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The Twenty-Ninth Greater Sin: Helping the Oppressors

The twenty-ninth sin, that is classified as a Greater Sin is ‘Helping the oppressors’. Fazl Ibn Shaz^{īn} has narrated from Imam Ri^{ḡā} (a.s.) that he said concerning the Greater Sins:

“And helping the oppressors and bending (leaning) towards them.”

In the narration of Amash from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) the following is mentioned, “Not helping the oppressed people is a Greater Sin.” In other words helping the oppressors is also a Greater Sin.

Imam Musa Ibn Ja’far (a.s.) says:

“To participate in the activities of the oppressors and to endeavour to achieve their evil objectives and to help them is equal to infidelity and to knowingly lean towards them is a Greater Sin and deserves Hell.”¹

The Holy Prophet (S) similarly says:

“On the night of ascension (Miraj), I saw the following inscription on the doors of Hell, ‘DO NOT BE A HELPER OF THE OPPRESSORS.’”²

It means that if one does not wish to enter Hell he must refrain from co-operating with the oppressors. Moreover, this is a sin that is promised Divine punishment by the Almighty in the Holy Qur’an.

“And do not incline to those who are unjust, lest the fire touch you, and you have no guardians besides Allah, then you shall not be helped.” (Surah H^ād 11:113)

According to Tafs^{īr} Minhaj us-S^ād^{iq} ‘do not incline’ means we must not have the slightest inclination towards the oppressors. Hence we must not treat them honourably nor mix with them freely nor express our affections for them. We must not be greedy of their gifts, nor should we praise them and obey their orders. When such are the prohibitions against the oppressors, it is obvious that then it cannot be lawful

to help them and co-operate with them in oppression.

The Messenger of Allah (S) remarks,

“One who prays for the long life of an oppressor is as if he likes the opposition of Allah on the Earth.”³

There is an interesting incident in the book *Rawzatul Jannat* concerning the author of *Maqasikul Ahkam*, Sayyid Muhammad. Once the Sayyid and another respected teacher, Shaykh, planned a pilgrimage to the Holy tomb of Imam Riḍā (a.s.) at Mashad, but when they learned that Shah Abbas Safavi was staying at Mashad they decided to cancel their visit.

Similarly under the biography of Sayyid Bahrul UImansḥrm it is mentioned that when the Governor of Shustaran Province behaved with utmost respect with him, he says, “Before I could develop some liking for him and come under the denouncement of the Qur’anic Verse, I fled from that place.” Thus he shifted from Dezful and settled down in Iraq for the rest of his life.

When we study the biographies of some scholars we realize how strictly they refrained from meeting, mixing with or communicating with the oppressors, so that there would not be even a remote chance for them to befriend them and help them in their activities.

Muhaddith Jazaeri writes in the book *Fawaidur Rizvia* that there was a person who committed some blunder in the presence of Shah Abbas Safavi and in order to escape his wrath took refuge in Mashad. Then he approached the late Mulla Ahmed (Muqaddase Ardebeli) and requested him to write to the Shah that he may forgive his mistake. Muqaddase Ardebeli wrote as follows:

“Founder of a kingdom obtained through asking, Abbas! Know that even though this man was initially an oppressor, but he is now an oppressed one. So, overlook his mistake. I hope Allah will forgive some of your mistakes.”

Signed: From the slave of the king of Wilāyat, Ahmed Ardebeli.

The Shah replied to his letter:

“You have been grateful upon me for ordering those things which you did (in your letter). Do not neglect me in your invocations.”

Signed: Dog of the House of ‘Ali, Abbas.

It is quoted from *Tarikh Bahire* that Khwaja Nizamul Mulk the Prime Minister of Malik Shah Seljuq, was very much thoughtful of the Hereafter and the Day of Judgement and he used to be fearful in this regard. During the tenure of his ministry he was a supporter of the helpless, a patron of intellectuals, and steadfast in following the religious obligations. He thought of obtaining a certificate from the scholars and intellectuals, certifying his good morals, so that the document could be kept inside his shroud during

burial. He hoped to achieve salvation by this. He drafted a certificate and sent it to various scholars and intellectuals for their signatures. When it reached Baghdad and was presented before the respected teacher of Nizamiya Madrassa, Shaykh Abu Ishaq, he wrote, "I witness that Shaykh Nizamul Mulk is slightly better (oppressor) from among the oppressors."

When Khwaja saw the remark of Abu Ishaq, he wept and said: "Whatever Abu Ishaq has written is true." There is no doubt that helping the oppressors in any way is Harām and a Greater Sin. There is an Islamic law for every kind of oppressor and the ways of helping the oppressors, and it is incumbent to learn these rules and commands.

