

Right n. 26: The Right of the Master

حق المنعم على مولاه

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الْمُنْعَمِ عَلَيْكَ بِالْوَلَاءِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ أَنْفَقَ فِيكَ مَالَهُ، وَأَخْرَجَكَ مِنْ ذُلِّ الرِّقِّ وَوَحْشَتِهِ إِلَى عِزِّ الْحُرِّيَةِ وَأَنْسَاهَا، وَأَطْلَقَكَ مِنْ أَسْرِ الْمَلَكَةِ، وَفَكَ عَنْكَ حَلِقَ الْعُبُودِيَّةِ، وَأَوْجَدَكَ رَائِحَةَ الْعِزِّ، وَأَخْرَجَكَ مِنْ سِجْنِ الْقَهْرِ، وَدَفَعَ عَنْكَ الْعُسْرَ، وَبَسَطَ لَكَ لِسَانَ الْإِنْصَافِ، وَأَبَاحَكَ الدُّنْيَا كُلَّهَا فَمَلَكَكَ نَفْسَكَ، وَحَلَّ أَسْرَكَ، وَفَرَّغَكَ لِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّكَ، وَاحْتَمَلَ بِذَلِكَ التَّقْصِيرَ فِي مَالِهِ، فَتَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ أَوْلَى الْخَلْقِ بِكَ بَعْدَ أَوْلَى رَحِمِكَ فِي حَيَاتِكَ وَمَوْتِكَ، وَأَحَقَّ الْخَلْقِ بِنَصْرِكَ وَمَعُونَتِكَ وَمُكَانِفَتِكَ فِي ذَاتِ اللَّهِ، فَلَا تُؤَثِّرْ عَلَيْهِ نَفْسَكَ مَا احتَاجَ إِلَيْكَ.

Then the right of your master who has favored you¹ is that you should know that he has spent his property for you and has brought you out of the abasement of slavery and its desolation, and has brought you into the honor of freedom and its sociability. And he has freed you from the captivity of his own possession and has released the bonds of his slavery from you.

And he has led you to smell the scent of honor, and has brought you out of the prison of subjugation, and has repelled hardship from you, and has extended to you the tongue of fairness, and has liberated you to freely move about in the whole world, and has given you ownership of yourself, and has freed you from captivity, and has given you the freedom to worship your Lord.

And for this he has suffered a decrease in his fortune. Then you should know that he is the closest creature to you after your relations of kin in your life and after your death, and that he is the most meritorious creature to receive your assistance and support, and your help for God's sake. Therefore, do not prefer yourself to him regarding any of his needs.

Here Imam Sajjad warns the freed slave about the rights of his master– a master who has expended his property to free him, and has brought him out of the abasement of slavery into the honor of freedom –

freedom of thoughts and beliefs. He has brought him out of the slavery of other than god into the honor of God's servitude. He warns him that such a master has certain rights incumbent upon him.

Thus, he should realize that such a master has the right to be helped. He should realize that he should never prefer himself to his master regarding any of his needs. We have already discussed the history of slavery. We expressed the oppressions they suffered. We also stated the factors that led to their freedom. Especially we clarified how Islam gradually established the proper conditions for their freedom. Here we shall not repeat what was said before. Rather we will present other aspects of their freedom – namely ideological freedom and the freedom of ownership.

Freedom to Think

Freedom to think is the most fundamental human right. Each individual has the right to think about anything he wants. No one is allowed to control his thinking, or interrogate him about what he thinks, or set up certain conditions that will block him from thinking and understanding properly. Although one may argue that only a slave's body is under the control of his master and his mind is free, it is obvious that in reality a slave is deprived of the opportunity to think freely.

Even if we assume that he is free to think, it is not possible for him to put his thoughts into practice. Therefore when Imam Sajjad says: "...and has brought you out of the prison of subjugation, and has repelled hardship from you, and has extended to you the tongue of fairness..." he implies that once a slave is freed, he can think freely. He can put his thoughts into practice out there in the real world. Thus, we can say that once a slave is freed, he has attained freedom of the mind. Islam has granted its followers freedom of the mind, and has left their way to study and research open. Imam Ali said the following in this regard:

مَنْ اسْتَقْبَلَ وُجُوهَ الآرَاءِ عَرَفَ مَوَاقِعَ الخَطَأِ

*"Whoever looks at various aspects of thoughts can recognize positions of faults."*²

