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## The Thirtieth Greater Sin: Not Helping the Oppressed

The thirtieth sin, which is mentioned as a Greater sin, is ‘not helping the oppressed people’ and ‘not warding off oppression from them’. In the tradition of Amash, Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says,

“...and not helping the oppressed (is a greater sin).”

To defend the oppressed is to help them ward off evil; not performing such a task is shirking a great duty which Allah has made incumbent upon us.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) says:

“If a person due to some difficulty takes refuge with his Muslim brother but inspite of being capable of helping him does not do so then he has for his own self cut off the Divine help.”<sup>1</sup>

Allah (S.w.T.) does not help a believer who does not help his brother in faith and leaves him on his own.

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) has mentioned that,

“A believer who inspite of being financially capable does not help another believer will be degraded by Allah in this world as well as the Hereafter.”

Similarly Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

“None of you should go to a place where a tyrant ruler is oppressing, and killing innocent people, if you are not capable of helping the oppressed. Because in event of a believer being present in such a place it would be his religious duty to help his believing brothers. But if he is not present at that place the obligation will not exist.”<sup>2</sup>

Umr<sup>ؓ</sup> bin Qays says, “My cousin and I went to meet Imam Husain (a.s.) when he was surrounded by the army of Yazid (l.a.). Imam (a.s.) conversed with us briefly and then asked,

‘Would you like to help me?’

I replied, ‘I have a family to look after, besides I also have some trusts of some people with me. I don’t know what my end would be and I don’t want that the property of those people, which I have as trust should be destroyed.’ My cousin also offered the same explanation.”

Imam Husain (a.s.) said,

“If you cannot offer your assistance to me you must go far away from this desert so that you may not be able to hear my plaintive cry for help. Because if anyone is to hear our cry for help and does not respond, it would be incumbent upon Allah to throw him in the fire (Hell).”<sup>3</sup>

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“A Jewish scholar was punished with fire maces in his grave with such severity that the flames leapt out from inside. This was because he had prayed without Wuzu and once he was passing by an oppressed person who called for help but he did not respond.”<sup>4</sup>

The Holy Prophet (S) says:

“It is necessary to help a believer whether he is an oppressor or an oppressed one. If he is an oppressor he should be restrained from oppression and if he is oppressed he should be helped in obtaining his rights. He should not be deserted and left on his own.”<sup>5</sup>

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“He is not a believer who inspite of being capable avoids helping his brother in need; Allah also leaves him on his own and does not help him in this world nor the Hereafter.”<sup>6</sup>

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

“A person before whom the defects of his Muslim brother are mentioned; and he does not try to remove those defects inspite of being able to do also; then Allah will expose (his defects) in this world as well as the Hereafter.”

From the above tradition and other similar narrations it seems that oppression is not confined to physical harm or monetary difficulty. It is also with regard to the injury to one’s honour and respect. For, the honour of a believer is as precious as his life and wealth. Defiling the honour of a believer is also *Harām*, like usurping his wealth or taking his life. The traditions are emphatic that just as it is necessary to defend the life and property of a believer, it is also incumbent to protect his honour and respect. It is *Wajib* to assist him in defending his honour.

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“If a person tells something (misleading) to a believer by which he intends to make him an evil man and due to this his respect and honour will be destroyed and he will be degraded in the eyes of common people and people will not trust him anymore nor respect him. Then such a person is deprived from the Guardianship of Allah and left for the Shaitan who also does not accept him.”<sup>7</sup>

The Messenger of Allah (S) says:

“If a person hears of the defects of his believing brother in an assembly and tries to defend him, Allah closes a thousand doors of evil from him in the world and the Hereafter. But in spite of being capable he does not refrain the one who is speaking about the defects of a believer; his sin will be equal to that of seventy backbiters.”<sup>8</sup>

Shaykh Ansari says that this sin is equated to that of seventy backbiters probably for the reason that if the one who is mentioning the defects is not restrained he may repeat this act on several other occasions. The Shaykh further says that preventing the backbiter is not sufficient but one should also endeavour to defend the believer from all such accusations and defects. For example if the defects pertain to some worldly matter one should say, “After all he has not committed a sin.” If the defects are with regard to some religious obligation he should try to somehow prove that the accusation is false. As an example, if a believer is said to have omitted prayers one can defend him by suggesting, that may be he had forgotten to offer them. If a believer is accused of being an alcoholic, one can suggest that he must have seen him drinking something else, or as a last resort one can say, “He is after all not a Masūm (infallible). A man is prone to sin sometimes, so instead of back-biting about him you should try to reform him and help him in his difficulties.”