Types of oppressors

'Zulm' the Arabic word for oppression and injustice implies disregard for Divine commandments and also to oppose whatever is compatible with reason and logic. There are two types of such oppression:

(1) Crossing the limits of religious law is equal to polytheism. As the Almighty says,

"...most surely polytheism is a grievous inequity." (Surah Luqmān 31:13)

(2) Belying the Divine signs is also oppression as stated in the Holy Book,

...and the unbelievers- they are the unjust." (Surah al-Baqarah 2:254)

In short, we can say that all the religious laws that we are supposed to follow according to reason or religious commands must be obeyed in totality. Not accepting them or not believing them is a kind of injustice. Apart from this, non-acceptance of the Divine commands or not acting upon them or disregarding the limits specified by the Almighty, like neglecting a Wajib act or doing a Harām one, all of these constitute injustice.

Thus the Almighty Lord says,

"...and whoever exceeds the limits of Allah these it is that are the unjust." (Surah al-Baqarah 2:229)

This also applies to injustice upon ones own self. As Allah (S.w.T.) mentions:

"Therefore whoever disbelieves, his unbelief is against himself." (Surah Fāṭ'ir 35:39)

Various kinds of oppressions include insulting, abusing, degrading or imprisoning a person; also backbiting or accusing a person falsely or hurting a person physically. Another form of oppression is to usurp someone's property or to obtain it without the owner's permission, or not to return the rights to its owner etc. Another way of usurping a right is to forcefully occupy a position reserved for someone else. The supreme example of such injustice was committed by the tyrant rulers of Bani Umayya and Bani

Abbas when they usurped the position of Wilāyat which clearly belonged to the Holy Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.). Another example is that of the unjust jurist who assumes the seat of Qazi.

Oppression belongs to two categories. In one category are the tyrant rulers and vicious kings, for whom committing oppression is a normal practice. In the second category are the individuals who may do injustice to someone else once in a while. We shall study all these types of injustices in four sub-topics.

Helping the oppressor in oppression

Helping an oppressor in any way whatsoever is Harām. For example to hand over a cane to someone so that he can beat an innocent person, or to help in any way to imprison him or kill him.

The renowned Shaykh Ansari writes in Makasib that the prohibiting of co-operation with the oppressors is confirmed by all four proofs required to prove the Islamic laws. i.e. Qur'an, reason, Sunnat and Ijma.

Logic: Reason dictates that there is no difference between the actual oppressor and the one who helps him. Both are equally responsible for the act of injustice. It is possible that if there is no one to help the oppressor he may not be able to oppress. Hence logically it is Harām help an oppressor.

Ijma: Referring to books on jurisprudence, confirms that all the jurists are unanimous in their opinion that helping the oppressor is Harām.

Qur'an: The Qur'anic verse

“And do not incline to those who do injustice,”

is sufficient to prove the illegality of helping the unjust. Because if even a slight inclination towards unjust people is prohibited, then how can helping them be permitted. As helping them would be the greatest form of inclining towards them.

Moreover, the Almighty says:

“...and do not help one another in sin and oppression; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is severe in requiting evil.” (Surah al-Mā'idā 5:2)

The Traditions of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.) against helping the oppressors

Numerous traditions have reached us in this connection. Shaykh Ansari has also recorded the following tradition from the Holy Prophet (S) in his book Warām:

“If one knowingly goes to help an oppressor, he has apostasized from Islam.”⁴

Naturally an act that makes a person bereft of the Islamic faith must be a sin that results in his destruction.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“When Qiyāma occurs an announcer will call: Where are the unjust, the helpers of Unjust and those like the Unjust? So much so that even if one has procured merely pen and ink for the oppressor to write the order of oppression; all these people would be bundled up in a cage of iron and thrown into Hell.”⁵

The Messenger of Islam (S) says:

“If a person even hangs up a cane for the tyrant king so that he can beat the oppressed one, Allah will change that cane into a snake, seventy thousand yards long and place it in the Hell fire (to torment him).”⁶

“Those who take the affairs of oppressors in their hands and help him in oppression will, at the time of death, be conveyed the Divine curse and news of Hell fire by the angel of death. And Hell is an evil resort. One who guides the oppressor will be considered at par with Hamān (the minister of Fir'on). And the punishment of those who help the unjust and the oppressors themselves will be more grievous than other punishments of the inmates of Hell. And if a person backbites about his believing brother to the ruler, and even though the Muslim may not have to suffer any injury from it, the backbiter will have all his good deeds nullified. However, if the Muslim had to suffer oppression at the hands of the ruler, the back-biter will be kept by Allah in that section of Hell where Hamān will be confined.”⁷

Praising the oppressor is also Harām

To praise an oppressor so that his power and authority may increase, or he may be encouraged to become more daring, is also Harām. This is confirmed by arguments that have been mentioned, and also the proofs concerning the forbidding of evil (Nahy Anil Munkar).

