

Right n. 19: The Right of Subjects through Knowledge

حق الرعية بالعلم

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ رِعِيَّتِكَ بِالْعِلْمِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ جَعَلَكَ لَهُمْ فِيمَا آتَاكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ وَوَلَاكَ مِنْ خَزَانَةِ الْحِكْمَةِ، فَإِنْ أَحْسَنْتَ فِيمَا وَوَلَاكَ اللَّهُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَقُمْتَ بِهِ لَهُمْ مَقَامَ الْخَازِنِ الشَّفِيقِ النَّاصِحِ لِمَوْلَاهُ فِي عِبِيدِهِ، الصَّابِرِ الْمُحْتَسِبِ الَّذِي إِذَا رَأَى ذَا حَاجَةٍ أَخْرَجَ لَهُ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ الَّتِي فِي يَدَيْهِ كُنْتَ رَاشِدًا، وَكُنْتَ لِذَلِكَ أَمِلًا مُعْتَقِدًا وَإِلَّا كُنْتَ لَهُ حَائِنًا وَلِخَلْقِهِ ظَالِمًا وَلِسَلْبِهِ وَعِزِّهِ مُتَعَرِّضًا.

And the right of your subjects through knowledge is that you should know that God established you over them through what He has granted you of knowledge, and the authority He has assigned you over His treasures of wisdom.

If you do well in what God has given you authority over and serve as a compassionate caretaker for them, sincere to his master in the affairs of his slaves, the steadfast one seeking reward through his good deeds, who, when he sees a needy person, takes out for him from the wealth under his control – then you will be rightly guided and will be hopeful and faithful.

Otherwise, you will be regarded as betraying Him, unjust to His creatures, and exposing yourself to God's seizing His Graces and Power from you.

And in the other version we read: “And the right of your subjects through knowledge is that you should know that God established you over them through what He has granted you of knowledge and what He has granted authority over His treasures of wisdom.

If you do well in teaching the people, not treating them roughly or annoying them, then God will increase His bounty toward you. But if you withhold your knowledge from people or treat them roughly when they

seek knowledge from you, then it will be God's right to deprive you of the knowledge and its splendor and make you fall from your place in the people's heart."

Imam Sajjad has pointed out the following:

1 – What one has learned of knowledge, and whatever he has gained of wisdom are all blessings of God. One does not have any of this on his own. Therefore, after considering these points one should not become haughty.

2 – What one has control over of knowledge and wisdom is only a portion of God's treasure. He is only considered to be a trustee and a gatekeeper. He should warmly welcome others, and kindly grant them from the treasures with which he is entrusted.

3 – Imam Sajjad considers knowledgeable wise men as gatekeepers of the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. He does not deem it proper to be stingy about knowledge or wisdom, as it is not proper to be stingy with wealth.

4 – If the one who possesses knowledge acts upon his duties, he is like a sympathetic counselor who has seriously safeguarded what he is entrusted with. Otherwise, he is like one who has betrayed his master. By not respecting the rights of his subjects through knowledge, he has oppressed them, and has deprived them of their rights to be honored.

Therefore, one who possesses knowledge should seek ways to teach his students that would encourage them to learn. Any form of bad-temper, ill conduct or anger with the students will make the students lose their interest. It might even force them to quit their studies. In fact, this implies that the one who possesses knowledge has hoarded up his knowledge, and is being stingy with his knowledge by showing this kind of behavior.

A Good Teacher's Characteristics

A good teacher is one who possesses the following desirable characteristics in teaching and encountering his students:

1 – A good teacher is one who does not assume the responsibility of teaching until he attains all the desirable qualities and capabilities of a teacher. This is to be recognized by good people.

2 – A good teacher is one who does not entrust his knowledge to bad people to be abused and debased.

3 – A good teacher should put his knowledge to practice, and the society should be given the chance to benefit from the fruits of this act. If not, he is like those admonished in the following verse:

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

“Do ye enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practice it) yourselves.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:44]

Regarding the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

“Those truly fear God, among His servants, who have knowledge.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Fatir 35:28]

Imam Sadiq said:

العالمُ مَنْ صَدَّقَ فِعْلُهُ قَوْلَهُ وَمَنْ لَمْ يُصَدِّقْ قَوْلُهُ فِعْلُهُ فَلَيْسَ بِعَالِمٍ.

“A knowledgeable person is one whose deeds confirm his words. One whose deeds do not confirm his words is not a knowledgeable person.”¹

4- A good teacher should be good-tempered and humble. He should train his students with patience and kindness. The Prophet of God said the following regarding scholars:

عُلَمَاءُ أُمَّتِي كَأَنْبِيَاءِ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ.

