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Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Social Sira and his Good Conduct towards People

He would tidy up his appearance when he went to people.

He would never verbally molest anyone.

He would never interrupt anyone.

He would never reject anyone's request if he could grant it.

He would not stretch his feet or lean back before his companion.

He was never seen to laugh boisterously; rather, his laughter was [more like] a smile.

He was interested in scenting himself, especially when among people.

He helped out others and gave them alms a lot and he would do this in the dark of the night.

He was very humble. It is related that once in a public bathhouse a man who did not know the Imam told him to rub his back (with a scrubbing glove). His holiness began to rub his back; when people introduced the Imam to him, he got so embarrassed and apologized but the Imam kept rubbing his back while comforting him.

He respected his guests a lot. One day a guest came to him and stayed until night. At this time something went wrong with light in the room; the man wanted to fix the light but the Imam stopped him and fixed it himself and said, "We do not exploit our guest."¹

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Generosity and Munificence

His holiness was unique in his time in generosity and favoring the poor. One year, on the day of ۞*Arafa* (the 9th day of Dhul-Hijjah), he gave away all his property. Fadhl b. Sahl said, "This is damage and

loss.” His holiness said, “Never consider as a loss what through which you have obtained reward and magnanimity.”[2](#)

One day a man said to his holiness: “Grant me something [proportionate] to your generosity.” The Imam (a.s.) replied: “I cannot.” The man said, “Then grant me to my generosity”. His holiness said, “This I can do.” Then, he ordered to give him twenty thousand *dinars*.[3](#)

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Special Attention and Favor towards the Needy

One of the issues highly emphasized in Islam is attending to and helping out the needy and fulfilling their requirements, especially when they ask for it. The Qur'anic verses and the Infallible Imam's (a.s.) instructions are replete with assertions on this issue and expressions of the excellence and manners of serving the needy.

A short review of the *sira* of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) reveals that his holiness has been especially favored with serving and helping out the poor.

Mu'ammār b. Khallad says: When Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) would start eating food, he would set a bowl next to the table-cloth, pick out the best part of the meal, and order to give it away to the poor...[4](#)

Al-Bazanti, who was one of the closest companions of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), says: “In a letter to Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) (who was in Medina), his holiness Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said, ‘O Aba Ja'far, I am informed that your servants take you out [of house] through the small gate (lest people should ask you for something); that is because of their miserliness that they wish no favor from you may reach others.

I want you, by my right on you, not to leave or enter the house except through the big (main) gate. When you leave, take gold and silver – in *dirham* and *dinar*, the currency of the time – with you and grant it to anyone who would ask for it.

Give no less than fifty *dinars* to any of your uncles who would ask for a favor; it is up to you to give them more. Give no less than twenty five *dinars* to any of your aunts who would ask for a favor; it is up to you to give them more. By means of this I wish Allah may uplift you; give away [in charity] and do not be apprehensive of the possessor of the Heaven [and earth] – Allah – for tightness of livelihood.[5](#)

Saving the Face of the Needy

Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) was present in a session and a large group of people were present asking him about legal rulings when all of a sudden a tall swarthy man entered. He greeted and said, “O son of the Prophet (S), I am a lover of you and your forefathers coming for Hajj pilgrimage (from Khurasan); I have run out of foodstuff and I am desperate.

Send me to my hometown if you deem it advisable; when I reach my hometown, I will give alms on your behalf for what you will have granted me since I do not deserve being given alms.” His holiness said, “Sit down, may God’s Mercy be upon you.” Then he went on dealing with the people’s problems until the gathering quieted and only three people remained.

His holiness asked to leave and went indoor; after a while he returned and without showing up he reached his blessed hand over the door and asked: “Where is that man from Khurasan?” The man said, “Here I am.” The holy Imam (a.s.) said, “Take these two hundred *dinars* and spend on provision for your journey and take care of yourself; and you do not need to give alms on my behalf, either.” Get going so as I do not see you and you do not see me!” And the man left.

Then, his holiness came out of the inner house. One of the people present asked him: “May I be your ransom. You granted him such a great favor, then why did you hide your face from him?” His holiness said, “So that I may not see the degradation of request in his face! Have you not heard the Apostle of Allah (S)’s *hadith* saying? “The one who does a good deed secretly is rewarded as of seventy Hajj pilgrimages! The one who commits a sin overtly is abandoned and the one who commits the sin covertly is forgiven.”