Shaykh Ansari has specifically related a tradition from the Holy Prophet (S):

“One who shows respect to a rich man and in the greed of his wealth considers him good; the Almighty Allah becomes angry on him and puts him in a cage of fire at the lowest part of Hell where Qarun is confined.”⁸

This tradition applies to all types of people, but if the praised one is unjust, the one who praises will be eligible to severe retribution. The Prophet of Allah (S) has said,

“If one praises a tyrant king or shows humility due to greed (of his rewards) then he will be in Hell with him (the King).”⁹

Another prophetic tradition states,

“Whenever a transgressor is praised, the heavens shudder and the Divine Anger envelopes the one who has praised.”¹⁰

We must not accept any honour from oppressors

The most common way of helping the oppressors is to accept some post or position from them, especially if that post is a cause for any type of oppression. For example the post of maintaining law and order. If a person assumes such an assignment from the oppressors and as a result unleashes oppression on innocent people, such an appointment and such an acceptance of the post is a Greater Sin. If as a result of it, innocent people are subjected to hardships, the doer of such actions is sure to have a severe punishment from the Almighty.

There is one very well known tradition of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) and it is quoted here from Tohful Uqūl. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“The Harām post is the post of an oppressive ruler and the posts of those who are busy in the assignments entrusted by the tyrants. Hence it is Harām to fulfill the duty of this post. One who takes up this post will become involved in Divine punishment. Whether the job is significant or paltry, any attempt to help the oppressor is a Greater Sin. Because accepting a post from an oppressor will result in the trampling of rights, the manifestation of injustice, the spread of corruption and disturbance, the destruction of heavenly books, the murder of Prophets, the demolishing of mosques and the interpolation of religious laws. Therefore it is Harām to work with them. Except when there is a condition of utter helplessness, like when it becomes permissible to drink blood and eat the flesh of dead.”¹¹

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) has also said:

“Those who accept some assignment from the oppressors; the minimum punishment for them on the Day of Judgement would be that Allah would make them stand near fire till He does the accounting of the rest of the people. After that He will decide about them.”

In the last portion of the book Dārūs Salām there is an incident concerning Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Iraqi. He was one of those who had the honour of seeing Imam az-Zaman (a.s.). He says... “during the time of my youth I was staying in my native village in Iraq. The name of that place was KarharMansūr. In those days a person whom I knew by his name and lineage passed away and was buried in the graveyard opposite to our house. For forty days, at the time of sunset a fire arose from his grave, and wails and screams were heard. On one of those nights the wailing of that dead man became more intense and I was very much troubled. I became so much frightened that I was trembling uncontrollably as if the punishment was on myself; so much so that I eventually began to lose consciousness. When my friends came to know of my condition they came and carried me to their house and I remained there till I was well again. Afterwards I came to know that the dead man was working in the local court. One day he had demanded some tax from a Sayyid who was unable to pay. This man arrested the Sayyid

and locked him up in one of his rooms. He hung him from the ceiling of his house for quite some time. It was due to these deeds that he was punished after death.”

Another similar incident is related by a reliable person that, some time ago there was a person by the name of ʿUqba Muhammad ‘Ali. He was a dealer in perfumes and was also in some way connected with the law courts. He had promulgated an order banning all the people from any kind of trade in perfumes. During that period a Sayyid had some perfume and he sold it to some other trader. When this tyrant came to know of this he met the Sayyid in the market and abused him excessively and even slapped him. In reply to this the Sayyid said, “My ancestors will repay you for this.” When the tyrant heard this he turned back and ordered his slave to catch hold of the Sayyid. Then he beat the Sayyid with a cane saying, “Go and tell your ancestor to cut off my arms.” The very next day this oppressor contracted high fever and his arms began to pain severely during the night. On the third day his arms had swollen terribly and puss began to ooze from them. On the fourth day the surgeons amputated his arms in a way that only the stubs remained. He died on the seventh day.

Therefore, it is important to know that acceptance of an assignment or a post from an oppressor or a tyrant is a great help to that unjust man. And it is impossible for the person who accepts such assignments to remain just and non-violent.

It is mentioned in the Sahih of Dawūd bin Zarbi that one of the followers of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) had requested Imam Sajjad (a.s.) to recommend him to the ruler of Madinah, Dawūd bin ‘Ali for an appointment in the governmental post. Imam Sajjad (a.s.) replied: “I will never do such a thing.”

