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Right n. 39: The Right of Him Who Seeks Your Advice

حق المستشير

وَأمّا حَقُّ المُسْتَشِيرِ، فَإنْ حَضَرَكَ لَهُ وَجْهُ رَأْيٍ جَهَدْتَ لَهُ فِي النَّصِيحَةِ، وَأَشَرْتَ عَلَيهِ بمَا تَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ لَوْ كُنْتَ مَكَانَهُ عَمِلْتَ بهِ، وَذَلِكَ لِيَكُنْ مِنْكَ فِي رَحْمَةٍ وَلِينٍ، فَإنَّ اللِّينَ يُؤْنِسُ الْوَحْشَةَ وَإنَّ الْغِلْظَ يُوحِشُ مَوضِعَ الأنْسِ. وَإنْ لَمْ يَحْضُرْكَ لَهُ رَأيٌ وَعَرَفْتَ لَهُ مَنْ تثِقُ برأيِهِ وَترْضَى بهِ لِنَفْسِكَ دَلَلْتَهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَرْشَدتَهُ إلَيْهِ، فَكُنْتَ لَمْ تَألُهُ خَيرًا وَلَمْ تَدَّخِرْهُ نُصْحاً. ولا حَوْلَ ولا قُوَّةَ إلا باللهِ.

And the right of him who seeks your advice is that you should exert all efforts to advise him if you can provide him with a good opinion, and suggest to him to choose what you would have chosen if you were in his place. You should do so with mercy and with lenience since lenience will eliminate fear while rudeness will eliminate friendliness.

But if you do not have any good advice for him, you should refer him to someone else whom you know and trust his advice yourself. You should spare no efforts to guide him towards the good and do your best to advise him. And there is no power but in God.

In short, Imam Sajjad says that once someone seeks advice, a right is established for him. This right is clearly providing him with proper advice if we can, or referring him to someone else whom we know and can provide him with some good advice.

Consultation in Islam

Consultation is one of the most important issues in Islam. It helps us get our affairs done in a more reasonable fashion. If we do not consult others regarding our affairs, then our affairs will not be done in a

perfect way, since by ourselves we cannot consider all aspects of an issue no matter how intelligent we are. Once issues are presented for consultation, and several experienced people use their intellect to help, then the job will be done more perfectly.

Consultation is so important in Islam that even the Prophet , who received divine revelations and was highly intelligent, consulted with others and respected their views. This was done in order to establish consultation as a practice among Muslims. His consultations were related to public issues about the execution of divine rules, and not on legislative issues.

Effects of Consultation

People who seek other people's advice regarding their affairs seldom fail. Others who consider themselves needless of other people's advice and do not do so, and just rely on their own minds, usually make mistakes even though they may be very intelligent. Such an attitude makes one unpopular and stops the flow of suggestions towards him.

Those who consult others regarding their affairs will not experience other people's jealousy if they succeed, since others will consider this success as their own. Even if one fails, others will not blame him since they will consider this failure to be their own fault. They will treat him sympathetically.

One can also evaluate the degree of friendship of others when he seeks their advice. This will pave the way for future success. This might have been one of the reasons that the Prophet sought other people's advice, even though he was very intelligent.

Consultation as Viewed by the Holy Qur'an

Consider the following verse from the Holy Qur'an:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللّهِ لِنتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لاَنفَضُّواْ مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللّهِ إِنَّ اللّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

"It is part of the Mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (***their faults***)***, and ask for*** (***God's***) ***forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs*** (***of moment***)***. Then, when thou hast taken a decision put thy trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust*** (***in Him***)***."*** [***The Holy Qur'an, Al-i-Imran 3:159***]

It was revealed during the Battle of Uhud. It deals with an important aspect of leadership. A good leader is one who forgives those who make mistakes, but realize their mistake and repent. If a leader does not forgive such people, and treats them with harshness, then the people will soon leave him unsupported,

he will fail to implement his plans, and thus he fails to lead.

In this verse, the Prophet is instructed by God to consult the people regarding his affairs. The Prophet obviously did not consult the people regarding revelations. Rather he consulted them regarding the ways in which he implemented divine decrees.

In other words, he never consulted the people on legislative issues: Rather they were consulted on executive issues. For example, in the Battle of Badr the Muslims set up their camps in a given location by the order of the Prophet . One of the companions called Hobab ibn Monzar asked: “Is camping in this location decreed by God, or is it your own opinion?” The Prophet said: “No. There is no divine ruling on this issue.” Then Hobab said: “This is not a good place to camp.” The Prophet agreed with him.

We also read in the Holy Qur’an:

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

“Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (***conduct***) ***their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance.”*** [***The Holy Qur’an, al-Shura 42:38***]

As we can see the issue of consultation is stressed in this verse also right after establishing regular prayers.

Consultation as Viewed in the Traditions

There are many traditions about consultation from the life of the Prophet and the Immaculate Imams . The Prophet said:

ما شَقَى عَبدٌ قَطُّ بمَشُورَةٍ وَلا سَعِدَ بِاسْتِغْناءِ رأيٍ.

“No one has ever been wretched after consultation, and no one has become prosperous through being satisfied with his own opinion.”[1]

Imam Ali said:

مَن اسْتَبَدَّ بِرأيِهِ هَلَكَ وَمَن شاوَرَ الرّجالَ شَارَكَهُم في عُقولِهِم.

“One who only follows his own opinion will perish, but one who consults people shares with them in their intellect.”[2]

The Noble Prophet said:

إذَا كانَ خِيارُكُم أُمَرائَكُم وأغْنِياؤكُم سُمَحائَكُم وأمْرُكُم شُورى بَينَكُم فَظَهْرُ الأرْضِ خَيرٌ لَكُم مِن بَطْنِها، وإذا كَانَ أُمَراؤكُم شِرارَكُم وأغْنِياؤكُم بُخَلائَكُم وَلم يَكُن أمْرُكُم شورَى بَينَكُم فَبَطْنُ الأرضِ خَيرٌ لكُم مِن ظَهرِها.

