

The Rights of the Leaders

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Right n. 15: The Right of the Possessor of Authority

حق سائسك بالسلطان

فَأَمَّا حَقُّ سَائِسِكَ بِالسُّلْطَانِ فَإِنَّ تَعَلَّمَ أَنَّكَ جُعِلْتَ لَهُ فِتْنَةً وَأَنَّهُ مُبْتَلَىٰ فِيكَ بِمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ لَهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ السُّلْطَانِ وَأَنَّ تَخْلِصَ لَهُ فِي النَّصِيحَةِ وَأَنَّ لَا تُمَاجِكُهُ وَقَدْ بُسِطَتْ يَدُهُ عَلَيْكَ فَتَكُونَ سَبَبَ هَلَاكِ نَفْسِكَ وَهَلَاكِهِ. وَتَذَلُّ وَتَلَطَّفُ لِإِعْطَائِهِ مِنَ الرِّضَا مَا يَكْفُهُ عَنْكَ وَلَا يَضُرُّ بَدِينَكَ وَتَسْتَعِينُ عَلَيْهِ فِي ذَلِكَ بِاللَّهِ. وَلَا تُعَازِهُ وَلَا تُعَانِدُهُ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ فَعَلْتَ ذَلِكَ عَقَقْتَهُ وَعَقَقْتَ نَفْسَكَ فَعَرَضْتَهَا لِمَكْرُوهِهِ وَعَرَضْتَهُ لِلْهَلَاكَِةِ فِيكَ وَكُنْتَ خَلِيقًا أَنْ تَكُونَ مُعِينًا لَهُ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ وَشَرِيكًا لَهُ فِيهَا أَتَى إِلَيْكَ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

Then the right of the possessor of authority is that you should know that God has established you as a trial for him. God is testing him through the authority He has given him over you. And you should sincerely provide him with your advice. And you should not quarrel with him while he has full dominance over you, for thereby you cause your own destruction and his, too. And you should be humble and courteous for his gifts to attain his satisfaction with you, so that he will not harm your religion.

And you should seek God's help in this regard. Do not oppose his power and do not resist him. Should you do so, you would have disobeyed him and disobeyed yourself: thus exposing

yourself to encounter his evil and expose him to destruction by you. Thus you will deserve to be considered to be his assistant acting against yourself and as his partner in what he does to you. And there is no power but in God.

In this chapter, we review the rights of the leaders of the society as expressed by Imam Sajjad . At first, the rights of the rulers are discussed. Everyone agrees that there must be a ruler in each society in order to run the affairs. Social regulations and laws should be executed under his rule. Social security and peace should be established and chaos should be avoided so that the people can continue their lives and struggle for further development.

Imam Ali's Views on the Need for a Ruler

When the “Kharijites”¹ objected to Imam Ali about the issue of “Hakamayn”² and claimed that the verdict lies but with God, Imam Ali said:

كَلِمَةٌ حَقٌّ يُرَادُ بِهَا بَاطِلٌ! نَعَمْ إِنَّهُ لَا حُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ، وَلَكِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ يَقُولُونَ: لَا إِمْرَةَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ. إِنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ أَمِيرٍ بَرٍّ أَوْ فَاجِرٍ يَعْمَلُ فِي إِمْرَتِهِ الْمُؤْمِنُ وَيَسْتَمْتِعُ بِهَا الْكَافِرُ وَيُبَلِّغُ اللَّهُ فِيهَا الْأَجَلَ وَيُجْمَعُ بِهِ الْفِيءُ وَيُقَاتَلُ بِهِ الْعَدُوُّ وَتَأْمَنُ بِهَا السُّبُلُ وَيُؤْخَذُ بِهِ لِلضَّعِيفِ مِنَ الْقَوِيِّ حَتَّى يَسْتَرِيحَ بَرٌّ وَيُسْتَرَاخَ مِنْ فَاجِرٍ.

“The statement is right but what (they think) it means is wrong. Yes, it is true that verdict lies but with God, but these people say that (the function of) governance is only for God. The fact is that there is no escape for men from a ruler, whether good or bad. The faithful persons perform (good) acts in his rule while the unfaithful ones enjoy (worldly) benefits in it. During the rule, God would carry everything to end. Tax is collected by the ruler, enemies are fought with, roadways are protected and the right of the weak is taken from the strong till the virtuous enjoys peace and is allowed protection from (the oppression of) the wicked.”

Imam Ali stresses the need for a ruler in the society and his role. He points out that a peaceful and strong society is one in which there is a strong rule based upon which security and order is established in the society. Here the Imam stressed the absolute necessity of a ruler in the society.

Imam Ridha's Views on the Need for a Ruler

Fazl ibn Shazan quoted Imam Ridha's views on the necessity of the existence of a ruler in the society, and the reasons behind it. He then stated that the Imam said:

وَمِنْهَا أَنَّا لَا نَجِدُ فِرْقَةً مِنَ الْفِرْقِ وَلَا مَلَّةً مِنَ الْمَلَلِ بَقُوا وَعَاشُوا إِلَّا بِقِيَمٍ وَرَيْسٍ لِمَا لَا بُدَّ لَهُمْ مِنْهُ فِي أَمْرِ الدِّينِ وَالدُّنْيَا، فَلَمْ يَجُزْ فِي حِكْمَةِ الْحَكِيمِ أَنْ يَتْرَكَ الْخَلْقَ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ لَهُمْ مِنْهُ وَلَا قَوَامَ لَهُمْ إِلَّا بِهِ، فَيُقَاتِلُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّهُمْ وَيُقَسِّمُونَ بِهِ فَيْئَهُمْ وَيُقِيمُ لَهُمْ جَمْعِيَّتَهُمْ وَجَمَاعَتَهُمْ وَيَمْنَعُ ظَالِمَهُمْ مِنْ مَظْلُومِهِمْ.

“One reason to support this view is that there have been no groups or nations who have been able to continue living without a leader or ruler, since people need a leader for their worldly and heavenly affairs. Therefore, it is not wise for a sage to deprive the people of what they need to continue living. They fight their enemies under his rule. They divide the booties under his supervision. They establish their Friday congregations and other gatherings through him. They seek justice for the weak ones against the oppressors by him.”³

The need for a leader is clearly established from these words expressed by Imam Ridha .

Just Leaders and Their Characteristics

God has said in the Holy Qur’an that there are two kinds of rulers: just leaders and oppressive rulers. Each one has certain characteristics that we will briefly outline here. Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ

“And We made them leaders, guiding (men) by Our Command, and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only).” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Anbiya 21:73]

The characteristics and duties expressed in this verse about leaders appointed by God are as follows:

- 1) Guiding men by God’s Command
- 2) Receiving divine inspiration to do good deeds, establish regular prayers, practice regular charity in order to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor
- 3) To constantly serve God, i.e. they must have served God to attain the position of leadership of the society.

Leadership as a Requirement for Victory

God has clearly stated strength and power as a requirement for a just ruler in the Holy Qur’an. The Qur’an cites a few illustrative examples. One such example is the story of Talut that is also expressed in the Bible.⁴ Talut was a tall, strong and handsome man. He had strong nerves. He was very wise and intelligent. Some say he was called Talut because he was very tall.⁵ Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَا مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّ لَهُمْ ابْعَثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

"Hast thou not turned thy vision to the Chiefs of the Children of Israel after (the time of) Moses? They said to a Prophet (that was) among them: "Appoint for us a king, that we may fight in the cause of God...." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:246]

Also, consider the following verse:

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مَلَكُهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Their Prophet said to them: "God hath appointed Talut as king over you." They said: "How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority, and he is not even gifted, with wealth in abundance?" He said: "God hath chosen him above you, and hath gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess: God granteth His authority to whom He pleaseth. God careth for all, and He knoweth all things." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:247]

We see that having a strong and intelligent leader is an important factor in achieving victory and success. This can clearly be seen in this verse where a knowledgeable person is appointed to rule the Children of Israel. They objected to his being poor but God responds with the fact that Talut is gifted with knowledge and bodily prowess.

Talut Heads the Army

Talut headed the army and proved his ability to run the affairs of the army and the country in a very short time. Then he went to fight against an enemy that seriously threatened them. He stressed that only those who were whole-heartedly interested in fighting with the enemy could accompany him. Then the children of Israel finally managed to overcome Jalut's forces under the leadership of a strong leader.

