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Right n. 30: The Right of the Ritual Prayer Leader

حق الإمام في الصلاة

وَأمّا حَقُّ إمَامِكَ فِي صَلاتِكَ فَأَنْ تَعلَمَ أنّهُ قَدْ تَقَلَّدَ السِّفَارَةَ فِيمَا بَيْنَكَ وبَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَالْوِفَادَةَ إلَى رَبكَ، وتَكَلَّمَ عَنْكَ وَلَمْ تَتَكَلَّمْ عَنْهُ، وَدعَا لَكَ وَلَمْ تَدْعُ لَهُ، وَطَلَبَ فِيكَ وَلَمْ تَطْلُبْ فِيهِ، وَكَفَاكَ هَمَّ الْمَقَامِ بَينَ يدي اللهِ وَالمُسَاءَلَةَ لَهُ فِيكَ وَلَمْ تَكْفِهِ ذَلِكَ، فَإنْ كَانَ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ تَقْصِيرٌ كَانَ بِهِ دُونَكَ، وَإنْ كَانَ آثِماً لَمْ تَكُنْ شَرِيكَهُ فِيهِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ عَلَيكَ فَضلٌ، فَوقَى نَفْسَكَ بنَفْسِهِ، وَوَقَى صلاتَكَ بصَلاتِهِ، فَتَشْكُرَ لَهُ عَلَى ذلِكَ. ولا حَوْلَ ولا قُوَّةَ إلا باللهِ.

And the right of your leader in your ritual prayer is that you should know that he has taken on the role of a mediator between you and God and appeared in the presence of your Lord on your behalf. And he speaks for you, but you do not speak for him; and he supplicates for you, but you do not supplicate for him; and he has beseeched for you and you do not beseech for him.

And he has spared you the anxiety of standing before God and the question of interrogation for your prayer, but you do not spare him that. Should he perform the prayer imperfectly, he is held responsible for that not you; and if he makes a mistake during the prayer, you will not be his partner in it, and there is no superiority in this for him over you. Then he protected you through himself, and he protected your prayer through his prayer. Therefore, thank him for this. And there is no power or strength but in God.

What Imam Sajjad tells us here is that the people praying should know that the prayer leader is a mediator between them and the Lord. He is praying to God on their behalf. He asks on their behalf. He suffers the fear of being in the position of being interrogated for their sake. If there are any shortcomings in the prayers, the responsibility rests upon his shoulders.

The people attending the prayer are not considered partners in this fault. The prayer leader has no superiority over others. He is just the maintainer of others and their prayers at the threshold of God the Almighty. The discussion here is not centered on the prayer itself. Rather it is about the rights of the leader of the prayers. He – who is standing in front – is like a military leader who is calling all his followers to fight with Satan.

Now they all attend to God who is the source of all perfections. The prayer leader is guiding a caravan of hearts towards God. He expresses ultimate humbleness to God on their behalf. He unites the rich and the poor, the employer and the employee, the master and the slave, the black and the white, the informed and the uninformed together through saying the prayers.

The Wisdom behind Congregational Prayers

The Almighty God has established certain forms of worship to be done in a group. He has set up a certain time and place to do them, too. He has done so in order for the believers to achieve the blessings and effects of such social activities on their path to perfection. We can name a few of the effects of congregational prayers as follows:

1) When everyone in the congregation moves together in performing the various acts of bowing down, prostrating and sitting down in harmony, the Grandeur and Majesty of the Lord is manifested.

2) When congregational prayers are performed the might of the Muslims and their majesty and power is demonstrated.

3) When the people follow the prayer leader in their motions and in what they say in prayers, then they will learn to have order and to abide by the rules.

4) When the people pray together in a group several times each day, the social ties and the sense of brotherhood between them is reinforced.

5) When the people pray together in a group, they will develop a sense of mutual trust that can be used when they are to witness about something or make a deal.

6) Since the congregational prayers are always performed on time, they provide the best chance for one to approach God, and seek His acceptance of prayers.

7) When one participates in the prayer, especially the congregational prayers he abandons the material life and is delved into the spiritual life. Once he starts the prayer, he leaves everything but God behind, and directs his full attention to God.

8) An important benefit of congregational prayers is that they are a good means of the development of mosques and places of worship. This includes both the physical and spiritual aspects of development.

9) Another important benefit of congregational prayers is that the attendees get to know each other and their ties of friendship are strengthened.

10) Finally, in the congregational prayers all people of different classes and races get together and stand in one line. There is no difference between the rich and the poor, the black and the white, the master and the slave, the informed and the uninformed person.