On hearing this he thought that Imam (a.s.) was unwilling to recommend him because he might be worried that some injustice would be caused by him. So he approached Imam (a.s.) and began to promise and take oaths that he would never do any kind of unjust act and said that he would not do anything except help the people. Imam (a.s.) looked at the sky and began to weep. Then he said that going to the sky was easier. It was apparent that Imam (a.s.) meant to say that once a person accepts employment of an oppressor it is impossible for him not to oppress.

When is it permitted to accept a position under rulership?

There are two situations where it is allowed to accept appointment in the service of oppressors and rather in some cases it becomes Wajib to do so. It is permissible when a person is forced to accept it or if he is practising Taqiyya. That is, if he refuses, his life property or honour will be in danger.

Permissibility of accepting employment under tyrants is proved in many ways.

The Holy Prophet (S) has said,

“My people will not be questioned for what they are forced to do.”¹²

And Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has mentioned:

“There is nothing that Allah has not made permissible for one who is helpless.”

Imam Riḍā (a.s.) has been reported in Wasa'il ul-Shia to say that he accepted to be heir-apparent of Mamun under duress and Taqiyya. When Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) was asked about working for a tyrant king, he replied,

“It is not allowed, except when a person is not able to obtain his livelihood from any other means or if his life is in danger and his life depends on accepting some work from the tyrant. In that case it is allowed. But if he receives any remuneration from the tyrant he must pay Khums from it.”¹³

Such appointments are permissible when the job involves only peacekeeping and maintaining of law and order. Like posts in armies where the aim is to defend the borders of Muslim countries, to see to the welfare of believers and the downtrodden people, and to restore the rights to those who were deprived of it. Accepting service under tyrants is allowed in these circumstances provided one has a firm intention of dealing in a just manner. If the intention is to help the Shias specifically, it is more meritorious. Ziyad ibn Abi Salma says that he went to meet Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) asked him if he was employed with the government? “Yes,” he replied. Imam (a.s.) asked, “Why?”

He replied, “I am benevolent and helpful to the needy so I cannot leave this job. Apart from this I have a family and children and I have no other means of livelihood.” Imam (a.s.) said,

“O Ziyad if I am taken to the top of a high mountain and thrown from it and my body is shattered to pieces. I would prefer that to doing some job for these people or even to step inside their threshold. Except for one condition. Do you know what that is?”

Ziyad said, “May my life be sacrificed for you; I don't know.”

Imam (a.s.) continued,

“Except that I rescue the believers from grief and hardships or liberate an imprisoned believer, or repay the debts of a believer.” After this Imam (a.s.) went on to say, “O Ziyad! If you are employed under a tyrant, work for the welfare of your believing brothers so that it will recompense for the sins that you may happen to commit during your service period.”

Fazl Ibn Abdul Rahmān says that I wrote a letter to Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) asking, “Please permit me to work on a governmental post.” Imam (a.s.) replied,

“You are permitted, provided you do not change my religious commands or cross the limits laid down by Allah. The compensation of your action will be your fulfilling the needs of your believing brother.”¹⁴

‘Ali Ibn Yaqtīn, who was the Prime Minister of Caliph Harūn, wrote to Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.): “Please give me permission to resign from this post.” Imam (a.s.) replied to him,

“I do not consider it permissible for you to leave this governmental post because in the courts of tyrants there are people through whom Allah removes the difficulties of His loved ones. And they are the ones whom Allah has made immune from the fire of Hell. Hence fear Allah with respect to your brothers.”¹⁵

Muhammad bin Ismail Baz^q was also a minister in the court of Har^qn. He had the honour of meeting Three Imams, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.), Imam ‘Ali Ri^qa (a.s.) and Imam Jawad (a.s.) who provided his own garment to serve as his shroud. He relates from Imam Ri^qa (a.s.) that he said,

“There are people in the courts of tyrants through whom Allah manifests His proof and they are appointed in specific cities. Allah removes the difficulties of His loved ones through them and by them He brings about the welfare of Muslims. The believers take refuge with them in calamities. The needs of our needy Shias are fulfilled through these very people. And the Almighty Allah through their means imposes the fear and dread of the believers upon the houses of oppressors. These are the true believers who are the trust bearers of Allah on this earth. Congratulations to them for their position and post!”

Then Imam (a.s.) asked,

“Wouldn’t it be better that at least one of you reaches that position?”