From studying this account, we can see that the most important aspects of leadership are divine appointment, knowledge and power. The leader uses his knowledge to recognize the proper path to progress for the society that he leads. He uses his power to implement his plans. Another point mentioned by Imam Sajjad is that God will test both the leader and his followers. We see an example of this test in the story of Talut as we read the following verse:

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَن شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَن لَّمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ اعْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ قَالُوا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُم مُّلَاقُوا اللَّهَ كَمِ مِّن فِتْنَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِئَةٌ كَثِيرَةٌ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

When Talut set forth with the armies, he said: "God will test you at the stream: if any drinks of its water, He goes not with my army: Only those who taste not of it go with me: A mere sip out of the

hand is excused.” But they all drank of it, except a few. When they crossed the river, – He and the faithful ones with him, – they said: “This day we cannot cope with Goliath and his forces.” But those who were convinced that they must meet God, said: “How oft, by God’s will, hath a small force vanquished a big one? God is with those who steadfastly persevere.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:249]

Good Use of Power by Alexander

Another example of the good use of power is found in the story of Alexander or Zul-qarnain. In this story, Alexander runs into a people who hardly understand but are apparently rich and have an enemy. Consider the following verse in this regard:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَّيْنِ وَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمَا قَوْمًا لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ قَوْلًا

“Until, when he reached (a tract) between two mountains, he found, beneath them, a people who scarcely understood a word.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Kahf 18:93]

This refers to some people who lived in a mountainous region. They were neither Eastern nor Western. They were of a very backward civilization since the Qur’an says that they scarcely understood a word. Alternatively, it may be that they were mentally retarded. This is, of course, less probable. They had ruthless enemies called the people of Gog and Magog. They complained to Alexander about them, and offered to pay him tribute in order to build a barrier between them and the people of Gog and Magog. Consider the following verse in this respect:

قَالُوا يَا ذَا الْقُرْتَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا أَتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ انْفُخُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ أَتُونِي أُفْرِغْ عَلَيْهِ قِطْرًا

“They said: “O Zul-qarnain! The Gog and Magog (People) do great mischief on earth: shall we then render thee tribute in order that thou mightest erect a barrier between them and us?” He said: “(The power) in which my Lord has established me is better (than tribute): Help me therefore with strength (and labor): I will erect a strong barrier between you and them. Bring me blocks of iron.” At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountainsides, he said, “Blow (with your bellows).” Then, when he had made it (red) as fire, he said: “Bring me, that I may pour over it, molten lead.”” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Kahf 18:94–96]

It seems that the pathway through which the people of Gog and Magog attacked them was a space between two steep mountainsides. Alexander filled up that space with blocks of iron, had it heated up and then poured molten lead over it to totally block off the passage.⁶ Then instead of being haughty for

what he had done, he politely stated that his power was that of his Lord's Mercy on him. The people thanked him. This is one of the characteristics of a strong leader. Imam Ali said:

فإنَّ الرِّعِيَّةَ الصَّالِحَةَ تَنْجُو بِالْإِمَامِ الْعَادِلِ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ الرِّعِيَّةَ الْفَاجِرَةَ تُهْلِكُ بِالْإِمَامِ الْفَاجِرِ.

*“The saving of good people depends on their just leader. The destruction of bad people is due to their bad leader.”*⁷

Recognize Good Leaders and Obey Them

Imam Sadiq narrated that Imam Husayn told his companions:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَلَّ ذِكْرُهُ مَا خَلَقَ الْعِبَادَ إِلَّا لِيَعْرِفُوهُ، فَإِذَا عَرَفُوهُ عَبَدُوهُ، فَإِذَا عَبَدُوهُ اسْتَعْنَوْا عَنْ عِبَادَةِ مَا سِوَاهُ.

“O people! God created the people only in order that they get to recognize Him. When they recognize Him, they worship Him, and when they worship Him they have no need of worshipping other than Him.”

A man said: “O’ May my parents be your ransom! How do we get to recognize God?” Imam Husayn said:

مَعْرِفَةُ أَهْلِ كُلِّ زَمَانٍ إِمَامَهُمُ الَّذِي يَجِبُ عَلَيْهِمْ طَاعَتُهُ.

“For each era the people should recognize their own leader whose obedience is obligatory for them.”
Thus, we see that the Imam considers getting to know the just leader is the proper way to recognize God.

Egyptians Were Saved by a Just Leader

We read in the Holy Qur’an that when Joseph was released from jail, and his talents became apparent to the ruler of Egypt, he was offered a high position in the government. Joseph who was an honest man and knew economics well thought that he could save the people of Egypt. He asked to be appointed as the treasurer. Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْمُ

“(Joseph) said: “Set me over the store-houses of the land: I will indeed guard them, as one that knows (their importance).” [The Holy Qur’an, Yusuf 12:55]

Joseph ran the affairs of the country and safely led the Egyptian people through the years of famine in such a successful way that the Qur'an considers him one of the best human leaders.

A Just Ruler Deserves to be Respected

There are many traditions that stress the necessity of respecting a just ruler. We shall mention a few of them here. The Prophet of God said:

وَقَرُّوا السَّلَاطِينَ وَجَلُّوهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ عِزُّ اللَّهِ وَظِلُّهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِذَا كَانُوا عُدُولًا.

“Respect and revere the rulers since they are the Glory of God and His shadow on earth if they are just.”⁸

It has been narrated that Umar asked the Prophet of God : “Please inform me of a ruler to whom everyone bows in respect.” The Prophet said:

(هو) ظِلُّ اللَّهِ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَإِذَا أَحْسَنَ فَلَهُ الْأَجْرُ وَعَلَيْكُمْ الشُّكْرُ، وَإِذَا أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهِ الْإِصْرُ وَعَلَيْكُمْ الصَّبْرُ

“He is God’s shadow on the earth. Whenever he does some good act, there will be a reward for him and you must be grateful to him. Whenever he does an evil act, he is held responsible for it and you must be patient and persevering.”⁹

We see that in this tradition the Prophet of God has stressed that we should be grateful to just rulers. It has been narrated that Imam Kazim advised his followers as follows:

لَا تُدَلُّوا رِقَابَكُمْ بِتَرْكِ طَاعَةِ سُلْطَانِكُمْ فَإِنْ كَانَ عَادِلًا فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ بِإِقْبَاءِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ جَائِرًا فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ بِإِصْلَاحِهِ، فَإِنَّ صَلَاحَكُمْ فِي صَلَاحِ سُلْطَانِكُمْ، وَإِنَّ السُّلْطَانَ الْعَادِلَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْوَالِدِ الرَّحِيمِ فَأَحِبُّوا لَهُ مَا تُحِبُّونَ لِنَفْسِكُمْ وَأَكْرَهُوا لَهُ مَا تَكْرَهُونَ لِنَفْسِكُمْ.

“Do not debase yourselves through disobedience to your rulers. If they are just rulers, ask God for their prosperity and lasting rule. If they are oppressive rulers, ask God to guide them. Your righteousness depends on his righteousness. A just ruler is like a kind father. Like for him what you like for yourselves, and dislike for him what you dislike for yourselves.”¹⁰

We see that the Imam depicts a just ruler as a kind father. He can direct the society towards progress, development and perfection, just as a kind father raises a good child. The Noble Prophet said:

زَيْنَ اللَّهِ السَّمَاءَ بِثَلَاثَةِ: الشَّمْسِ وَالْقَمَرِ وَالْكَوَاكِبِ. وَزَيْنَ الْأَرْضِ بِثَلَاثَةِ: الْعُلَمَاءِ وَالْمَطَرِ وَالسُّلْطَانَ الْعَادِلِ.

“God has adorned the heavens with three things: the sun, the moon and the stars. He has also adorned the earth with three things: scholars, rain and just rulers.”¹¹

A Just Pagan Ruler or a Muslim Oppressive Ruler

When Hulegu Khan conquered Baghdad in 1258 A.D. he had his agents ask the wise ones in Baghdad whether a just pagan ruler is better or a Muslim oppressive ruler. When the scientists gathered in the Mustansiriyah School and read the question they refused to answer. Razi ad-din Ali ibn Tavoos who was highly respected by the sages in Baghdad was also present there. When he saw that they refused to answer the question, he started to write the answer as follows: “A just pagan ruler is better than an oppressive Muslim ruler. This is supported by a tradition from the Prophet of God , which says:

يَبْقَى الْمُلْكُ بِالْعَدْلِ مَعَ الْكُفْرِ، وَلَا يَبْقَى بِالْجَوْرِ مَعَ الْإِيمَانِ.