Thus one should make every effort to defend his believing brother from such dishonour. The details of this shall be discussed in the chapter of backbiting.

## **It is not necessary that only those who request for help should be assisted**

We should know that helping an oppressed does not become Wajib only when they request for help. Every person who is capable of removing difficulties of a believer must do so and if the needy person has entreated for assistance it becomes all the more important. As the Messenger of Allah (S) says,

“One who hears the entreaty of a man, ‘O Muslims! Come for my help,’ and does not assist him, is not a Muslim.”<sup>9</sup>

Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says,

“If a person requests his Muslim brother to help him and the latter does not do so in spite of being capable enough; the Almighty Allah installs a huge snake from (the snakes of) Hell on his grave so that it

can continuously bite him.”<sup>10</sup>

In another tradition it is reported that such a person will continue to receive this punishment till Qiyama even if he had been pardoned (for other sins). Moreover, Imam (a.s.) also said,

“No person refrains from helping and pleasing his Muslim brother unless there is some benefit in it.” (i.e. his helping would have been sinful instead of rewarding).”

There are many traditions of this type from the Holy Imams (a.s.). Imam Sajjad (a.s.) says:

“The sin which results in the descending of calamities is when one does not respond to the call for help of the helpless people.”<sup>11</sup>

Then the Imam (a.s.) invocated Allah (S.w.T.) saying,

“O Allah! I plead for forgiveness for the time when someone is oppressed in my presence and I do not help him. I seek refuge in You for not helping an oppressed and a needy person.”

(Sahifa al-Sajjadia)

Traditions on this subject are numerous and widespread. Let us be content with the ones we have discussed.

## Helping the oppressed is not only for believers

Helping the oppressed is Wajib. This does not mean that it is Wajib only to help the oppressed believers. The commands of helping the oppressed in the light of Qur'an and traditions are only conditional as far as the capability of the helper is concerned. Even if the oppressed people are not Shias and they belong to other sects of Muslims, it is still Wajib to help them. Even if a non-offensive infidel is being oppressed, the command of enjoining good and forbidding evil dictates that he should be helped and the evil must be eradicated.

There is an incident in Muntahiul Ma'ani that Mansur Dawaniqi was in Mecca when an expensive diamond was brought to him. It was for sale. When Mansur saw the diamond he recognised that it had belonged to Hisham bin Abdul Malik and should have been surrendered to him (Mansur). Since Muhammad a son of Hisham was still alive he must have brought it for sale. So he ordered his guards to close all the doors of the Holy Mosque after morning prayers the next day, and allow the people to leave only from a single door after careful scrutiny. When Muhammad bin Hisham was found he should be arrested and brought to him.

When on the next day after morning congregational prayers all the doors were shut and it was announced that people should leave from one particular exit, Muhammad bin Hisham realized that it was a plot to arrest him. He became fearful and looked here and there in confusion and worry. He did not

know what to do. Just then Muhammad bin Zaid bin ‘Ali bin al–Husain (a.s.) came towards him and asked, “Who are you? And why are you so frightened.”

“If I reveal my identity, would my life be safe?”

“Yes!” he replied, “I take an oath to remove this danger from you.”

“I am Muhammad, the son of Hisham Ibn Abdul Malik, Now tell who you are?”

“I am Muhammad Ibn Zaid bin ‘Ali bin al–Husain (a.s.) and certainly your great grandfather Marwan had killed my father unjustly, but do not worry, you are safe. Taking your life will not avenge the innocent blood of my father and you had not killed my father yourself. Now I will try my best to save you from this danger. I have thought of a way out of this. I want you to co-operate with me and promise me that you will be absolutely fearless and repose your trust in me.”