Muhammad asked, “May my life be sacrificed for you. How can a person reach such a position?” Imam (a.s.) replied,

“Being with the tyrants, he makes the heart of our Shias happy; that makes us happy. O Muhammad! After you do this you will be considered among those people who have lofty positions.”¹⁶

Accepting employment under a tyrant ruler becomes Wajib in one condition

At times it is Wajib to accept rulership or a post in government. A person should do so only when he is sure that if he assumes the post he will be able to uproot a great evil or will be able to prevent at least one sinful ritual or system. But such a situation is rare because it depends on personal confidence, that after one assumes authority, one will never commit any sort of injustice or sinful act nor go against justice and Divine commands. It is obvious that such a proposition is very difficult because there are numerous dangers that lurk behind the facade of governance. It is most difficult to save oneself from them.

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) replied to the letter of Abdullah Najjashi the ruler of Ahwaz:

“It has come to my knowledge that you assumed the rulership of Ahwaz. I am happy by this news and aggrieved too. Happy because I hope Allah will remove the difficulties and the problems of the Progeny of Muhammad and help them through you and through you the fire of opposition will cool down on them. I am aggrieved on account of the fears, the least of which is that you may become a cause of injury or

difficulty to our followers and thus be deprived of even the fragrance of Paradise.”¹⁷

The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“One who assumes the leadership of a community will be raised on the Day of Qiyāma in a way that both his hands will be tied to his neck. Then if he had dealt with the people according to Shariah; Allah will free him. But if he has been unjust he will be thrown into Hell. And what an evil resort it is. If a leader of a community does not deal with justice and goodness with the people, for each day that he ruled, he will be made to stand at the boundary of Hell for a thousand years with both his hands tied behind his neck. Thus if he has dealt with equity he will be freed and if not, he will be thrown into Hell, into a depth of seventy thousand years.”

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“If a person has authority in a particular affair of the people and he deals with justice with them and the doors of his house are open for those who refer to him and seek his help and he does not remain aloof from the people. Then the Almighty Allah will keep him safe from dread and fear on the Day of Qiyāma and make him enter Paradise.”¹⁸

It must be remembered, however, that this is a vast subject and it is not possible to discuss all its facets. Hence those who wish to study in detail may refer to books of jurisprudence.

Helping the oppressors in other matters

Helping the oppressors or tyrants in matters other than oppression; like to work as their personal assistant, to stitch clothes for them, or build their house or guard their property. All these types of jobs can be classified into Three categories:

(1) In some cases these jobs indirectly help in oppression; for example, if the tyrant had usurped a piece of land and orders a mason to build a house on it, or a cloth which has been obtained forcefully is given to a tailor to stitch a dress, or a person may be ordered to guard the money exorted from innocent people.

There is no doubt that all such kinds of jobs are Harām. Because the use of things acquired by illegal means is Harām for the one who has acquired them or for anyone else who is aware of their contraband nature.

(2) The second category is of those jobs which are not direct acts of oppressions or which do not help in oppressing, but since the one who is involved in them is associated with the tyrants and the common people consider him to be a part of that oppression; it is Harām. His presence may encourage the tyrants, consequently his name is also included in the list of oppressors. He is also counted among those who usurp the rights of people. All these are Harām according to numerous traditions. Imam Ja’far

as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“One who has his name registered in the office of Bani Abbas will be raised on the Day of Qiyāma in the form of a pig.”¹⁹

In another tradition he says that such a person will be brought in the form of a black pig. Imam (a.s.) has also said,

“Do not help the oppressors in the construction of mosques.”²⁰

Ibn Abi Yūfur says that I was in the company of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) when one of the Shias came and spoke to Imam (a.s.). He said, “May our lives be sacrificed for you! Some of our people have problems in obtaining livelihood whereas there are vacancies in the establishments of Bani Abbas for construction of buildings and digging of canals. So what is your opinion regarding this?”

Imam (a.s.) replied:

“I don’t like to tie even a knot, or the mouth of a water bag or the strap of a purse for them. Even if they were to pay me with Madinah and whatever is in it. I do not like that I help them even as little as the ink at the tip of a pen. Without any doubt, the oppressors will remain standing at the verge of Hell–fire till the time Allah decides about all others.”

Muhammad bin Azfar says that Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) told his father,

“I have come to know that you deal freely with Abu Ayyub and Abu Rabie. Then what would be your condition when your name will appear in the list of the helpers of tyrants?”

Hearing this command the father became aggrieved. When Imam (a.s.) saw his restlessness he said,

“I have only warned you of that about which the Almighty has warned me.”

The narrator says, “My father remained sorrowful for the rest of his life.”²¹

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says, “It is incumbent upon Allah to raise you on the Day of Qiyāma with the same group from which you derived benefits in this world.”

The Imam (a.s.) has also mentioned the incidents when some of the followers of Hazrat Musa (a.s.) decided to support Fir’on for worldly benefits and secretly planned to change sides. When Musa (a.s.) was about to win, they enrolled as his supporters, but it so happened that when Fir’on and his soldiers were about to be drowned and these people made a bid to cross to Hazrat Musa’s side, the Almighty Allah caused their horses to perish and they also drowned with Fir’on and his army.