Rule lasts if accompanied by justice, even if it is a pagan’s rule. However, it will not last by oppression even if it is a Muslim’s rule.”¹²

Being Informed about Governmental Affairs

Another important characteristic of a good ruler is being informed about governmental affairs. We saw in the story of Talut a manifestation of this principle. He was strong and well-informed as to how to run the affairs. A ruler’s knowledge of the affairs of the government is like a lantern that lights up his way out of darkness. Some wise men have said that if a ruler lacks knowledge, he is like an elephant that runs over and destroys everything when it attacks, since it neither has knowledge nor intellect that are the means which hinder oppression.

Fear and Piety

Another good characteristic of a just ruler is piety and being God-fearing. These characteristics are a source of good blessings. When a ruler has piety, his people live in security. It is narrated that once Imam Ali called his slave. He did not respond. He called him several times again, but the slave did not respond. Then someone entered the room and told Imam Ali that the slave was standing behind the door, but did not respond.

Then the slave entered the room and Imam Ali asked him if he had heard being called. The slave replied positively. Then the Imam asked why he had not responded. The slave said: “I did not respond because I feel secure that I will not be punished by you.” Then Imam Ali said: “I thank God for establishing me as one whose creatures are secure from.”

Forgiving and Overlooking

Other good characteristics of a ruler are forgiving and overlooking people's minor faults as we read in the following verse:

وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ

“Let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that God should forgive you?” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nur 24:22]

Imam Ali said:

إِذَا قَدَرْتَ عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّكَ فَاجْعَلِ الْعَفْوَ عَنْهُ شُكْرًا لِقُدْرَتِكَ عَلَيْهِ

“Forgive your enemy once you have overcome him, so as to be grateful about the blessing of the victory which you have been granted.”¹³

In Imam Ali's letter to Malik al-Ashtar, we read:

لَا تَتَذَمَّنَّ عَلَىٰ عَفْوٍ وَلَا تَبْجَحَنَّ بِعُقُوبَةٍ

“Never be sorry about forgiving, and never be pleased with punishing.”¹⁴

In the same letter, Imam Ali wrote:

فَأَعْطِهِمْ مِنْ عَفْوِكَ وَصَفْحِكَ مِثْلَ الَّذِي تُحِبُّ وَتَرْضَىٰ أَنْ يُعْطِيَكَ اللَّهُ مِنْ عَفْوِهِ وَصَفْحِهِ، فَإِنَّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ، وَوَالِي الْأَمْرِ عَلَيْكَ فَوْقَكَ، وَاللَّهُ فَوْقَ مَنْ وَوَلَاكَ

“Forgive the people as you wish God to grant you His forgiveness. Your rank is above them, and the rank of the possessor of the rule is above yours, and God's rank is above the rank of the one who has granted you your authority.”¹⁵

Fulfilling His Engagements

Another important characteristic of a ruler is that he should fulfill his engagements. In this regard, God says:

وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا

“And fulfill (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).” [The Holy Qur’an, Bani Isra’il 17:34]

Being Informed about the Country’s Affairs

Another good characteristic for a ruler is being well-informed about the affairs of the people and the country. He should know the problems and the insufficiencies that the people are dealing with. He should do his best to pave the way for the elimination of these difficulties and set his nation on the path to progress and development. Imam Ali wrote the following to Malik al-Ashtar in this regard:

وَأَمَّا بَعْدَ هَذَا فَلَا تُطَوِّلَنَّ أَحْتِجَابَكَ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِكَ، فَإِنَّ أَحْتِجَابَ الْوُلَاةِ عَنِ الرَّعِيَّةِ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الضِّيْقِ، وَقَلَّةُ عِلْمٍ بِالْأُمُورِ، وَالْأَحْتِجَابُ مِنْهُمْ يَقْطَعُ عَنْهُمْ عِلْمَ مَا أَحْتِجَبُوا دُونَهُ فَيَصْغُرُ عِنْدَهُمُ الْكَبِيرُ، وَيَعْظُمُ الصَّغِيرُ، وَيَقْبَحُ الْحَسَنُ، وَيَحْسُنُ الْقَبِيحُ وَيُشَابُ الْحَقُّ بِالْبَاطِلِ

“Do not prolong your seclusion from your subjects, for the rulers’ seclusion from their subjects is a kind of limitation and (results in) a lack of knowledge about (their) affairs. Seclusion from them deprives them (the rulers) of the knowledge of what is concealed from them so that what is great becomes small for them and the small becomes great, the good is seen to be ugly and the ugly to be good, and the truth is mixed with falsehood.”

Oppressive Rulers

As we said God has set two kinds of leaders: just ones and oppressive ones. The Qur’an says:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ

“And we made them (but) leaders inviting to the Fire; and on the Day of Judgment no help shall they find.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Qasas 28:41]

Oppressive rulers invite the people who follow them to the Fire of Hell. Now you may wonder how God could set some oppressive rulers while He has sent Prophets to invite man to do good and to lead man to prosperity. The answer is that having an oppressive ruler is a direct consequence of a nation’s acts. Naturally, the fact that is usually expressed as “for every action there is a reaction” is just a divine law. They have set out on a path that leads them to the rule of corrupt people. That is why they are the masters of the residents of Hell, as they were leaders of the corrupt people in this world. Thus they are cursed by God in this world, and in the next to come as God says:

وَأَتَّبَعْنَاهُمْ فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ هُمْ مِنَ الْمَقْبُوحِينَ

“In this world We made a curse to follow them and on the Day of Judgment they will be among the loathed (and despised).” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Qasas 28:42]

God’s curse is depriving them of His Mercy. The curse of the angels and the believers will also be always upon them. Divine leaders invite the people to do good deeds, but corrupt rulers invite the people to corruption and the Fire. There is a tradition from Imam Sadiq in this regard. It says that divine leaders give priority to God’s orders over those of the people and their own will.

They consider God’s decrees to be the best ones. However, the second group give priority to their own orders over those of God and consider their decrees to be above His. [16](#) As each leader has some followers in this world, each leader in the Hereafter also has some followers. Bashar ibn Ghalib quoted on the authority of Imam Husayn when asked about the interpretation of the following verse:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ

“One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams.” [The Holy Qur’an, Bani Israil 17:71]

Imam Husayn said:

إِمَامٌ دَعَا إِلَى هُدًى فَأَجَابُوهُ إِلَيْهِ وَإِمَامٌ دَعَا إِلَى ضَلَالَةٍ فَأَجَابُوهُ إِلَيْهِ: هُوَ لَاءٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَهُوَ لَاءٌ فِي النَّارِ. وَهُوَ قَوْلُهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ.

“A leader invites to guidance and some people follow him. Another leader invites to corruption and some people accept his invitation. The first group will go to Heaven while the second group goes to Hell. This is what is meant by the Almighty God’s words: ‘... (when) some will be in the Garden, and some in the Blazing Fire’ [Shura 42:7].” [17](#)

Imam Sadiq said:

إِنَّ فِي وِلَايَةِ الْوَالِيِ الْجَائِرِ دُرُوسَ الْحَقِّ وَإِحْيَاءَ الْبَاطِلِ كُلِّهِ وَإِظْهَارَ الظُّلْمِ وَالْجَوْرِ وَالْفَسَادِ

“Truth is erased, falsehood is revived, and injustice, oppression and corruption become manifest during the rule of an oppressive ruler.” [18](#)

The Noble Prophet of Islam said:

لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ آفَةٌ يُفْسِدُهُ وَآفَةُ هَذَا الدِّينِ وُلَاةُ السُّوءِ.

*“For everything there is a blight that corrupts it. The blight of this religion is evil rulers.”*¹⁹

Imam Baqir said:

ثَلَاثَةٌ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ حُرْمَةٌ: صَاحِبُ هَوَى مُبْتَدِعٍ وَالْإِمَامُ الْجَائِرُ وَالْفَاسِقُ الْمُعْلِنُ فُسُوقَهُ.

*“There are three groups of people who are not entitled to respect: those who have a lust for innovations (in religion), those who are oppressive leaders, and corrupt people who manifest their corrupt deeds.”*²⁰

From the above discussion, we can clearly see the role of oppressive rulers in destroying the truth and making falsehood and corruption prevail in the society.