Thus, Muhammad bin Zaid covered the head and face of Muhammad ibn Hisham with his own robe and pulled him towards the exit beating him at every step. When they reached the exit he told the guard loudly, “This wretched man is a camel driver from Kufa. He had hired a camel from me but he ran away and he gave it to someone else. I also have two just witnesses to support my claim. You send your deputies with me and I will take him to the Qazi for judgement. Rabi, the chief guard ordered two of his deputies to accompany them and they came out of the Holy Mosque together. When they had walked for some distance Muhammad ibn Zayd told Muhammad bin Hisham, “There is still time for you to repent and promise to return my money, I will not trouble these guards and the Qazi if you assure me.”

Muhammad bin Hisham picked up the cue and said, “O son of the Holy Prophet (S). I promise to do as you say.”

Muhammad bin Zayd told the guards that since the fellow has repented there was no need for them to take more trouble. The guards left them. Muhammad bin Hisham took off the robe from his face and kissed the face and head of Muhammad bin Zayd and said, “Allah the Almighty knew well where to put His message that He appointed the Prophet from your family.”

Then he took out an expensive diamond from his pocket and requested Muhammad bin Zayd to accept it as a reward for saving his life but Muhammad bin Zayd declined saying, “I belong to a family that does not accept anything in return of a good deed. When I had condoned the murder of my father what value can this diamond have for me? I cannot take it.”

## **The worshipper sinks in the ground**

Shaykh Tusi has related from Imam Ja’far as–Sadiq (a.s.), “There was an old man of Bani Israel. He was praying when he saw that two children had caught a fowl and were pulling its feather. The fowl was shrieking in pain but he remained engrossed in prayers and did not help the poor bird by having it

released from the clutches of the naughty children. So the Almighty ordered the earth to swallow this man and sucked him to the lowest depths.”

## **The worldly and the heavenly rewards for those who help the believers**

A large number of traditions have reached us which emphasise the necessity of helping and assisting the believer and the rewards that are earned by those who do so. Let us study some of these traditions:

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

“One who responds to the entreaties of his believing brother in difficulties and makes him glad and helps him and fulfills his needs; then seventy two bounties become incumbent for him from Allah. One of these bounties is given to him in this world so that it can solve his worldly problems and the other seventy one are stored for him to remove the dread and difficulties of the Hereafter.”<sup>12</sup>

He (a.s.) has also said:

“If a person tries to fulfill the need of a believer and he completes it, the Almighty Allah writes in the scroll of deeds the rewards of a Hajj and Umra and Ihtikāf of two months in Masjidul Harām and fasts of two months. But if the need is not completely fulfilled the reward of one Hajj and Umra is written.”<sup>13</sup>

Imam (a.s.) has also mentioned that it was revealed upon Hazrat Dawūd (a.s.) that,

“When one good deed of one of My servants reaches Me I shall grant him Paradise.”

Dawūd (a.s.) asked, “O my Lord what deed is that?”

“Removing sorrow and difficulties of a believer, even if it is as little as giving him a date (fruit)!”

Dawūd (a.s.) said, “It is only You O Allah! Who is of such greatness that once a person recognises You, he must never despair of Your Mercy.”

It is quoted from Maimūn bin Mahram in the book Faqih, “I was sitting in the assembly of Imam Hasan (a.s.) when a person entered and said, ‘O son of the Messenger of Allah. I am indebted to such and such person and now he wants to imprison me.’

Imam (a.s.) said,

‘I do not have any money to repay your debt.’

He said, ‘Maybe you can speak to him so that he will not put me in prison.’

Imam (a.s.) arose and put on his shoes. I said, ‘O son of the Messenger (S) did you forget that you are

in Ihtikāf and cannot go out of the mosque?’

Imam (a.s.) said,

‘I have not forgotten, but I have heard my father say that the Holy Prophet (S) had said, “One who tries to fulfill the needs of his believing brother is as if he has for 9000 years fasted during the days and prayed during the nights.”’