"If your good people are your rulers, your rich ones are generous, and your affairs are carried out in consultation with each other, then the surface of the earth is better for you than its depths. However, if your rulers are your evil ones, your rich are miserly, and your affairs are not carried out in consultation with each other, then being under the earth is better for you than being on it."[3]

Imam Kazim said:

يا هشامُ! مجَالَسَةُ أهْلِ الدّينِ شَرَفُ الدّنيا وَالآخِرَةِ وَمُشَاوَرَةُ العاقِلِ النّاصِحِ يُمْنٌ وَبَرَكَةٌ وَرُشْدٌ وَتوفِيقٌ مِن اللهِ، فإذَا أشارَ عَلَيكَ العاقِلُ النّاصِحُ فإيّاكَ وَالخِلافَ، فإنَّ في ذلِكَ العَطَبَ.

"O Hisham! Associating with people of religion is nobility in this world and the Hereafter. Consulting with an intelligent, sincere advisor is good fortune and a blessing and guidance. It is a form of divine success. Therefore, beware of acting against the advice of an intelligent, sincere advisor whose advice you seek, for in that lies ruin."[4]

Whom to Consult With

Chapters 21 and 22 of Wasa`il al-Sh`ah deal specifically with whom to consult with. We shall present a few traditions from these chapters here.
Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of his Noble father that the Prophet of God was asked: "What does 'Hazm' mean?" He replied:

مُشاوَرَةُ ذَوي الرّأيِ واتِّباعُهُم.

"Consulting with those who are well-informed and following their advice."[5]

Imam Sadiq said that one of the recommendations of the Prophet to Imam Ali was:

لا مُظاهَرَةَ أوْثَقُ مِن المُشاوَرَةِ ولا عقْلَ كالتَّدبِيرِ.

"There is no aid more reliable than consultation, and there is no intellect like pondering over the affairs."[6]

Imam Baqir said: "There are four lines in the Torah the first of which is as follows:

مَن لا يَسْتَشِرْ يَنْدَمْ.

“One who does not seek advice regarding his affairs will regret it.”[7]

Imam Ali said:

لا ظَهيرَ كَالمُشاوَرَةِ.

“There is no aid like consultation.”[8]

Imam Sadiq said:

إستَشِرْ في أمْرِكَ الّذينَ يخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم.

“In your affairs, only consult with those people who are fearful of God.” [9]

Imam Sadiq said:

اسْتَشِرِ العاقِلَ مِن الرّجالِ فإنَّه لا يأمُرُ إلا بِخَيرٍ، وإيّاكَ والخِلافَ فإنَّ مُخالَفَةَ الوَرِعِ العاقِلِ مَفْسَدَةٌ في الدّينِ والدّنيا.

“Consult with men who are intelligent, since they will only advise you to do good. Beware of opposing (their) advice, for opposing the God-fearing intelligent man is a cause of ruin in religion and in this world.”[10]

Imam Sadiq said:

إنَّ المَشورَةَ لا تَكونُ إلاّ بحُدودِها وإلاّ كانَت مَضَرَّتهُا عَلى المُستَشِيرِ أكْثَرَ مِن مَنفَعَتِها لهُ: فأوَّلهُا أنْ يَكونَ الّذي تَشاوَرَ عاقِلاً، وَالثّانيةُ أنْ يَكونَ حُرّاً مُتَديّناً، والثّالِثَةُ أنْ يكونَ صَديقاً مُؤاخِياً، والرّابِعةُ أنْ تُطلِعَهُ عَلى سِرّكَ فَيَكونُ عِلمُهُ بِه كَعِلمِكَ بِنفْسِكَ.

“Consultation should be carried out within its limits, otherwise it will be more harmful than beneficial to the one seeking advice. Firstly, the one consulted should intelligent. Secondly, he should be a free, religious man. Thirdly, he should be a sincere friend. Fourthly, when he becomes acquainted with your inner thoughts, his knowledge of it should be like your knowledge of yourself.”[11]

Whom Not to Consult With

Undoubtedly we cannot consult with just anyone. We were advised to consult with those who are intelligent, God-fearing, honest and trustworthy and who wish us well. Consulting with some people might cause us harm and deprivation. The Commander of the Faithful in his letter to Malik al-Ashtar tells us whom not to consult with:

> لا تُدخِلَنَّ في مَشورَتِكَ بخِيلاً يَعدِلُ بكَ عَن الفَضْلِ وَيَعِدُكَ الفَقْرَ، ولا جَباناً يُضَعِّفُكَ عَن الأمورِ ولا حَريصاً يُزَيِّن لكَ الشَّرَهَ بالجَورِ.

"Do not include in your consultations a miser who turns you away from generosity and threatens you with poverty, or a coward who renders you weak in your affairs, or a greedy person who makes covetousness (*for wealth and power*) *accompanied by tyranny seem attractive to you .*"[12]

As stated before consultation is a means of finding the proper way to do things. It is meant to help us do the right thing. Therefore, we should not consult with wicked, stingy, greedy or cowardly people. They will not help us if we consult with them. Rather they will cause misery for us. That is why Imam Sajjad has said: "But if you do not have any good advice for him, you should refer him to someone else whom you know and trust his advice yourself."

1. Tafsir-i-Namunah, v.3, p.145.
2. Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, Hikmah 161.
3. Tafsir-i-Namunah, v.3, p.145.
4. Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.293.
5. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.8, pp.424-427.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.8. pp.424-427.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Nahjul Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, letter no.53.

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