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Rights of Subjects

18) The Rights of Subjects through Authority

The right of your subjects through authority is that you should know that they have been made subjects through their weakness and your strength. Hence it is incumbent upon you to act with justice toward them and to be like a compassionate father toward them. You should forgive them their ignorance and not hurry them to punishment and you should thank God for the power over them which He has given to you.

ثم حقوق الرعية

18. حق الرعية بالسلطان

فأَمَّا حُقُوقُ رَعِيَّتِكَ بالسُّلْطَانِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أنهم صاروا رعيتك لضعفهم قوتك فيجب أن تعدل فيهم وتكون لهم كالوالد الرحيم، وتغفر لهم جهلهم، ولا تعاجلهم بالعقوبة، وتشكر الله عز وجل على ما آتاك من القوة عليهم.

19) The Rights of Subjects through Knowledge

The right of your subjects through knowledge is that you should know that God made you a caretaker over them only through the knowledge He has given you and His storehouses which He has opened up to you. If you do well in teaching the people, not treating them roughly or annoying them, then God will increase His bounty toward you. But if you withhold your knowledge from people or treat them roughly when they seek knowledge from you, then it will be God's right to deprive you of knowledge and its splendour and to make you fall from your place in people's hearts.

19. حق الرعية بالعلم

وأمَّا حَقُّ رَعِيَّتِكَ بالعِلْمِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أن الله عز وجل إنما جعلك قيما لهم فيما آتاك من العلم وفتح لك من خزائنه فان أحسنت في تعليم الناس، ولم تخرق بهم، ولم تضجر عليهم، زادك الله من فضله، وإن أنت منعت الناس علمك أو خرقت بهم عند طلبهم العلم منك كان حقا على الله عز وجل أن يسلبك العلم وبهاءه ويسقط من القلوب محلك.

20) The Right of the Wife

The right of your wife (*zawja*) is that you know that God has made her a repose and a comfort for you; you should know that she is God's favour toward you, so you should honour her and treat her gently. Though her right toward you is more incumbent, you must treat her with compassion, since she is your prisoner (*asir*) whom you feed and clothe. If she is ignorant, you should pardon her.

20. حق الزوجة

وأما حق الزوجة فأن تعلم أن الله عز وجل جعلها لك سكنا وأنسا فتعلم أن ذلك نعمة من الله عليك فتكرمها وترفق بها، وإن كان حقك عليها أوجب فان لها عليك أن ترحمها لأنها أسيرك وتطعمها وتكسوها وإذا جهلت عفوت عنها.

21) The Right of the Slave

The right of your slave (mamluk) is that you should know that he is the creature of your Lord, the son of your father and mother, and your flesh and blood. You own him, but you did– not make him; God made him. You did not create any one of his limbs, nor do you provide him with his sustenance; on the contrary, God gives you the sufficiency for that.

Then He subjugated him to you, entrusted him to you, and deposited him with you so that you may be safeguarded by the good you give to him. So act well toward him, just as God has acted well toward you. If you dislike him, replace him, but do not torment a creature of God. And there is no strength save in God.[1]

21. حق الرعية بملك اليمين

وأما حق مملوكك فأن تعلم أنه خلق ربك وابن أبيك وأمك ولحمك ودمك تملكه،لا أنت صنعته من دون الله ولا خلقت شيئا من جوارحه، ولا أخرجت له رزقا ولكن الله عز وجل كفاك ذلك ثم سخره لك وائتمنك عليه واستودعك إياه، ليحفظ لك ما تأتيه من خير إليه فأحسن إليه كما أحسن الله إليك، وإن كرهته استبدلت به، ولم تعذب خلق الله عز وجل ولا قوة إلا بالله.

1. At this period in Islamic history, slavery was still common because of wars at the frontiers (slaves were invariably

captured in battle; cf. Supplication 27, ‘For the People of the Frontiers’). The sources indicate that the Imam often had slaves, most likely because people gave them to him as part of their alms (the family of the Prophet being entitled to these) and also because he used to purchase them in order to free them. It is said that he would never beat his slaves, but rather write down their misdeeds.

Then, at the end of the month of Ramadan, he would call them together and list their misdeeds, asking them to pray to God to forgive him, just as he had forgiven them. Then he would free them with generous gifts. If he owned a slave at the beginning or middle of the year, he would free him on the eve of the Feast of Fast-breaking and then buy another slave. (A’yan al-shi’a, IV, 193-4).

Once the Imam called his slave twice, but he did not respond. When he answered the third time, he said: ‘Did you not hear my voice?’ The slave answered: ‘Yes, I did.’ The Imam asked: ‘Then why did you not answer me?’ He replied: ‘Because I am safe from you.’ The Imam said: ‘Praise belongs to God, who made my slave safe from me!’ (A’yan al-shi’a, IV, 200; Bihar, XLVI, 56). Once a slave girl poured water for the Imam while he was making the ablution for prayer. Suddenly the pot dropped from her hand and struck him in the face, cutting him. He turned towards her and the slave girl said: ‘God says: Those who restrain their rage.’ He said: ‘I have restrained my rage.’ She said: ‘And pardon the people.’ He said: ‘God has pardoned you.’ She said: ‘And God loves the good-doers’ (3:134). He said: ‘Go. You are a free woman.’ (Bihar, XLVI, 68; cf.96).

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