An Oppressive Rule: From Light into Darkness

God says in the Holy Qur’an:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ

“..Of those who reject faith the patrons are the evil ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:257]

Imam Sadiq said:

لا دِينَ لِمَنْ دَانَ بِوِلَايَةِ إِمَامٍ جَائِرٍ لَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَا عَتَبَ عَلَى مَنْ دَانَ بِوِلَايَةِ إِمَامٍ عَدْلٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ. (قال ابن أبي يعفور) قلت: لا دِينَ لِأَوْلِيكَ وَلَا عَتَبَ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ؟ فقال عليه السَّلَامُ: نَعَمْ! لا لا دِينَ لِأَوْلِيكَ وَلَا عَتَبَ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ. أَمَا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِ اللَّهِ: اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ.

“Whoever accepts the leadership and rule of an oppressive ruler not appointed by God has no religion, and whoever accepts the leadership of a just leader appointed by God has no blame (on him).” Ibn Abi Ya’foor asked: *“No religion for those and no blame on these?”* The Imam said: *“Yes. No religion for those and no blame on these! Did you not hear God’s statement: ‘God is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light...’”*[al-Baqarah, 2:257].

Treacherous Ruler as Viewed by Imam Ali

The following is a part of a letter that Imam Ali wrote to Masqalah b. Hubayrah al-Shaybani, who was his

representative in a city in the province of Fars²¹ called Ardeshir Khorrah:

بَلَّغَنِي عَنْكَ أَمْرٌ أَنْ فَعَلْتَهُ فَقَدْ أَسْخَطْتَ الْإِهْكَ وَ عَصَيْتَ إِمَامَكَ: إِنَّكَ تَقْسِمُ فِيَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ الَّذِي حَازَتْهُ رِمَاحُهُمْ
وَحُيُولُهُمْ وَأُرْبِقَتْ عَلَيْهِ بِمَاؤُهُمْ فِي مَنْ اعْتَامَكَ مِنْ أَعْرَابِ قَوْمِكَ. فَوَالَّذِي فَلَقَ الْحَبَّةَ وَبَرَّءَ النَّسَمَةَ لَئِنْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ حَقًّا
لَتَجِدَنَّ بَكَ عَلَيَّ هَوَانًا وَتَلْخِفَنَّ عِنْدِي مِيزَانًا، فَلَا تَسْتَهِنِ بِحَقِّ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُصْلِحِ دُنْيَاكَ بِمَحَقِّ دِينِكَ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الْأَخْسَرِينَ
أَعْمَالًا.

“I have heard things about you that, if true, imply that you have raised your Lord’s wrath, and you have disobeyed your leader. I have been notified that you are dividing the properties of Muslims that they have earned with their spears and horses, and for which they have shed their blood, between your Arab relatives who have come to you. I swear by Him Who split the seed and created man, that if this is true then you will find yourself debased in my sight and you will be lowered in my estimation. Therefore do not make light of your Lord’s right, and do not build your world by destroying your religion lest you be of those who are ‘..the greatest losers in their works’” (18: 103).”²²

Then he continues:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ مِنْ أَعْظَمِ الْخِيَانَةِ خِيَانَةَ الْأُمَّةِ وَأَعْظَمُ الْغِشِّ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْمِصْرِ غِشُّ الْإِمَامِ، وَعِنْدَكَ مِنْ حَقِّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ
خَمْسُمِائَةَ أَلْفِ دِرْهَمٍ فَابْعَثْ بِهَا إِلَيْنَا حِينَ يَأْتِيكَ رَسُولِي.

“Moreover, indeed the greatest form of treachery is that done to a nation, and the greatest form of deceit against the people of the city is the deceit of the leader. You have five hundred thousand Dirhams of dues belonging to the Muslims, so send it to us when my representative comes to you.” ²³

We see how Masqalah who had started to forcefully take away the people’s property is blamed by Imam Ali and his treachery is considered to be the worst possible type by the Imam .

Abu-Dharr’s Request was Turned Down

It has been quoted on the authority of Abu-Dharr: “I told the Prophet of God : Will you not appoint me to a government position?” The Prophet replied:

يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ! إِنَّكَ ضَعِيفٌ وَإِنَّهَا أَمَانَةٌ، وَإِنَّهَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ خِزْيٌ وَنَدَامَةٌ إِلَّا مَنْ أَخَذَ بِحَقِّهَا وَأَدَّى الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ فِيهَا.

“O Abu-Dharr! You are weak and the rule of a government is a trust. On the Day of Judgment it will be a (cause of) disgrace and remorse except for those who rightfully obtain it, and fulfil what is incumbent on them in it.”²⁴

Thus, we see that although Abu-Dharr was one of the special companions of the Prophet , he was

denied a government position, and told that he was not able to run the affairs of the government.

- [1.](#) A sect of Muslims who rebelled against the caliphate.
- [2.](#) “Hakamayn” in Arabic means two “hakims”. A “hakim” is a magistrate or one who issues decrees.
- [3.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.386.
- [4.](#) The king of Palestine. Talut is the Arabic name for Saul. Consider the following verses from the Bible:
“When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. [1 Samuel 10:21–24, King James version].
- [5.](#) Why did the Prophet Muhammad name Saul “Talut”? This is seemingly the only name in the Qur’an for a Biblical figure which seems to have no linguistic connection to its Biblical name. According to the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam it is most probably chosen for poetic reasons to make his name rhyme with Jalut [Goliath, 2:249, 250]. Maybe another reason is that Saul was very tall [1 Samuel 10:21–24], and hence he is called Talut from the Arabic word ‘taala’ (to be long/tall) as suggested in Paret’s commentary on the Qur’an. But this is not directly stated in the Qur’an and thus must remain speculative. The Qur’an does state that he had an impressive physique.
- [6.](#) Tafsir-i-Namunah, v. 12, p.534.
- [7.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.385.
- [8.](#) Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.328.
- [9.](#) Ibid.
- [10.](#) Ibid.
- [11.](#) Ibid. p.383.
- [12.](#) Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, p.385.
- [13.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, Wise saying no.10.
- [14.](#) Ibid. Letter no. 53.
- [15.](#) Ibid.
- [16.](#) Tafsir-i-Namunah, v. 16, p.93; quoted from Tafsir Safi.
- [17.](#) Nur al-Thaqalayn, v.3, p.192.
- [18.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.405.
- [19.](#) Nahjul Fasahat, tradition no.2255.
- [20.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.391.
- [21.](#) In Iran.
- [22.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, Letter no. 43.
- [23.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, v.33, p.416.
- [24.](#) Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.374.

Right n. 16: The Right of the Trainer through Knowledge

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ سَائِسِكَ بِالْعِلْمِ فَالتَّعْظِيمُ لَهُ وَالتَّوْقِيرُ لِمَجْلِسِهِ وَحُسْنُ الاسْتِمَاعِ إِلَيْهِ وَالْإِقْبَالُ عَلَيْهِ وَالْمَعُونَةُ لَهُ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ
فِيمَا لَا غِنَى بِكَ عَنْهُ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ بِأَنْ تُفَرِّغَ لَهُ عَقْلَكَ وَتُحْضِرَهُ فَهَمَكَ وَتُزَكِّيَ لَهُ قَلْبَكَ وَتُجَلِّيَ لَهُ بَصْرَكَ بِتَرْكِ اللَّذَاتِ
وَتَقْصِ الشَّهَوَاتِ، وَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّكَ فِيمَا أَلْقَى إِلَيْكَ رَسُولُهُ إِلَى مَنْ لَقَيْكَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَهْلِ فَلْزِمَكَ حُسْنُ التَّأْدِيبَةِ عَنْهُ إِلَيْهِمْ،
وَلَا تَخُنْهُ فِي تَأْدِيبَةِ رِسَالَتِهِ وَالْقِيَامِ بِهَا عَنْهُ إِذَا تَقَلَّدْتَهَا. وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

And the right of the one who trains you through knowledge is venerating him, and respecting his meetings, and listening well to him, and being responsive to him,¹ and helping him for yourself in the knowledge that you need by freeing your mind for him, and presenting your understanding to him, and purifying your heart for him, and fixing your eyes on him by means of abandoning leisures and diminishing lust.

And you should know that regarding what he teaches you, you are considered as his messenger to teach when you meet the ignorant ones. Therefore, it is binding upon you to render on his behalf properly, and not cheat in the fulfillment of his mission, and strive to deliver what you undertake. And there is no power but in God.