Congregational prayer is the best form of elimination of racism. The gap between the people from different classes or races is reduced to zero once they attend congregational prayers.

Congregational Prayers are Open to the Public

Fazl ibn Shadan quoted on the authority of Imam Ridha :1

> إنمَّا جُعِلت الجَماعَةُ لِئَلاّ يَكونَ الإخْلاصُ والتَّوحيدُ والإسْلامُ والعِبادَةُ للهِ إلاّ ظاهِراً مكْشوفاً لأنَّ في إظْهارِهِ حُجَّةً عَلى أهْلِ الشَّرقِ وَالغَربِ للهِ وَحدَهُ ولِيكونَ المُنافِقُ والمُستَخِفُّ مُؤدّياً لمَا أقَرَّ بهِ يُظْهِرُ الإسلامَ وَالمَراقَبةَ وَلِتكونَ شَهاداتُ الناسِ بالإسلامِ بَعْضِهِم لِبَعضٍ جائِزَةً ممْكِنةً، مَع ما فيهِ مِن المُساعَدَةِ عَلى البِرِّ وَالتَّقوى والزَّجْرِ عَن كَثيرٍ مِن مَعاصِي اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

“Congregational prayers are decreed because true devotion, submission and servitude of God shall not be attained unless it is done in public. The public performance of such deeds is a clear testimony of the uniqueness of God for the people of the East and the West. It is to be done in public so that even hypocrites and those who belittle the Muslims in private practically have to do what they have verbally confessed in public and have to make their devotion and submission clear to the public.

This is done so that it becomes easily possible for the people to testify as to one another’s being Muslim. In addition to these, another benefit of the congregational prayer is that it makes it possible to help others and to cooperate with each other. It becomes possible for the people to worship God. Through congregational prayers, a lot of the bad deeds and acts of disobedience to God the Exalted the High are forbidden.”

In another tradition we read: “Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of his noble father who quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

> مَن صَلّى الخَمْسَ في جَماعَةٍ فَظُنُّوا بهِ خَيراً.

*“Think well of one who performs all his five sessions of daily prayers in congregations.”*2

This is the point that was mentioned earlier. One of the major benefits of attending congregational prayers is the mutual trust that is developed between those who attend. As Imam Ridha said in the

tradition just cited above, God has established congregational prayers as the means by which men can publicly recognize the servitude to God, and the people of the East and the West can become fully aware of this divine proof. The congregational prayer also fosters cooperation, helping each other and the prevention of wicked deeds.

A Few Words from "Asrar ul-Salat"

Now we will present a few words from Asrar ul-Salat by the late Hajj Mirza Malaki Tabrizi regarding congregational prayers as follows.

The main wisdom behind the decree on congregational prayers is the unity of the hearts of the believers in God's affair. There are many benefits to this unity including the strengthening of Islam. In addition to this, congregational prayers are very effective in the perfection of the soul, its strengthening the soul in trotting along the path towards God, and obtaining divine rewards. This is because God's Mercy will encompass all of them if they are united in God's way if it should be meant to descend upon anyone of them. This is true even if not all of them deserve to receive God's Mercy.

The similitude of the unity of hearts is like that of the joining of narrow muddy streams of water. Once they join, they turn into a wide river that can cleanse everything on its way. This river will no longer become dirty from the least bit of added impurities. Thus, what is important is the unity of the hearts. If one succeeds to unite in congregational prayer with people whose hearts are united with God, then he can be hopeful to receive the reward that is promised in the traditions.

However, if the people who are attending the prayer are jealous of each other and hold a grudge against each other, then hoping to receive such rewards is a far-reaching aspiration. It is not considered hope in God, rather it is fooling oneself. When a prayer leader purifies his soul, anyone who knows him shall love him. He will also be kind with the believers due to this bond of divine love.

Therefore, their congregation will be a divine one. However, if the people who unite in prayer are really disunited in their hearts and are enemies of one another, are jealous of the God-given blessings that each other one has, then there will not be any illumination from this type of unity especially if one side involved is the prayer leader himself. This is all because the major effect of any worship is due to the way it affects the heart and illuminates it.[3]

The Reward for Congregational Prayers

Abu Saeed Khudhri quoted on the authority of the Noble Prophet of God : After prayer Gabriel descended with seventy thousand angels and said: "O Muhammad! Your Lord sends greetings and grants you two gifts which He has never donated to any of the Prophets before you."