(Wasa’il ul-Shia)

Our beloved Imam (a.s.) has the following advice for us:

“Fear Allah, strengthen your faith with an incomparable Taqiyya and avoid presenting your needs to the ruler. And if a person is respectful to an irreligious man, Allah will degrade him and will consider him His enemy and leave him on his own. And if he receives any monetary benefit from this man, Allah will remove barakat from it. And if he uses this money to perform Hajj or emancipate slaves, or for any other benevolent deed, he will not get any reward for it.”²²

‘Ali bin Abi Hamza says, “One of my friends was a scribe in the employ of Bani Umayya. One day he requested me to take him to Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.). I took him to Imam (a.s.). He saluted and said, ‘May my life be sacrificed upon you, I had been in the employ of Bani Umayya as a scribe and have earned a huge amount of wealth without giving any thought to right or wrong.’ Imam (a.s.) said,

‘If people like this had not been in the service of Bani Umayya to write letters for them, collect their wealth for them, fight their enemies and attend their assemblies, they (Bani Ummaya) would not have usurped our rights. And if they had been left alone they would not have been able to accumulate any wealth more than what they had.’

The man said, ‘May I be sacrificed for you, can I attain salvation after what I have done?’ Imam (a.s.) said,

‘Separate whatever wealth you have earned from them and try to return it to the rightful owners if you know them. Whatever you cannot deliver should be given as charity (Sadaqah) on their behalf so that I can guarantee that Allah will send you to Paradise.’

Upon hearing this, the young man bowed his head thoughtfully for sometime. Then he raised his head and said, ‘May I be sacrificed on you, I will do as you have ordered.’ After this he accompanied me to Kufa and returned all his wealth to the rightful owners as much as it was possible; the rest he gave away as Sadaqah. He even gave up the dress he was wearing. I procured some money for him and bought him a dress and gave him some amount for his expenses. After some months he fell ill and I paid him a visit. I found that he was in a very serious condition. He opened his eyes and told me, “Ali ibn Abi Hamza, by Allah, your Imam (a.s.) has fulfilled his promise.’ He died soon after. I supervised his final rites and returned to Madinah to meet Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) said,

‘O ‘Ali! I have fulfilled my promise to your friend.’

I said, ‘May I be sacrificed upon you! You speak the truth, because my companion testified to it at the time of his death.’”²³

Assistance which is not Harām nor can be an encouragement

(3) The third type of help is that which is not objectionable in any way an encouragement to the

oppressor, nor can it be considered as help to the oppressor in general sense. For example, to hire vehicles or carry the load of permissible goods and eatables etc. All these types of actions are not totally Harām but some elders have mentioned that on the basis of precaution it is necessary to avoid even these actions. As we have stated earlier, by involving oneself in such matters one is prone to incline towards the oppressors.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) commands Safwan Jamīl

Safwan bin Mahram Kufi was a very pious companion of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) and Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.). He used to earn his livelihood by hiring out camels. He owned a large number of camels. He says that one day Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) said to him,

“Safwan every action of yours is meritorious except one.”

“May I be sacrificed for you, what action is that?” He said,

“You hire your camels to Harun al-Rashid (l.a.)”

He said, “I don't give my camels for hunting or games but he takes them when he goes for Hajj and I do not serve him myself, I order my servants to accompany them on the journey.”

Imam (a.s.) asked,

“Do they pay you in advance or after their return?”

“After they return”, he replied,

“Don't you carry the hope that they return safe and sound from their journey so that you receive your payment?”

“Yes.”

Imam (a.s.) said,

“One who wishes them to remain alive is like them and one who is connected with them will go to Hell.”²⁴

Safwan says that when he heard this he sold away all his camels. When Harun heard of this he summoned him and asked the reason for it. He said, “I have become old and weak and am unable to take care of the camels, even my slaves are not capable of maintaining them properly.”

Harūn said, “It is not so! I know who has persuaded you to do this. You have done this on the direction of Musa Ibn Ja'far (a.s.).”

“What do I have to do with Musa Ibn Ja’far?” said Safwan but Harun was not satisfied and said that if he had not had good relations with Safwan he would have got him killed.

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“One who likes the oppressors to continue (to live) likes the disobedience to Allah (to continue) on this earth.”²⁵

While explaining the Qur’anic verse,

“... and do not incline to those who are unjust, lest the fire may touch you.” (Surah Hūd 11: 113)

Imam (a.s.) says,

“If a person comes to a ruler and wishes for him to live if only for as long as it would take for him to put his hand inside his money bag and give some amount.”