We can therefore summarize the following rights of teachers as expressed by Imam Sajjad :

- 1 – Respecting our teacher
- 2 – Seeking our teacher's help in acquiring knowledge
- 3 – Getting whole-heartedly prepared to attend our teacher's lectures
- 4 – Not raising our voice over our teacher's voice
- 5 – Not responding to questions that others ask him before he does
- 6 – Not talking with others while we are in the presence of our teacher
- 7 – Not gossiping about anyone
- 8 – Defending our teacher if someone speaks bad of him
- 9 – Covering up the faults of our teacher
- 10 – Advertising our teacher's nobility
- 11 – Not associating with our teacher's enemies
- 12 – Not acting as an enemy towards his friends

The Importance of Knowledge

Before discussing the rights of teachers, we must consider the high value of knowledge from the viewpoint of Islam and the Holy Qur'an. The value of knowledge is clear to all. Everyone values knowledge, and is naturally humble to those who possess it. The Prophet of God who was the seal of the Prophets is told to read in the very first instance of receiving divine revelations:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

"Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created..." [The Holy Qur'an, al-'Alaq 96: 1]

Then the subject of teaching the use of the pen is revealed:

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

"... He who taught (the use of) the Pen. Taught man that which he knew not." [The Holy Qur'an, al-'Alaq 96:4-5]

It is very important to notice that the very first instance of revelation of divine teachings is about reading, teaching, the pen, etc. This shows that it is teaching and knowledge that can elevate man from the lowest ranks to the highest positions, and finally approach the threshold of God. The Holy Qur'an asks man's conscience to judge about knowledge:

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

"Say: Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Zumar 39:9]

Consider the following verses:

قُلْ لَا يَسْتَوِي الْخَبِيثُ وَالطَّيِّبُ

"Say: Not equal are things that are bad and things that are good ..." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Maida 5: 100]

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَى وَالْبَصِيرُ

وَلَا الظُّلُمَاتُ وَلَا النُّورُ وَلَا الظِّلُّ وَلَا الْحَرُورُ

“The blind and the seeing are not alike, nor are the depths of Darkness and the Light. Nor are the (chilly) shade and the (genial) heat of the sun.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Fatir 35: 19–20]

The phrases “things that are good”, “the seeing”, “the light”, “the heat of the sun” all represent the results of having knowledge, while “things that are bad”, “the blind”, “depths of Darkness” and “the chilly shade” all represent the results of ignorance.

Consider the following verse:

قُلْ كَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَمَنْ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْكِتَابِ

Say: Enough for a witness between me and you is God, and such as have knowledge of the book.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Ra’d 13:43]

In this verse, those who have knowledge have been described to be as a witness to Prophethood along with God, and their high rank near God is clarified.

To stress the importance of acquiring knowledge, the Qur’an says:

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

“... God will raise up to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) knowledge ...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Mujadila 58: 11]

Now that we have briefly expressed the value of knowledge, we will attend to the worth of the teacher.

The Importance of the Rank of a Teacher

God’s Prophet said:

زِيَارَةُ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مِنْ سَبْعِينَ طَوَافاً حَوْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَأَفْضَلُ مِنْ سَبْعِينَ حِجَّةً وَعُمْرَةً مَبْرُورَةً مَقْبُولَةً وَرَفَعَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى لَهُ سَبْعِينَ دَرَجَةً وَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الرَّحْمَةَ وَشَهِدَتْ لَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَنَّ الْجَنَّةَ وَجِبَتْ لَهُ

“Visiting the knowledgeable people is more loved by God than seventy circumambulations of His Holy House, and more excellent than performing seventy Hajj and ‘Umrah (obligatory or recommended) pilgrimages that are approved and accepted. God will raise the status of the one who visits knowledgeable people seventy degrees, and send down mercy upon him and the angels will bear witness that Heaven is guaranteed for him.”²

The Noble Prophet encouraged the people to attend the meetings held by the knowledgeable people:

يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ! الْجُلُوسُ سَاعَةً عِنْدَ مُذَاكِرَةِ الْعِلْمِ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنْ قِيَامِ أَلْفِ لَيْلَةٍ يُصَلِّي فِي كُلِّ لَيْلَةٍ أَلْفَ رَكْعَةٍ. وَ الْجُلُوسُ سَاعَةً عِنْدَ مُذَاكِرَةِ الْعِلْمِ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنْ أَلْفِ غَزْوَةٍ وَقِرَاءَةِ الْقُرْآنِ كُلِّهِ.

“O Abu-Dharr! Attending a scholarly discussion for an hour is more loved by God the Almighty than a thousand nights of standing in prayer, performing a thousand units of prayer each night. Attending a scholarly discussion for an hour is more loved by God than attending a thousand battles and reciting the whole Qur’an.”³

The Prophet said:

مَا مِنْ مُؤْمِنٍ يَفْعُدُ سَاعَةً عِنْدَ الْعَالِمِ إِلَّا نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: جَلَسْتَ إِلَى حَبِيبِي، وَعِزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي لِأَسْكِنَنَّكَ الْجَنَّةَ مَعَهُ وَلَا أُبَالِي.

“No believer sits with a scholar for an hour but that his Lord, the Exalted, the High, calls out to him: You sat with My beloved. I swear by My Majesty and Honor that I will make Heaven your abode. There are no obstacles for this.”⁴

We can see that the Prophet has stated that one who is busy teaching is loved by God and is considered God’s friend. Both him and the students attending his lectures are given a promise to enter Heaven. We should add that this reward is only meant for the teacher and the student who have pure intentions and work for God’s sake.

The Role of the Teacher

Imam Jawad said:

مَنْ أَصْغَى إِلَى نَاطِقٍ فَقَدْ عَبَدَهُ؛ فَإِنْ كَانَ النَّاطِقُ عَنِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ عَبَدَ اللَّهَ، وَإِنْ كَانَ النَّاطِقُ يَنْطِقُ عَنِ لِسَانِ إِبْلِيسَ فَقَدْ عَبَدَ إِبْلِيسَ.

“Whoever listens to a speaker has worshipped him. If the speaker is from God, (and is teaching divine things,) then the listener has worshipped God. But if the speaker speaks through the tongue of Satan (and is saying evil things,) then he has worshipped Satan.”⁵

In this tradition, the role of speaking, and its possible influences is stressed to the extreme points of being divine or Satanic. If the listener considers the words of the teacher to be valuable, it can be very effective on him.

Imam Ali's Advice to Malik

In the following addressed to Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali recommends associating with people of knowledge:

أَكْثِرْ مُدَارَسَةَ الْعُلَمَاءِ وَمُنَاقَشَةَ الْحُكَمَاءِ فِي تَثْبِيْتِ مَا صَلَّحَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرُ بِلَادِكَ وَإِقَامَةِ مَا اسْتَقَامَ بِهِ النَّاسُ قَبْلَكَ.

*“O Malik! Study often with the scholars and have frequent discussions with the wise in consolidating what is suitable for the prosperity of your land, and in establishing that by which the people before you were in a sound state.”*⁶

The Teacher's Role

Umar ibn Abdul Aziz was a child from the Umayyad clan. He used to repeat a slogan devised by Mu`awiyah against Imam Ali when he played with other children. One day when his teacher was passing by, he heard him. Later in class when the teacher was teaching, he gave Umar a mean look. Umar asked the teacher for the reason.

The teacher said: “O’ my son! Today I heard you curse Imam Ali . Since when have you become sure that Ali deserves to be cursed?” Then Umar promised his teacher to quit doing that. This advice of the teacher was so effective that when Umar ibn Abdul Aziz became the Caliph, he banned this practice, and instead ordered the following verse to be recited:⁷

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

“God commands justice, the doing of good...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Na’i 16:90]

The son of Yazeed was called Mu`awiyah. When he became the ruler, he ruled for only a few days. Then he invited the people, climbed up the pulpit and resigned from his Caliphate. His mother and Marwan opposed his decision, but it was of no use. Then they tried to find out the reason behind his resignation.

They found out that Umar al-Maqsoos who was his teacher had been very influential in changing the course of life of Mu`awiyah and his viewpoints. Then they went to him and interrogated him as to why he had established the love for Imam Ali in the heart of Mu`awiyah. Then they dug a ditch and buried the teacher alive.⁸ This is how a teacher can influence someone and change his life.