After that, the Imam recited a poem with the following content: “Whenever I put in a request to Him, I will come back from Him with my honor and face [saved].⁶

Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) Treatment of his Subordinates

One of Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) beautiful and affectionate moral features is his tenderness towards servants and slaves, which, while indicating his extraordinary humility – a common characteristic among Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) – it also represents the Imam’s sublime attentiveness and affection toward the subordinate and the poor.

His holiness paid attention to his servants’ acts of devotion and spirituality to the extent that he had appointed someone to wake them up for their late-night supererogatory prayer (*salat al-layl*).⁷

He cared about the freedom of his slaves, as it is reported: “His holiness has freed a thousand slaves.”⁸

One of the people of Balkh says: “I was in the company of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) in the journey to Khurasan. One day he spread a tablecloth [to eat] and called all the servants – whatever rank they were – to gather around the tablecloth. I said, ‘May I be your ransom, would that you spread a separate tablecloth for them.’ His holiness said, ‘Verily our Lord is One, our mother is one, our father is one, and the reward goes to actions.’”

Among his holiness’ most valued features was that he was mindful of the peacefulness of his subordinates at the mealtime. Two of his servants named Yasir and Nadir said, “Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said to us if we were eating and he came to us, we did not have to stand up and should finish our food.”

Sometimes his holiness would call one of us and when he was told that we were eating, he would say: "Let them finish their food";⁹ and sometimes he would care so much for his servants that he would make a morsel with his own hands for them [to eat]. His servant, Nadir, said, "Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) would fix *jawzina* (= sugared almond) and give it to me."¹⁰

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Favor and Grace towards the Shi'a

To the Shi'a, Imam is like a kind father who is constantly seeking his children's goodness and benevolence. Accordingly, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said, "The Imam is a kind companion, a compassionate brother and father, and [like] a fostering mother to her little child." And that is why we know Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) as a kind-hearted Imam, since his holiness is always gracing his Shi'as with his favors.

'Abd Allah b. Aban, who was favored by Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), said, "I said to his holiness to pray for me and my family. The Imam (a.s.) said, 'Am I not praying?! I swear by God that your actions are presented and reported to me every day and night.'" 'Abd Allah said, "I regarded this issue as exaggerated and was surprised.

His holiness said, 'Have you not read the Book of Allah in which He says:

And say, "Go on working: Allah will see your conduct, and His Apostle and the faithful". Qur'an: 9/105'

Then his holiness said, "By God the faithful is 'Ali b. Abi Talib (and his infallible children)."¹¹

A man named Musa b. Sayyar says: "I was in the company of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) in his journey to Khurasan. As we approached Tus and the walls of the city became visible, I heard the sound of mourning and lamenting.

I followed the sound and found it was a funeral. At this moment, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) dismounted his horse, went toward the dead body, sympathized with the mourners and prayed for the dead person.

Then he faced me and said, 'O Musa b. Sayyar, whoever takes part in the funeral of one of our friends; they will be exonerated from sins just like when they were newly born with no sins'.

When the dead body was laid next to the grave, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) went near, pushed the people aside, put his blessed hand on the chest of the dead man, and said, 'O so and so, glad tidings of Paradise to you! You will have no fear anymore.' I said, 'May I be your ransom! You have not traveled to this land before. How do you know this man?'

He said, 'O Musa b. Sayyar, do you not know that the deeds of our Shi'as are presented to us every morning and evening; we ask Allah's pardon for any shortcoming that exists in their deeds and request Him to grant them gratitude for the excellent deeds they have undertaken.'¹²

- [1.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, pp. 90–104 (selected from different traditions).
- [2.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 100.
- [3.](#) Ibid.
- [4.](#) Bihar al-Anwar Bihar, vol. 49, p. 100, [related from] Mahasin al-Barqi.
- [5.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 9, p. 463, chapter 43, Kitab al-Zakat, vol. 1.
- [6.](#) Manaqib, Ibn Shahrashub, vol. 4, p. 360; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 101.
- [7.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 178.
- [8.](#) A'lam al-Hidaya, p. 31.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 102.
- [10.](#) Ibid, p. 100.
- [11.](#) Usul Kafi, Kitab al-Hujja, vol. 1, p. 319.
- [12.](#) Manaqib Al-i Abi Talib, vol. 4, p. 341. See: Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p.98.

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