“My nation’s scholars are like the Prophet of the Israelites.”²

This implies that the same patience and good-temper that is necessary for the Prophets to succeed in their inviting the people to follow God, is also necessary for teachers to be successful in teaching their students.

5 - A good teacher should not use the student’s lack of sincerity and intent to learn as an excuse not to teach him. Rather he should admit him, and slowly develop this sincerity and intention to acquire knowledge in the student in the process of teaching. This is because knowledge without sincerity is similar to jewelry hanging around a pig’s neck as Imam Ali said:

لَا تُعَلِّقُوا الْجَوَاهِرَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الْخَنَازِيرِ.

“Do not hang jewels around a pig’s neck.”³

6 - A good teacher should not hesitate to teach whenever he finds a student ready to learn. Jabir Jo’afi quoted on the authority of Imam Baqir:

زَكَاةُ الْعِلْمِ تَعْلِيمُهُ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ.

“The alms due to be paid on your knowledge is teaching it to God’s servants.”⁴

7 – A good teacher is one whose deeds do not negate his words. An example of this might be his declaring something to be illegitimate, but doing it himself.

8 – A good teacher should be determined to express what is right as much as is in his power to do so. The Prophet of God said:

إِذَا ظَهَرَتِ الْبِدْعُ فِي أُمَّتِي فَلْيُظْهِرِ الْعَالِمُ عِلْمَهُ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَفْعَلْ فَعَلَيْهِ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ.

“When innovations (in religion) appear in my nation, then let the person of knowledge confront it. Whoever does not do so, upon him be the curse of God.”⁵

A Good Teacher’s Duties to His Students and Class

The following are the duties of a good teacher to his students and class:

1 – A good teacher should foster good manners, proper ethics and religious knowledge in his students step by step. He should develop their sense of abstaining from this world.

2 – A good teacher should explain the value and the nobility of knowledge to his students. He should help them understand that the men of knowledge stand in the ranks of the Prophets.

3 – A good teacher should like for his students what he likes for himself, and should dislike for them what he dislikes for himself.

4 – A good teacher should advise his students not to follow bad examples and not to commit the forbidden acts or what might harm them.

5 – A good teacher should not be haughty with his students. Rather he should be humble with them since the Prophet of God said:

لِيُنُوا لِمَنْ تَعَلَّمُونَ وَلِمَنْ تَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُ.

“Be gentle with those you teach and those you learn from.”

6 – A good teacher should always be sympathetic with his students. Whenever one of them is absent, he should ask the reason. He should check on them every now and then either in person or through someone else. He should visit them if they get ill. He should try to help fulfill their needs when they

become needy if he is able to assist them.

7 – A good teacher should get to know the names and characteristics of his students.

8 – A good teacher should seek the easiest way to teach. In the beginning, he should teach whatever must be taught first in order to make them understand what he is teaching. He should present the material to his students at a level that is understandable by them.

9 – A good teacher should be enthusiastic about going to class, and should avoid presenting material beyond the mental ability of his students to comprehend.

10 – A good teacher should treat all of his students the same. If they are all of the same rank, he should not prefer some to others. In addition, if there is an age-related difference in their rank, he should show more respect for the students with a higher rank to encourage the rest to work hard to attain a higher rank.

What a Teacher Should Practice

1 – A teacher should be clean, wear clean clothes, walk calmly towards his class, and enter the class with utmost dignity.⁶

2 – A teacher should remember God, and say supplications transmitted to us through the Prophet of God and the Immaculate Imams stressing the highest spiritual meanings. He should pray God to help guide him, and help him understand well, and then start to teach.

3 – A teacher should greet his students upon entering the class. If he is teaching in a mosque, he should at first say two units of prayers, ask God to save him from making any mistakes, and help him succeed.

4 – When he wants to sit down in class, he should be calm. He should sit down with dignity and having previously prepared his lecture, he should start to teach.

5 – He should sit down facing the Qiblah⁷ whenever possible and avoid vain talk.

6 – He should be sincere in his intentions to teach when he sets out to go to class. He should establish the propagation of knowledge and divine decrees as his main goal.

7 – He should avoid undue jokes while teaching. However, he should use jokes mildly and at proper times to break the ice and eliminate the highly formal atmosphere of the classroom.

8 – He should sit where every student can see him. He should look at him and reply.

