

Right n. 21: The Right of your Slave

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وَأَمَّا حَقُّ رَعِيَّتِكَ بِمَلِكِ الْيَمِينِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ خُلِقَ رِبَكَ، وَلِحُمُكَ وَدَمِكَ وَأَنَّكَ تَمْلِكُهُ لَا أَنْتَ صَنَعْتَهُ دُونَ اللَّهِ وَلَا خَلَقْتَ لَهُ سَمْعًا وَلَا بَصَرًا وَلَا أُجْرِيَتْ لَهُ رِزْقًا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ كَفَاكَ ذَلِكَ، ثُمَّ سَخَّرَهُ لَكَ وَأَنْتُمْ مَنَ عَلَيْهِ وَاسْتَوَدَعَكَ إِيَّاهُ لِتَحْفَظَهُ فِيهِ وَتَسِيرَ فِيهِ بِسِيرَتِهِ فَتَطْعِمَهُ مِمَّا تَأْكُلُ وَتَلْبَسُهُ مِمَّا تَلْبَسُ وَلَا تُكَلِّفُهُ مَا لَا يُطِيقُ، فَإِنْ كَرِهْتَ [ه] خَرَجْتَ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنْهُ وَاسْتَبَدَّلْتَ بِهِ وَلَمْ تُعَذِّبْ خَلْقَ اللَّهِ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of your subject through being your slave is that you should know that he is a creature of your Lord and is made of the same flesh and blood as you. And you only own him, but you have not created him apart from God. And you have not created his hearing and sight, nor do you provide his daily sustenance; rather it is God who gives you sufficiency for that.

Then He subjugated him to you, entrusted him to you, and provisionally consigned him to you so that you may protect him there,¹ and treat him as well as He has treated you. So feed him with what you eat yourself, and clothe him with what you clothe yourself. And do not burden him with what he cannot withstand. And if you dislike him, you ought to let him go and replace him, but do not torment God's creature. And there is no power but in God.

We discussed what Imam Sajjad presented about the right of the trainer through ownership earlier in Chapter 17. In this chapter, we shall discuss the right of the slaves. There we stated that at the beginning Islam accepted the issue of slavery and did not issue a decree as to the slaves' freedom all at once since it was not economically feasible. However, since the issue of slavery was unavoidable at first, Islam established certain rights for slaves, and advised the Muslims to wholeheartedly honor their rights.

Islam and the Worth of the Slaves

1 – Islam eliminated the distinctions between the master and the slave, and it declared all equal. The Noble Prophet Muhammad said:

إِخْوَانُكُمْ جَعَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِتْنَةً تَحْتَ أَيْدِيكُمْ فَمَنْ كَانَ أَخُوهُ تَحْتَ يَدِهِ فَلْيُطْعِمْهُ مِنْ طَعَامِهِ وَلْيَلْبِسْهُ مِنْ لِبَاسِهِ وَلَا يُكَلِّفْهُ مَا يَغْلِبُهُ فَإِنْ كَلَّفَهُ مَا يَغْلِبُهُ فَلْيَعِزَّهُ.

“Your slaves are your brothers. God has set them as a trial under your authority. Therefore whoever has mastery over one of his brothers should feed him from what he eats himself, and should clothe him with what he wears himself, and should not burden him with tasks beyond his strength, and should assist him in doing whatever hard work he asks him to do.”²

2 – The Prophet of Islam has honored slaves so much that he has not even allowed anyone to call them a slave or a maid:

لَا يَقُلْ أَحَدُكُمْ: هَذَا عَبْدِي وَهَذِهِ أَمْتِي. وَلْيَقُلْ: فَتَايَ وَفَتَاتِي.