Thus, we can see that there is no censorship of thoughts in Islam. The criteria for maturity and worth of a person in Islam are considered his intellect, knowledge and thinking. One hour of thinking is considered better than seventy years of worshipping. In many verses, the Qur'an advises man to think and understand. Consider the following verse:

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمْ أُولُوا الأَلْبَابِ

"Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it: those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endowed with understanding." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Zumar

39: 18]

In another verse of the Holy Qur'an we read:

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“...can the blind be held equal to the seeing?” Will ye then consider not?” [The Holy Qur'an, al-An'am 6:50]

Ideological Freedom

One's ideology forms due to a certain background and environment. The way one is educated and some other factors are also involved in the formation of a person's ideology. To change a person's ideology we must rely on the same influential factors that were instrumental in its initial formation. We cannot use force to change a person's ideology. The Holy Qur'an says the following in this regard:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:256]

In another verse we read:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

“If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed, – all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!” [The Holy Qur'an, Yunus 10:99]

In another verse it says:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا

“Say, “The truth is from your Lord”: Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it): for the wrongdoers We have prepared a Fire..!” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Kahf 18:29]

We also read:

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ

“Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish. Thou art not one to manage (men’s) affairs.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Ghashiyah 88:21-22]

Moreover, in another verse we read:

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ

“Now have come to you, from your Lord, proofs (to open your eyes): if any will see, it will be for (the good of) his own soul; if any will be blind, it will be to his own (harm): I am not (here) to watch over your doings.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-An’am, 6: 104]

The above verses also clarify that there is no compulsion in religion. Everyone is free to choose. Islam is a religion of the intellect, logic, science and research. It forbids following blindly. It considers any form of worshipping other than God, like idol-worshipping or worshipping cows as forms of ignorance. Islam invites man to think and acquire knowledge.

Freedom of Ownership

Addressing the freed slaves and regarding their masters, Imam Sajjad said the following regarding their masters: “...and has liberated you to freely move about in the whole world...” This freedom includes freedom of thought and freedom of ownership. Thus, a freed slave can own and use his own property. Private ownership is rooted in man’s nature. It fosters encouragement and helps our lives develop. Islam honors private ownership and legally supports it. Consider the following verse in this respect:

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبْنَ

“...To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn...”[The Holy Qur’an, al-Nisaa 4:32]

Once you legitimately earn something, then it belongs to you. Consider the following verse:

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

“O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: But let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual good-will!” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nisaa 4:29]

Therefore, what one earns through legitimate means belongs to him. Should he be killed while trying to protect his property, he is considered a martyr:

مَنْ قُتِلَ دُونَ مَالِهِ فَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ.

“Whoever gets killed for guarding his wealth is a martyr.”³

Freedom of ownership does not mean that one can obtain wealth through any possible means. Wealth obtained through work in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, business, industry and the like are one’s legal property.

However, what one may obtain through acts like robbery, cheating in transactions, cheating in the amount of goods sold, usury or confiscation is considered to be illegitimately earned by Islam. Islam seriously fights such deeds. It places certain forms of Islamic tax and declares certain rights on what one earns legitimately. Consider the following verse regarding those who do not abide by these regulations:

وَالَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ الذَّهَبَ وَالْفِضَّةَ وَلَا يَنْفِقُونَهَا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

يَوْمَ يُحْمَى عَلَيْهَا فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ فَتُكْوَى بِهَا جِبَاهُهُمْ وَجُنُوبُهُمْ وَظُهُورُهُمْ هَذَا مَا كَنْزْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْنِزُونَ

“And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God: announce unto them a most grievous penalty—On the Day when heat will be produced out of that (wealth) in the fire of Hell, and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs. This is the (treasure) which ye buried for yourselves: taste ye, then, the (treasures) ye buried!” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Tawbah 9:34-35]

This was a brief study of the degrees of freedom a slave attains after being freed. Finally, Imam Sajjad stresses the importance of the freed slave being grateful to his master for freeing him. The Imam warns the freed slave that he should never forget his master’s major act of freeing him.

¹. By freeing you from slavery.

². Nahjul Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, wise saying 164.

³. Islam wa Huquq al-Bashar, p.316; quoted from Al-Adalat al-Ijtima’iyat, p. 103.

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