The Prophet asked: "O Gabriel! What are these two gifts?" Gabriel said: "Three units of prayer, and

saying congregational prayers five times each day." The Prophet asked Gabriel: "What is the reward of congregational prayers for my nation?" Gabriel said: "Whenever there are two people attending congregational prayer, each one shall be rewarded the reward of one hundred and fifty prayers for each unit of congregation prayer. When there are three people, the reward will be that of two hundred and fifty prayers. When there are four people in the prayer, then their reward will be that of one thousand and two hundred prayers.

When there are five people in the prayer, the reward will be that of one thousand and three hundred prayers. When there are six people in the prayer, the reward will be that of two thousand and four hundred prayers. When there are seven people in the prayer, the reward will be that of four thousand and eight hundred prayers. When there are eight people, the reward will be that of nine thousand and six hundred prayers for each unit of prayer. When there are ten people, the reward will be that of nineteen thousand prayers.

When there are more than ten people the reward cannot be recorded. Even if all the water in all the seas in the heavens and the Earth turns into ink, and the wood from all the trees turns into pens, and all the men, the jinns and the angels start to record, they cannot record the reward. O Muhammad! Hearing the praises of the Lord that a believer hears in the congregational prayer is better than seventy pilgrimages and one thousand non-obligatory pilgrimages for him."[4]

In another tradition Zurarah said: "I asked Imam Sadiq : Will the congregational prayer be right with just two people?" The Imam said: "Yes. The second man must stand on the right of the prayer leader." [5] According to another tradition Johani came to the Prophet and said: "I live in the desert. After the call for the prayer, there are only my servants, my wife and my children present there. I say the prayer with them. Is this considered to be congregational prayer?" The Prophet replied: "Yes."

Then considering all the reward, why do the followers of Imam Ali lose it all by not attending congregational prayers? Is this not a great loss for them indeed?

Stories about Ritual Prayer Leaders

Now that we have reviewed the traditions about the rewards of congregational prayers, let us consider the following stories about prayer leaders that Ghopanchi has compiled in his book Sharh-iRisalat al-Huquq.

1- An Arab man called Mujrim (meaning man of sin) was standing in the first row of the congregational prayer. As the prayer leader was praying he recited:

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ الْأَوَّلِينَ ثُمَّ نُتْبِعُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ

"Did We not destroy the men of old [***lit. the first ones***] (***for their evil***)***? So shall We make later*** (***generations***) ***follow them?"*** [***The Holy Qur'an, al-Mursalat 77:16-17***]
The Arab man moved back to the third row. Then the prayer leader said:

كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ

"Thus do We deal with men of sin." [***The Holy Qur'an, al-Mursalat 77:18***]

Then the Arab man said: "By God he has aimed his words at no one else but me." He picked up his shoes and ran away from the mosque.

2 – Three brothers called Abraham, Moses and Hajj Ahmad built a mosque and asked someone to be the prayer leader for that mosque. They paid for his living expenses. One day the prayer leader recited the following verse:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى

"And this is in the Books of the earliest (***Revelation***)***, - The Books of Abraham and Moses."*** [***The Holy Qur'an, Al-A'la 87:18-19***]

When he finished, Hajj Ahmad asked: "Do you not know that the three of us built this mosque together, and that we all help run it?" The man said: "Yes I know." Hajj Ahmad said: "Then why did you mention their names when you recited but made no mention of me?" The prayer leader said: "These are verses of the Qur'an. We cannot add to them."

Hajj Ahmad said: "No. You had better confess that you like them more than you like me. I will hit you hard with my cane if you do not add my name in your next prayer." Then when the prayer leader recited the next prayer he said: "The Books of Abraham, Moses and Hajj Ahmad." After he finished the prayer, the people who prayed after him asked: "Where did you get Hajj Ahmad from? He said: "The thought of getting hit by the cane resulted in Hajj Ahmad's name entering in the Qur'an."

3 – It has been narrated that once a prayer leader brought a trash can that is called "satl" in Arabic and put it behind him. When he bowed down in prayer he remembered his "satl" and thought that it was stolen. Then he raised his head and said: "Rabana Lakal Satl" instead of saying "Rabana Lakal Hamd". Some of the people who were praying said: "Do not worry, the trash can is behind you."

4 – A man was praying behind a prayer leader. Then the prayer leader forgot the Sura Fatiha and started repeatedly saying: "I seek refuge in God from Satan." The man who was praying behind him said: "It is not Satan's fault. You are the one who forgot how to pray."

1. ‘Ilal wa ‘Uyun al-Akhbar.
2. Ibid. p.371.
3. Tarjumeh wa Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Sepehri, pp.153-155, quoted from Asrar al-Salat, pp.491-497.
4. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, pp.144-145.
5. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, v.5, p.379.

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