“No one is allowed to say this is my slave or that is my maid. You should say this is my young man, and that is my young lady.”³

3 So much was done to improve the conditions of slaves in Islam, and they were so honored so much that no one dared beat his slave lest he would be recognized as the worst person in the world. This was done so that no one can beat someone else just because he is a slave, so that no one can hurt one of the servants of God nor oppress them. Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet : “Do you want me to tell you who the worst people are?” The companions said: “Yes. O Prophet of God!” Then the Prophet said:

مَنْ سَافَرَ وَحْدَهُ وَمَنْعَ رِفْدَهُ وَضَرَبَ عَبْدَهُ.

“Those who travel alone, do not admit guests, and beat their slaves.”⁴

You can see from this tradition that the Prophet has introduced those who beat or hurt their slaves as the worst of the people.

Imam Ali and his Generosity with His Slave

Once Imam Ali went to the bazaar and purchased two garments. He bought one for two Dirhams and the

other one for three Dirhams. He donated the one he had bought for three Dirhams to his slave Qanbar and took the other one for himself. His slave said: “You are the Commander of the Faithful. You climb up the pulpit and deliver sermons to the people. You deserve more to wear the more expensive garment.” Imam Ali replied: “I am ashamed to seek superiority over you in this respect. I heard God’s Prophet say:

أَلْبَسُوهُمْ مِمَّا تَلْبَسُونَ وَأَطْعِمُوهُمْ مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ

*“Clothe them with what you wear yourselves, and feed them with what you eat.”*⁵

The Prophet of Islam said:

“Your slaves are your brothers. Treat them with kindness. Seek their help in performing your hard tasks, and help them in the performance of difficult tasks.”⁶

He also said:

أَوْصَانِي حَبِيبِي جِبْرِئِيلُ بِالرَّفْقِ بِالرَّقِيقِ حَتَّى ظَنَنْتُ أَنَّهُ سَيَضْرِبُ لِي أَجَلًا يَخْرُجُ فِيهِ حُرًّا

*“My friend Gabriel advised me about treating my slaves with gentleness so much that I thought he would soon establish a deadline for freeing them.”*⁷

Abu-Dharr and Donating a Garment

Abu-Dharr al-Ghifari owned two long expensive togas with which he covered himself. After a while, he used one of them to make himself a garment. He used to wear a cloak on top of that. He donated the other one to his slave. When the people found out, they blamed him and said: “You would have looked more handsome if you used both togas to make an attire for yourself.”

Abu-Dharr replied: “But I heard the Prophet of Islam say: “Clothe your slaves with what you wear yourselves, and feed them with the same with which you feed yourselves.”⁸ Once the Prophet of Islam noticed a man was riding while his slave was walking behind him. The Prophet said: “Let your slave ride with you since he is your brother. His spirit is similar to your spirit.”⁹

Imam Ridha and Slaves

Yaser and Nader were both slaves of Imam Ridha . They said that Imam Ridha told them: “Whenever you see me while you are sitting down and eating, do not move until you finish your meal.”¹⁰

Imam Sadiq and Slaves

Once Imam Sadiq asked one of his slaves to go and do something. He went, and did not return on time.

The Imam went after him, and found him asleep. He sat there and waited until he woke up. Then Imam Sadiq faced him and said: “O man! Why do you sleep both at night and during the daytime? The night is for you to rest, and the day is for you to struggle to fulfill your needs.”¹¹ The few examples above are only cited to illustrate how the Immaculate Imams treated their slaves and how much they honored them and respected them.

Pledges for the Slaves

The Prophet of Islam did a lot to raise the status of the slaves. As an example, he made a pledge of brotherhood for slaves such as Bilal al-Habashi (the Abyssinian), Zayd ibn Harithe and Kharizat ibn Zayd with free Muslims such as Khalid ibn Rowayhe Khasami, Hamza ibn Abi Talib and Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah. He also married off many of the women from noble families to the slaves. He first married off his own aunt’s first daughter named Zaynab, the daughter of Jahsh to the slave named Zayd ibn Harithe.

Then he married off the daughter of the head of the Bani Bayazeh tribe – the daughter of Zeyad ibn Lobayd to Jowbayr. In addition to this, he appointed Usama ibn Zayd (the son of a slave) to be the head of the Islamic armed forces and go to Syria to fight with the Roman enemies. This he did even though there were many brave free men such as Umar, Abu Bakr, and others from among the immigrants¹² and the helpers¹³ available to fill that position.