Wishing for the life of an oppressor even for a moment is the same as being inclined towards him.

Helping an oppressive person who is not an habitual oppressor

To help a person, who is not always oppressive, but occasionally happens to commit oppression, is also absolutely Harām. If one knowingly helps a person in a situation where he is oppressing another, one commits a Harām action and a Greater Sin and will be punished as promised in Qur’an:

“Surely We have prepared for the iniquitous a fire, the curtains of which shall encompass them about; and if they cry for water, they shall be given water like molten brass which will scald their faces, evil the drink and ill the resting place.” (Surah al-Kahf 18:29)

Oppressing and helping someone in oppression is one and the same.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has remarked:

“The oppressor, the one who helps an oppressor and the one who is satisfied with it, are all partners in oppression.”²⁶

It means all Three of them are equally responsible. A similar tradition has been narrated from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) who says that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

“One who breaks allegiance to the Imam, or raises a standard of misguidance or conceals a piece of knowledge which is obligatory to be imparted or usurps some property or helps an oppressor knowingly; then he has deserted the religion of Islam.”²⁷

On the night of ascension (Miraj) the Holy Prophet (S) saw the following inscription on the door of Hell:

“Allah degrades the one who insults Islam, the one who insults the Holy Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.) and the one who helps an oppressor in oppression.”²⁸

In this way the Qur’anic verses and traditions prove the seriousness of oppression and helping an oppressor as a Greater sin. Moreover, one who helps an oppressor has also acted against the Divine commandments of forbidding evil. He is actually a hypocrite because he has in fact encouraged an evil and this is one of the characteristics of a hypocrite. As the Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur’an:

“The hypocritical men and the hypocritical women are all alike; they enjoin evil and forbid good...” (Surah at-Tawba 9:67)

Preventing oppression is necessary

If a Muslim sees an oppressor trying to oppress someone and if he is in a position to prevent him it is obligatory on him to do so. The Messenger of Allah (S) says:

“Help your Muslim brother whether he is an oppressor or the oppressed one.”

People asked, “O Messenger of Allah! We shall help the oppressed ones but how is it possible to help the oppressor?” He replied,

“Hold both the hands of the oppressor so that he cannot oppress. If you do it, it is as if you have helped him and such an action is a help to your brother (in faith).”²⁹

Helping a person who is not a professional oppressor

It is permitted to help an oppressor (in acts other than his acts of oppression) if rendering this help can discourage him from his oppression.

If however, helping him has no effect on his oppressive activities then from the point of view of Nahy anil Munkar (forbidding evil) it is Harām to help him.

We must not co-operate in sinful deeds

It is also Harām to help an oppressor whose oppression is not directed to others; but he is unjust to himself. For example to omit prayers and avoid fasting, to drink wine, commit adultery, gambling etc. Every type of sinner is being unjust to himself. Hence helping him in being unjust to himself is also prohibited. One who helps him is his partner in sin. The Almighty Allah has mentioned:

“Help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and oppression, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil).” (Surah al-Mā’ida 5:2)

Sin (Ithm) is limited to the one who commits it and aggression (udwān) affects others too.

All the proofs and arguments that are applicable to the obligation of forbidding evil also apply here.

Helping in Sin

To help in any condition required in a sinful act is Harām.

(1) For example to sell grapes with the specific purpose of making wine.

(2) A person may help in some way without the intention of helping towards a sinful act, for example, he may sell grapes to a wine-maker without the intention of this being used for making wine, but if there is no other source available for the wine maker to procure grapes, then the selling of grapes by this person is Harām, because it would directly contribute to the manufacture of wine.

Helping a sinner in some other way

Is it allowed to help a sinful person, by way of giving loan or solving his difficulties to one who does not pray or is an alcoholic? Sometimes it is very difficult to decide as to what is the proper course of action in such circumstances, because we are commanded to maintain a distance from sinners. Thus ‘Ali (a.s.) says:

“The Messenger of Allah has ordered us to be unfriendly with the sinful people.”³⁰

Hazrat Imam Sadiq (a.s.) rebuked his followers:

“It may happen that in your social circle one of your Shias does evil, and you do not prevent him nor dissociate with him nor hurt him, till he gives up his evil deeds.”³¹

There are several traditions regarding certain specific sins. For example:

“One who helps a person who does not pray, with a morsel of food or a piece of cloth, is as if he has murdered seventy Prophets, the first of whom being Adam (a.s.) and the last, Muhammad (S).”³²

In another tradition the Holy Prophet (S) says:

“One who smiles at a person who does not pray, is as if he had demolished the Holy Ka’ba seventy times.”³³

The Prophet of Allah (S) also says:

“One who helps a person who does not pray, with a drink of water, is as if he has made war upon me.”³⁴

Other traditions of this kind are against associating with alcoholics, with those who cut off relationships with their kith and kin and with liars. On the other hand we have traditions that emphasise the respecting of a believer's rights, helping and socialising with the followers of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.), the Sayyads, the neighbours etc.