Which Teacher Should We Choose

In the following verses, God has clarified this for us:

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا

“Then let man look at his food (and how We provide it): For that We pour forth water in abundance, and We spilt the earth in fragments, And produce therein corn.” [The Holy Qur’an, ‘Abasa 80:24–27]

These verses apparently refer to our food since they discuss rain, the earth and the production of food. However, the Immaculate Imams have interpreted them to refer to our spiritual food. The late Fayz Kashani reported in his Tafsir-i-Safi: “Imam Baqir was asked about the meaning of “then let man look at his food”. The Imam replied: “By ‘his Food,’ it is meant knowledge. One must be careful where he gets it from.”⁹

Fayz Kashani then goes on to say: “There are two types of food – food for the body and food for the mind. This is because we are composed of the body and the spirit. Man should think about how food is produced. It rains, the earth gets soft, and seedlings emerge. Man should also think about his food for the mind. He should ponder over how knowledge is revealed in the lands of the Prophets to the hearts of the Prophets, and how the minds of those who are ready to become educated receive this descended revelation and blossom.

Therefore, we should try to obtain our knowledge through divine lines such as the Prophet and the Immaculate Imams . Spoiled or poisoned food is harmful to the body. At times digesting such food might take us to the border of death. Likewise, what we hear and see affects our nervous system, our mind and our spirit. We might be misled, and lose our chances of Prosperity. It might result in both our life and our Hereafter to be ruined. We have already discussed the rights of hearing and sight before in detail.

The Rights of the Teacher as Viewed by Imam Baqir

Imam Baqir said:

إِذَا جَلَسْتَ إِلَى عَالِمٍ فَكُنْ عَلَى أَنْ تَسْمَعَ أَحْرَصَ مِنْكَ عَلَى أَنْ تَقُولَ. وَتَعَلَّمْ حُسْنَ الْإِسْتِمَاعِ كَمَا تَتَعَلَّمُ حُسْنَ الْقَوْلِ، وَلَا تَقْطَعْ عَلَيْهِ حَدِيثَهُ.

“When you sit with a scholar, be more eager to hear him than to talk yourself. Learn how to listen well just as you learn how to speak well, and do not interrupt his speech.”¹⁰

In general, it is rude to interrupt someone who is talking. It is even ruder to interrupt your teacher. A polite student should wait for his teacher to finish talking, and then ask his question.

The Rights of the Teacher as Viewed by Imam Ali

Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of Imam Ali :

إِنَّ مِنْ حَقِّ الْعَالِمِ أَنْ لَا تُكْثِرَ عَلَيْهِ السُّؤَالَ وَلَا تَأْخُذَ بِتَوْبِهِ وَإِذَا دَخَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ وَعِنْدَهُ قَوْمٌ فَسَلِّمْ عَلَيْهِمْ جَمِيعاً وَخُصَّهُ
بِالنَّحْبَةِ دُونَهُمْ وَاجْلِسْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا تَجْلِسْ خَلْفَهُ وَلَا تَعْمِزْ بِعَيْنِكَ وَلَا تُشِرْ بِبَدِكَ وَلَا تُكْثِرْ مِنْ قَوْلِ (قَالَ فَلَانٌ وَقَالَ
فُلَانٌ) خِلَافاً لِقَوْلِهِ وَلَا تَضْجُرْ بِطُولِ صُحْبَتِهِ، فَإِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْعَالِمِ مَثَلُ النَّخْلَةِ تَنْتَظِرُهَا حَتَّى يَسْقُطَ عَلَيْكَ مِنْهَا شَيْءٌ

"The rights of a scholar include the following:

- 1 – *You should not ask him too many questions,*
- 2 – *You should not take hold of his cloak.*
- 3 – *When you go to see him and there are some people with him, greet them all and give him especial greetings.*
- 4 – *Sit in front of him, and do not sit behind him.*
- 5 – *Do not wink, or point with your fingers.*
- 6 – *Do not keep saying ‘So and so said’, in opposition to what he has said.*
- 7 – *Do not get upset if you have to wait a while to talk with him, since his case is similar to the case of a palm tree, that is, you have to wait for a while before you can get some dates.”¹¹*

Next, we will describe the case of a teacher and a student both of whom were Prophets. We will see how they respected their teacher and how they taught ways to teach, question and how to learn to everyone.

Respect for the Teacher in the Qur’an

In Chapter al-Kahf of the Holy Qur’an, we read the story of the mission of Moses to go after a teacher and learn what he does not know from him. The Qur’an does not name Khidhr, but calls the teacher “one of Our servants”. However, this knowledgeable wise man has been called Khidhr in many traditions.¹² Even though the Prophet Moses was one to whom God spoke directly as evidenced by the

following verse:

وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا

“And to Moses God spoke direct ... [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nisaa 4: 164]

And he was a Prophet and had a Book of Commandments. Moses was ordered to go to a teacher. He was accompanied by a brave young man from amongst the Israelites called “Yusha’ ibn Noon” (Joshua) to seek and finally find the teacher as we read in the following verse:

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِمَّا لَدُنَّا عُلَمَاءُ

“So they found one of Our servants, on whom We have bestowed mercy from Ourselves, and whom We have taught knowledge from Our own Presence.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Kahf 18:65]

The especial characteristics of this great teacher include his attainment of the high rank of becoming a servant of God, his prosperity in receiving divine mercy, and his knowledge being taught to him by God. What is obvious is that this student has many advantages over his teacher, but he recognizes that he does not know everything, and suffers the hardships of traveling in order to benefit from the teacher’s especial knowledge. When he meets the teacher, he politely asks a question as we read:

قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَنِي مِمَّا عُلِّمْتَ رُشْدًا قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَىٰ مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خَيْرًا قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا وَلَا أَعْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا

“Moses said to him: May I follow thee on the footing that thou teach me something of the (Higher) Truth which thou hast been taught? (The other) said: Verily thou wilt not be able to have patience with me! And how canst thou have patience about things about which thy understanding is not complete? Moses said: Thou wilt find me, if God so will, (truly) patient: nor shall I disobey thee in aught.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Kahf 18:66-69]

We can see some recommendations that students should use:

- 1 – Moses introduces himself to be a follower of his teacher, and recognizes his rank to be lower than that of his teacher.
- 2 – His statement “May I follow thee, on the footing that thou teach me something of the (Higher) Truth which thou hast been taught?” is a sign of absolute humbleness to his teacher.
- 3 – By saying “that thou teach me” he introduces himself to be ignorant relative to his teacher, and

highly respects his noble teacher.

4 – The concepts of following, teaching and patiently learning are all introduced in order to show that a student should follow his teacher. Then he can benefit and learn from his teacher if he is patient.

5 – By “that thou teach me something of the (Higher) Truth,” Moses shows that he is only seeking knowledge, and he is not after a higher rank and position. Therefore, all students should benefit from these words, and expect nothing from their teachers but benefiting from their knowledge.

6 – From “of the (Higher) Truth which thou hast been taught,” we realize that Moses is referring to divine knowledge that God has taught Khidhr. We also learn that the position of being a teacher is a divine rank, and man has learned knowledge from God.

7 – Moses was seeking guidance from Khidhr. He wants to benefit from the blessing of his guidance.

The Educational Remarks of the Teacher

1 – From “Verily thou wilt not be able to have patience with me,” we realize that one cannot learn if he is impatient. One must struggle hard and strive to learn.

2 – The teacher talks this way with the student in order to get him prepared not to rush into conclusions regarding the philosophy behind what Khidhr does.

3 – What is Moses after for which he suffers the hardships of the trip? He is after a good teacher. This teaches us that we should be very patient in order to get a good teacher. We have also read in traditions that we should not seek knowledge from just anyone but try to seek it from divine sources, such as the Teachings of the Immaculate Imams . In what follows, Moses objects to the acts of his teacher when he scuttles the boat; he slays a young man, or he sets up straight a wall they find at the verge of falling down. Moses objects to these acts, but later he is told the reason for doing them. [13](#)

Ghazali’s Views on the Status of Teachers

Muhammad Ghazali has said that man has several states regarding wealth and knowledge:

1–Earning it.

2–Saving it.

3–Benefiting from it.

4–Helping others with it.

He believes that the best state for a teacher is when he is teaching and others are benefiting from his lectures. In this state, he is giving the people insight.

