil deeds may have on his children and will refrain from them lest something like this happen to them.

And it should be noted that cheating is very harmful, which may be explained as follows:

The harmful effects of cheating include:

1-Cheating is a way that leads to Hell.

2-It is indicative of the mean and evil nature of a person. No one does this except one who is ignoble and does not care about his soul, so he causes it to indulge in that which will cause its doom and destruction.

3-It alienates one from Allah and from other people.

4-It causes one’s du’aa’s not to be accepted.

5-It causes one to be deprived of barakah (blessing) in one's wealth and one's life.

6-It is indicative of a lack of faith.

7-It is the reason that leads to being overpowered by the oppressors and kaafirs. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami said: “Because of these evil actions – i.e., cheating – that are committed by traders, workers and craftsmen, Allah caused the oppressors to gain power over them and take their wealth and violate the sanctity of their women. Indeed, He enabled the kuffaar to gain power over them, so they took them prisoner and enslaved them, and made them taste all kinds of torment and humiliation.

Cases where the kuffaar gained power over the Muslims, taking them prisoner and confiscating their property, taking their wealth and women, have happened a great deal in recent times, because of evil deeds that traders and others have committed, cheating in many different ways, because of the enormity of these crimes, deceit and trickery by means of which they took the wealth of the Muslims in any way they could, and did not feel that Allah is always watching them.