The latter kinds of traditions are not conditional. For example it is obligatory to do Silet ar-Rahm with one's kindered and it is not a necessary condition that the relatives should be pious. We have discussed this matter in the chapter of Silet ar-Rahm and the rights of parents. Even if they are unbelievers we have to fulfill our duties towards them. In the same way the Holy Prophet (S) says regarding Sayyads:

“Respect my descendants, be kind towards the righteous from among them for the sake of Allah and towards the non-righteous ones for my sake.”

Imam Riḍā (a.s.) says the following with regard to the devotees of the Progeny of Muhammad (S):

“Be a friend of the Progeny of Muhammad even if you are a transgressor and befriend their friends even if they are transgressors.”

As far as the rights of neighbours are concerned we are told that if your neighbour is a Muslim he has double rights upon you (One of neighbourhood and another of being a fellow Muslim). If he is an infidel he still has the right of neighbourhood on you.³⁵

On the basis of the above it is incumbent to befriend the followers of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.), help them and fulfill their needs even if they are not pious. We must respect the Sayyads and fulfill our rights towards the kindered even if they are sinners.

Secondly when one is faced with more than one obligation at a time, one should try to fulfill all if it is easy to do, if this is difficult, one should fulfill the one which is more important.

For example when one is faced with a situation when one is keeping an obligatory fast and a child is drowning in a pond. If he jumps into the pool his head will submerge and the fast will become invalid, but since it is more important to save a human life it becomes Wajib for him to jump into the pool. According to Shari'a breaking a fast is a lesser evil than allowing the death of a human. By doing this he would not be liable for the punishment of breaking a Wajib fast. On the other hand he will be deserving of Divine reward for saving a human life.

Preventing others from evil is most important

Enjoining good and forbidding evil are the Divine commands, which are obligatory to be followed. They are so important that in case of their clashing with other duties, priority has to be given to these commands. If mother, father, son or some relative do not obey the divine obligatory commands like praying etc. And if by withholding kindness and help from them, it is possible to reform them and induce

them to give up their sinful ways, then it is Wajib to withhold kindness and help from them. The same reasoning applies to Sayyids, neighbours and the followers of Ahl ul-Bayt (a.s.) who have a right on us. But if withholding help is not going to make any difference in their behaviour, then it is meaningless to adopt such measures. For these were withheld only that they may force the sinners to reform. Otherwise there is no point in employing these retaliatory tactics. If one's parents and relatives are not in the habit of ritual prayers and dissociating with them will not change their attitude; then it is Harām to dissociate with them or disobey them.

We must discriminate between different ranks and positions

We must remember that Nahy Anil Munkar (Forbidding evil) is more important than the rights of relatives, Sayyads and neighbours. Hence we should first try to fulfill the duty of forbidding evil even if it necessitates the non-fulfillment of latter duties, provided there is scope of improvement among the sinners. If it is not so, then it is not required to dissociate with them or withhold kindness etc. from them.

And as far as possible we should try to adopt a charitable option. If it is possible to reform a sinner through love and help we must try it, before we resort to harsher ways of withholding kindness and help. For example, a father has better chances of influencing a son, who is not steadfast in his prayers, if he tries to influence him gently. A gentle option must be tried before taking strict measures against him.

In other words, when withholding kindness does not achieve the desired results (giving up of sinful ways) there is no prohibition in being kind. In fact it is an obligatory act and its omission is Harām.

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1. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 2. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 3. Minhaj us-Sādiqīn
 4. Majmua Warām
 5. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 6. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 7. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 8. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 9. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 10. Safinat'ul-Bihār
 11. Tohful Uqā
 12. Khasael
 13. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 14. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
 15. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
 16. Bihār al-Anwār vol. 15
 17. Makasib Muharrama
 18. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 19. Wasa'il ul-Shia
 20. Wasa'il ul-Shia

21. Wasa'il ul-Shia
22. al-Kafi
23. Wasa'il ul-Shia
24. Wasa'il ul-Shia
25. Wasa'il ul-Shia
26. Wasa'il ul-Shia
27. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
28. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il
29. Anwarun Nomaniya
30. Wasa'il ul-Shia
31. Tehzib
32. Layali Akhbār
33. Layali Akhbār
34. Layali Akhbār
35. Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il

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