A Teacher is Like a Psychologist

A student should look at his teacher as a patient looks at a psychologist. The psychologist prescribes medications for his patient in order to help his patient gain his health. Likewise, a teacher invites his students to mental perfection and development of higher human characteristics. The teacher uses advice for healing. Thus, a student should carefully listen to his teacher in order to be saved from illnesses such as greed, haughtiness and excessive pride. [14](#)

Esteem for Teacher

One of the knowledgeable people in the old days used to give a small amount of money in charity on his way to class each day, and asked God to cover up the faults of his teacher from his eyes, and to secure the continuation of the blessing of his teacher's knowledge for him. Another knowledgeable man never loudly flipped the pages of his book so as not to disturb his teacher. [15](#)

Hamdan Isfahani narrated that he was with Sharik when Mahdi, the son of the Abbasid Caliph entered the room. He leaned on the wall and asked Sharik a question about one of the traditions. Sharik did not pay any attention to him. He repeated his question again. Again, Sharik ignored him.

The son of the Caliph told him: "Are you insulting the son of the Caliph?" Sharik said: "No. However, knowledge is more glorious at the threshold of God. I do not want to be disrespectful to it for the sake of others." Then the son of the Caliph stepped forward and sat down politely. This is how we must seek knowledge. [16](#)

That is why Imam Sajjad advises students to be humble to God. A teacher is like a spiritual father who provides sufficient food for the mind for his students. That is why students must respect their teacher. He uses his student's hearing faculty as a gateway to provide him with this food for the mind. The student must carefully listen to his teacher.

A student should realize that a teacher is the one who provides him with food for his mind and is similar to his father. He should respect his teacher as he respects his father. Therefore, he should not raise his voice above that of his teacher's. He should be very polite in front of his teacher.

A student should strive to cover up the faults of his teacher, and stress his teacher's nobilities. They asked Alexander why he respected his teacher so much, and honored him more than his parents? He replied that his parents were only the source of his worldly existence that is ephemeral, while his teacher was the source of his eternal prosperity. A society can be developed if it has capable and sympathetic teachers. Teachers have sacrificed their most valuable asset – that is their life, in order to revitalize the society and save the people from the grips of the ignorant ones and cultural thieves.

Once when Socrates was imprisoned, his students made every effort and sacrifice to save him.

However, he did not accept. He preferred to die rather than break the law and harm social order.

Finally, we mention the practice of Imam Husayn . Aba Abdul Rahman Solami taught one of the children of Imam Husayn to recite the Chapter Fatiha of the Holy Qur'an.

Imam Husayn gave him one thousand coins, one thousand robes and a mouthful of pearls. Some people considered this too great a reward. However, he said: "How can this reward compensate for his generous grant? Nothing is enough to compensate for teaching the Holy Qur'an."¹⁷

¹. In the other version it is followed by: "You should not raise your voice toward him. You should never answer anyone who asks him about something, in order that he may be the one who answers. You should not speak to anyone in his session nor speak ill of anyone with him. If anyone ever speaks ill of him in your presence, you should defend him. You should conceal his faults and make manifest his virtues. You should not sit with him in enmity or show hostility toward him in friendship. If you do all of this, God's angels will give witness for you that you went straight to him and learned his knowledge for God's sake, not for the sake of the people."

². Al-Hayat, v.2, p.272, quoted from 'Uddat'ul Da'i, p.66.

³. Ibid. quoted from Bihar al-Anwar, v. 1, p.203.

⁴. Ibid.

⁵. Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.336.

⁶. Nahjul Balaghah, letter no.53.

⁷. Al-Kamil, Ibn Athir, v.5, p.42.

⁸. Hayat al-Hayawan, v. 1, p.88.

⁹. Tafsir Safi, v.2, p.789.

¹⁰. Al-Hayat, v.2, p.273, v. 1, p.222.

¹¹. Mishkat al-Anwar Fi Ghurar al-Akhbar, tradition no.687.

¹². Khidr means 'green'. His knowledge is fresh and green, and drawn out of the living sources of life for it is drawn from God's own Presence. See Yusuf Ali's Translation of the Holy Qur'an, n.2411, p.748.

¹³. You can read the detailed account of this in the Holy Qur'an, al-Kahf 18:62-82.

¹⁴. Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v. 1, p. 119.

¹⁵. Adab-i-Ta'lim wa Tarbiyat Islam, p.333.

¹⁶. Ibid. p.323.

¹⁷. Lu'lu wa'l Marjan, p.44, quoted from Manaqib Ibn ShahrAshub.

Right n. 17: The Right of the Trainer through Ownership

حق السائس بالملك

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ سَائِسِكَ بِالْمَلِكِ فَنَحْوُ مَنْ سَائِسِكَ بِالسُّلْطَانِ إِلَّا أَنَّ هَذَا يَمْلِكُ مَا لَا يَمْلِكُهُ ذَاكَ، تَلْزِمُكَ طَاعَتُهُ فِيمَا دَقَّ وَجَلَّ

مِنْكَ إِلَّا أَنْ تُخْرِجَكَ مِنْ وُجُوبِ حَقِّ اللَّهِ، وَيَحُولَ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ حَقِّهِ وَحُقُوقِ الْخَلْقِ، فَإِذَا قَضَيْتَهُ رَجَعْتَ إِلَى حَقِّهِ فَتَشَاعَلَتْ بِهِ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of him who trains you through 1 ownership² is similar to the right of the possessor of authority over you. Except this one has a right which that one does not: being that you are bound to obey him in every matter, whether small or great, except for what would lead you to abandon incumbent rights of God, or in what would intervene between you, his rights and the rights of the people. And once you fulfill them, you can commit yourself to his rights and engage in fulfilling them. And there is no power but in God.

What we can conclude from the words of Imam Sajjad is that he considers the rights of the master to be similar to those of the ruler. However, a master has an especial right that is incumbent upon the slave. This right is that the slave must obey his master. It is proper at this point to discuss the origins of slavery and its roots. Of course, here the question of ownership is discussed not just slavery.

The History of Slavery

It is not exactly clear when in history slavery originated, and various ideas have been expressed regarding its roots. Montesquieu has said the following regarding the factors which contribute to the appearance of slavery as follows:

- 1 – International rights made it a requirement for prisoners of war to be considered as slaves to be immune from being killed.
- 2 – In the Roman civil law people were allowed to sell those people who owed them money but could not pay back their debts. Another option for those who could not pay back their debts was to turn themselves into a slave for the one who had given them the loan.
- 3 – The laws of nature make the son of a slave to be considered a slave. This is because a child is subject to the same conditions as his father is.
- 4 – The right to slavery is rooted in the humiliation of one nation by another one, due to differences in their customs and habits.
- 5 – The main root of slavery is the simultaneous existence of the weak and the strong people in the human societies accompanied by an inclination towards oppression and exploitation.

Then he continues with the following:

Aristotle tried to prove that slavery existed, and will continue to exist naturally. This implies that God has created some people to be slaves for other people. If we accept what this philosopher claims and consider slavery to be a natural phenomenon, then any attempts to free slaves would be opposed to

nature and useless. The above is a brief expression of the roots of slavery as expressed by Montesquieu in *Ruh ul-Qawanin*.³

Islam's Point of View on Slavery

According to Islam and opposed to Aristotle's views, man is born free and slavery is not a natural phenomenon. Imam Ali said:

النَّاسُ كُلُّهُمْ أَحْرَارٌ إِلَّا مَنْ أَقْرَأَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بِالْعُبُودِيَّةِ.

*"All people are born free except for those who (wrongfully) declare themselves to be slaves."*⁴

He also said:

لَا تَكُنْ عَبْدًا لغيرِكَ وَقَدْ جَعَلَكَ اللَّهُ حُرًّا بِحَقِّ السَّائِسِ بِالْمَلِكِ حُرًّا.

*"Do not be slaves for others since God has established you to be free."*⁵

These were the words of Imam Ali who was himself a hero and the most freedom-loving man. He expressed the fact that man is born free, and it is only due to some external factors that some people become slaves. This condition is also not a permanent condition. The author of *The History of Rome* expressed the viewpoints of Romans about slaves as follows. "According to the law, a slave is not a person, but just a tool which can talk but has no rights."⁶

Montesquieu wrote: "In Plato's law it was expressed that a slave does not have the natural right to self-defense. This law stripped a slave from his natural right to self-defense if he was attacked. At the same time, he was also not given any civil rights to defend himself. Therefore, he could not even go to court and file a complaint if he was attacked. In Spartan, the slaves could not file a complaint in court if they were hurt. These slaves were so desperate that they were considered not just one person's slave but slaves to the society."⁷

How Sick Can You Be

One of the main entertaining events for the noble Roman men was to collect the poor slaves in an arena where hungry beasts like tigers and lions were let loose to attack them. They would then laugh their hearts out once the slaves started their cries and their shouting because of being torn apart by the beasts. They also used to have fun by making two groups of slaves fight with each other with swords.