The Rewards for Freeing Slaves

So far, we have expressed the importance of the rights of the slaves as expressed by the Noble Prophet of Islam and the Immaculate Imams . Now we shall discuss the rewards for freeing slaves. We have already discussed the rights of the trainer through ownership, and the issue related to free slaves. There is a section in Wasa`il al-Sha`h by Sheikh Toosi called “Kitab ul-‘Itq”. In the first chapter of this section called “Bab ul-Estehbabe” there are many traditions regarding the rewards for freeing slaves. We will mention a few of them here.

In the first tradition in this chapter we read: “Muhammad ibn al-Husayn quoted on the authority of al-Husayn ibn al-Sa’ed on the authority of Abi Abdullah Ja’far ibn Muhammad :

يَعْتِقُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ بِكُلِّ عَضْوٍ مِنْهُ عَضْوًا مِنَ النَّارِ

“God the Exalted the High will save whoever frees his slave from the Fire. For every organ that he frees, God will save one of his organs from the Fire.”¹⁴

In the fourth tradition in this chapter we read: “Husayn ibn Muhammad quoted on the authority of al-Hasan ibn Ali on the authority of his grandfathers on the authority of Bashir an-Nab’bal that he heard

Imam Sadiq say:

مَنْ أَعْتَقَ نَسَمَةً صَالِحَةً لِرُوحِهِ اللَّهُ كَفَّرَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ مَكَانَ كُلِّ عَضْوٍ مِنْهُ عَضْوًا مِنَ النَّارِ.

“God will forgive whoever frees a good servant of God for God’s sake. God will save his organs from the Fire (of Hell) – an organ will be saved for each organ freed.”¹⁵

The Evening of the Day of ‘Arafah⁴⁹⁸ and Freeing Slaves

In the sixth tradition of this chapter, Imam Sadiq has been quoted as saying: “The Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali freed one thousand slaves using money he earned with his own hard work.” In the second chapter of this section, it has been stated that it is recommended to free slaves on the evening of the day of ‘Arafah. Two traditions from Imam Sadiq have been narrated to support this. The first one is:

يُسْتَحَبُّ لِلرَّجُلِ أَنْ يَتَقَرَّبَ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَشِيَّةَ عَرَفَةَ وَيَوْمَ عَرَفَةَ بِالْعِتْقِ وَالصَّدَقَةِ.

“It is recommended for man to seek proximity to God on the day and evening of ‘Arafah by freeing slaves and giving charity.”¹⁶

Thus from what we have described one can better comprehend the depth of the meaningful words of Imam Sajjad regarding slaves. Therefore, we should treat them as the Noble Prophet and the Immaculate Imams did.

- ^{1.} In your shelter.
- ^{2.} Islam and Human Rights, p.204, quoted from Nahjul Fasahat, p. 120.
- ^{3.} Ibid. from Shubhat al-Islam, p.34.
- ^{4.} Islam and Human Rights, p. 204, quoted from Bihar al-Anwar, v. 16, p.40.
- ^{5.} Ibid.
- ^{6.} Ibid. p.206.
- ^{7.} Ibid. quoted from “The History of Slavery” (Persian text), p.74.
- ^{8.} Islam and Human Rights, quoted from Bihar al-Anwar, v. 16, p.40.
- ^{9.} Ibid. quoted from The History of Slavery (Persian text), p.74.
- ^{10.} Ibid. quoted from Bihar al-Anwar, v. 15, p.41.
- ^{11.} Ibid.
- ^{12.} Those who emigrated from Makkah to Madina.
- ^{13.} Those who lived in Madina and helped the Prophet and the other emigrants who accompanied him.
- ^{14.} Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v. 16, pp. 2-4.
- ^{15.} Ibid.
- ^{16.} Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v. 16, pp.2-4

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