9 – He should be happy and pleasant when he is teaching, and avoid frowning, or being bad-tempered.

10 – He should bless his class by starting his lecture with some verses from the Holy Qur'an.

11 – It is very important for a good teacher to confess that he does not know the answer to a question asked for which he does not know the answer. He should do so bravely since Imam Ali said:

إِذَا سُئِلْتُمْ عَمَّا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ فَاهْرُبُوا... تَقُولُونَ: اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

“If you are asked about what you know not, then flee.” He was asked how. He replied: “Flee by saying God knows best.”

One should realize that acknowledging that you do not know the answer to that question does not reduce your status. Rather it will strengthen your status in the hearts of the people since then they realize that you are pious.

The Worth of Knowledge–Seekers in the Eyes of the Prophet

The late Al–Shahid al–Thani⁸ expresses more characteristics of a good teacher in the book Muniat al–Mureed. However, we will suffice with the above and direct our attention to the worth of the knowledge–seekers, and the reward that God has established for them.

1 – God’s Prophet said:

مَنْ طَلَبَ عِلْمًا فَأَدْرَكَهُ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنَ الْأَجْرِ، وَمَنْ طَلَبَ عِلْمًا فَلَمْ يُدْرِكْهُ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ كِفْلًا مِنَ الْأَجْرِ.

“God will grant two rewards to whoever seeks knowledge and acquires it. And God will grant one reward to those who seek knowledge, but do not acquire it.”

2 – God’s Prophet said:

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَى عِتْقَاءِ اللَّهِ مِنَ النَّارِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ إِلَى الْمُتَعَلِّمِينَ: فَوَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ مَا مِنْ مُتَعَلِّمٍ يَخْتَلِفُ إِلَى بَابِ الْعَالَمِ إِلَّا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِكُلِّ قَدَمٍ عِبَادَةَ سَنَةٍ وَبَنَى اللَّهُ لَهُ بِكُلِّ قَدَمٍ مَدِينَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَيَمْشِي عَلَى الْأَرْضِ وَهِيَ تَسْتَغْفِرُ لَهُ وَيُمْسِي وَيُصْبِحُ مَغْفُورًا لَهُ وَشَهِدَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَنَّهُمْ عِتْقَاءُ اللَّهِ مِنَ النَّارِ.

“Whoever likes to see those saved by God from the Fire (of Hell) should take a look at those who seek knowledge. I swear by the One who possesses full control over my life that God grants the reward of one year of worshipping Him for each step that the knowledge–seekers take while going to and returning from the house of the knowledgeable ones. For each step they take, God builds them a city in Heaven. The Earth prays for them and seeks their forgiveness as they walk on it. Their mornings and evenings are accompanied by God’s forgiveness and the angels witness that they have been freed by God from the Fire.”⁹

3- God's Prophet said:

مَنْ طَلَبَ الْعِلْمَ فَهُوَ كَالصَّائِمِ نَهَارَهُ وَالْقَائِمِ لَيْلَهُ وَإِنَّ أَبَا بَابٍ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ يَتَعَلَّمُهُ الرَّجُلُ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ أَنْ يَكُونَ أَبُو قُبَيْسٍ ذَهَبًا فَأَنْفَقَهُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ.

*“Whoever seeks knowledge is like one who fasts in the daytime and stays up at night to worship God. For him each chapter that he learns is better than giving as much gold in charity as Mount Abu Qubays for the sake of God.”*¹⁰

4- God's Prophet said:

مَنْ جَاءَهُ الْمَوْتُ وَهُوَ يَطْلُبُ الْعِلْمَ لِيُحْيِيَ بِهِ الْإِسْلَامَ كَانَ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ دَرَجَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ.

*“Whoever dies while seeking knowledge with the intention of reviving Islam, then there is one rank in Heaven between him and the Prophets.”*¹¹

This was a brief summary of the values of students that the Noble Prophet expressed.

- ^{1.} Usul al-Kafi, v. 1, p.36.
- ^{2.} Munyah al-Murid, p.182.
- ^{3.} Ibid. p.184.
- ^{4.} Usul al-Kafi, v. 1, p.41.
- ^{5.} Usul al-Kafi, v. 1, p.54.
- ^{6.} Munyah al-Murid, pp. 204–210.
- ^{7.} The direction towards the Holy House of God in Makkah to which Muslims turn when they pray.
- ^{8.} Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al-'Amili.
- ^{9.} Zayn al-Din al-'Amili.
- ^{10.} Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al-'Amili.
- ^{11.} Ibid.

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