When they were wounded and bloody, these noble men would get entertained. Should anyone of the slaves refuse to participate in such terrible events, then he would be torn into pieces by the wild soldiers

that stood around the arena. Another source of entertainment for the nobler Romans was to force their slaves to put their hands inside cylindrical containers filled with bees and scorpions. Then once their faces turned color due to being bit, their masters would get pleased and laugh.[8](#)

In another part, the author of The History of Rome writes the following regarding the conditions of slaves in that country: “Slaves must just do the hard work just like animals do. They should clean the trench, pave the roads, weed out the thorns, shovel the gardens, chop off useless plants, thresh the wheat, and clean the toilets. If anyone of the slaves failed to do his duties, he was seriously punished. He was either beaten up or chained down, or tied to the wheels in a mill instead of a horse, and forced to drive it to grind. Alternatively, he was used to dig mines, or imprisoned in dark and humid basements. Animals had days off on holidays, but slaves did not.”[9](#)

[The Gradual Freedom of Slaves by Islam](#)

It is clearly recorded in history that Islam fought slavery, and gradually freed slaves. It might be asked why this was done gradually, and why Islam did not free slaves all at once. To answer this question we must realize that at the advent of Islam in the Age of Ignorance in Arabia, slavery was one of the main principles of the economy, and the continuation of trade and even the living of many depended on it. It was neither possible nor practical for the Prophet Muhammad who founded Islam to suddenly abolish slavery.

The economic order of the society would have been seriously affected. In addition, owners were not willing to free their slaves. There were many lazy people who earned their living by means of using the slaves. In order to abolish slavery, Islam first clarified the rewards for hard work, and the wickedness of laziness. Once working was considered a form of worship, and everybody was said to have the right to benefit from the results of his own work, then it was understood that being lazy is not good and everyone should benefit from his own work.

Another possibility that existed if Islam freed the slaves all at once, was that they might have rebelled and caused a bloody revolution since they had been oppressed for a long time. This would have breached social security. There are similar cases cited in history. Montesquieu has stated the following regarding the possible harms of a collective and simultaneous freeing of a group of slaves: “It is not wise to establish a law to free a large number of slaves as this would cause social disorder.”

He cited the following cases as evidence to support his statement: “As an example of this danger, we can consider Velicini where the large number of freed slaves got the right to vote and achieved the majority. Then they established a law according to which whenever one of the previous free men married a woman, one of the freed slaves should sleep with the bride on the first night of the wedding and submit her to the groom the next night.”[10](#)

Consider what Gustav Lubon stated as the third reason. “Slaves lived under especial conditions for a

very long time. Because of this, they had a different style of living than the free people. Therefore, they were raised lacking any experience or aptitude. Thus, we can state that they would not have been able to set up an independent life on their own due to their lack of experience and talent, if they were all simultaneously freed by Islam. They would have had conditions similar to those slaves who were freed in America, and their lives would have been totally ruined.¹¹

We might present the above as reasons for Islam not simultaneously freeing slaves. Rather the means for their freedom were established gradually. Now let us consider the means provided by Islam to allow for their freedom. We will first consider the legal aspects expressed in Islamic jurisprudence and then consider the moral aspects.

Ways to Free Slaves: Jurisprudential Aspects

Islamic jurisprudence established the following ways to free the slaves:

1) Contract

A contract could be drawn according to which the slave would be freed after he paid a certain amount of money to his master. Should he fail to do so, it was incumbent upon the religious leader to pay to free him.

2) Will

A master could will that his slave be freed after his own demise.

3) Ownership of Blood Relatives

If anyone becomes the owner of his own father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, child, grandchild, sister, paternal aunt, maternal aunt, or nephew, he would instantly free them.

4) Partial Freedom

If anyone frees a slave partially, the slave will be totally freed.

5) Giving Birth to a Master's Child

If a slave woman gets pregnant by her master and delivers his child, then she will be freed.

6) Accepting Islam before the Master

If a slave accepts Islam before his master does, he would be freed.

7) Physical Harm

If a master chops off his slaves ear or nose or any other organs, then the slave will be freed.

8) Physical Ailment

If any slave gets blind, suffers from leprosy, or crippled then he will be freed, and his sustenance will be provided by the state.

9) Death of a Master without any Inheritors

If a rich master who has no one to inherit his wealth should die, then the slave would be purchased using the property left behind and thereby freed. The freed slave will inherit the rest of the master's wealth left behind.

10) A Believing Slave Serves his Master for Seven Years

There is a chapter in Wasa'il al-Sha'ah with many traditions. What we can conclude from these traditions is that a believing slave would be freed after seven years of serving his master.

11) Using the Alms Tax

One of the eight allowable ways to spend the alms tax is to purchase slaves in order to free them.

12) As Expiation

There is expiation for various acts such as intentionally breaking one's fast, or unintentional murder, or not adhering to one's pledge, oath or bet, etc. One of the ways of such expiation is to free slaves. [12](#)

Ways to Free Slaves: Practical and Moral Aspects

Islam has provided practical and moral means for the freedom of slaves. We could look at the life and the practices of the Noble Prophet of Islam and the Immaculate Imams as an example. There are recorded facts in history. The Prophet of Islam himself freed slaves such as Zayd ibn Haritheh. Then the Muslims followed his example and freed slaves.

In addition to freeing Zayd ibn Haritheh, the Prophet Muhammad married off the daughter of Jahsh to him, and they lived together for a while. Then the Prophet Mohammad appointed Zayd's son called Usama ibn Zayd as the chief of the army, and ruled that all the noble men both from among the immigrants and their helpers should obey him.

Imam Ali used his own income to free one thousand slaves. [13](#) Georgi Zaydan wrote: "Abdullah ibn Uman freed one thousand slaves and Muhammad ibn Suleiman freed seventy thousand slave men and

women.”¹⁴

Moral Recommendations

By establishing divine rewards for the Hereafter, Islam encouraged Muslims to free their slaves. The Holy Qur'an states:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ
ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ أَوْ مِسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ

“Have We not made for him a pair of eyes? And a tongue, and a pair of lips? And shown him the two highways? But he hath made no haste on the path that is steep. And what will explain to thee the path that is steep? (It is) freeing the bondman; or the giving of food in a day of privation to the orphan with claims of relationship, or to the indigent (down) in the dust.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Balad 90:8–16]

The Prophet of Islam said:

“God will save from the Fire of Hell the organs of whoever frees a Muslim slave: An organ for an organ.”

The eighth Imam said:

“God will save from the Fire – an organ for an organ of – whoever frees a slave.”

Finally we should remark that the words expressed by Imam Sajjad regarding the rights of the master incumbent upon the slave are related to the period of time that he is still not freed. This subject is extensive, but we will suffice to this much for now.

¹. In the other version it is followed by: ”property is that you should obey him and not disobey him, unless obeying him would displease God, for there can be no obedience to a creature when it is disobedience to God.”

². You are his slave.

³. Ruh al-Qawanin, pp.308–413.

⁴. Islam and Human rights, (Persian text), p. 198.

⁵. Nahjul Balaghah, letter no.31.

⁶. Islam and Human Rights, (Persian text), p.200, quoted from The History of Rome, p. 149.

⁷. Ruh al-Qawanin, p.426.

⁸. Islam and Human Rights (Persian text), p.201, quoted from The History of Social Developments, v. 1, p.39.

⁹. Ibid. p.210, quoted from The History of Rome, p. 150.

¹⁰. Ruh al-Qawanin, p.428.

¹¹. The History of Islamic and Arab Civilization, (Persian text), p.467.

¹². Islam and Human Rights (Persian text), p.219, quoted from books on jurisprudence such as Jawahir, Shara’i, and Wasa’il al-Shi’ah.

¹³. Safinah al-Bihar, v.2, article on “Ettagh”.

¹⁴. The History of Islamic Civilization (Persian text), p.684.

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