## **Letter of Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) to the ruler of Ahwaz**

When Najjashi assumed the rulership of Ahwaz there was a person in his service who requested Imam (a.s.) that, “I owe a certain amount to the ruler and he is a Shia, if you feel proper, please write to him regarding this matter.”

Imam (a.s.) wrote:

“In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful. Please your brother so that Allah may please you.”<sup>14</sup>

The narrator says that when the person went to Najjashi, he was busy in some official matter. When he was free he handed Najjashi the letter saying that it was from Imam (a.s.). He kissed the letter and touched it to his eyes and asked, “What is the matter?” He told him that he owed some taxes. “How much?” Najjashi asked, “Ten thousand Dirhams,” he replied. Najjashi called his accountant and told him to note down his debt as paid and close his account in the register. Then he went further and said that for the following year too this amount of taxes should be marked as paid. Then he turned towards him and asked, “Have I made you happy?”

“Yes!” replied the man.

Then he called for a horse, and a slave brought it. He ordered for a dress and gave to the man. At each step he kept asking, “Have I made you happy? Have I made you happy? The man kept replying “Yes! Yes! May I be sacrificed for you, Yes!” At last he told him to take even the carpet on which he was sitting. Because, he said, “It was on this carpet that you handed me this letter of my Master (a.s.), and if you have any other need, tell me.” The man thanked him profusely, returned to Imam (a.s.) and related the details. The Imam (a.s.) was extremely pleased at the behaviour of Najjashi. The man asked, “O my Master are you pleased with Najjashi’s response?”

Imam (a.s.) replied,

“By Allah! Najjashi has also pleased Allah, His Prophet (S) and his Progeny.”

Yaqṭīn the father of ‘Ali relates that one of the accountants of Yahya bin Khalid was appointed to collect tax from their area. Yaqṭīn says, “At that time I was owing a considerable amount of tax and if all the tax

had to be cleared I would have had to sell off all my property. Some people suggested that he was a Shia, but I was too fearful to approach him in case he turned out to be a non-Shia and would force me to part with all my wealth, as I was a follower of 'Ali (a.s.). So I decided to run away from that place and headed for Mecca. After completing pilgrimage I decided to visit Madinah and presented myself before Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) and told him, 'Such and such person has been appointed as a tax collector but I was too scared to approach him for the fear that he may not be one of your adherents.' Imam (a.s.) told me that there was no cause for me to worry and he wrote a brief note;

"In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful, there are many people in His shade whose guardians are only those who remove the grief and difficulties of their brothers or give them opportunity or do some good to them even if it is as little as half a dried date and this person is your brother."

Imam (a.s.) put his seal at the end and handed me the note saying, 'Give this to him.' When I returned to my native town and went to his door, I said, 'I have been sent by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.)' He came running to the door barefooted. When he saw me, he saluted me and kissed my forehead and asked if his master has sent me. I replied in the affirmative and he said, 'If this is so, even my life is at your disposal.' He held my hands and implored me to tell him in what condition Imam (a.s.) was when I had departed. I told him that Imam (a.s.) was well. 'By Allah? Yes, By Allah?' he asked this Three times and after that I handed him the hand-written note of Imam (a.s.). He kissed it and touched it to his eyes. Then he asked me what I wanted from him. I told him that I owed several thousand dirhams in taxes and I would spend my whole life in paying them. He called for my file and condoned the taxes payable by me and gave me a receipt. After this he called for his money chest and gave half of the money to me. Then he called for his horses and distributed them equally between us. After this he sent for his clothes and distributed them in the same way. When he had divided all his belongings and given me half he said 'O Brother! Have I pleased you?' Yes, I replied, 'By Allah!'

When it was the time for Hajj I said to myself that I could never repay his kindness except for that which is most liked by Allah (S.w.T.) and His Holy Prophet (S). So I decided to go for Hajj in order that I may pray for him and after Hajj meet Imam (a.s.) and inform him of the kindness and request him also to pray for this noble soul. When I met Imam (a.s.) after Hajj he seemed very pleased and asked,

"O Yaqtin how did that person behave with you?"

When I described his goodness the face of Imam (a.s.) beamed with happiness. I asked whether Imam (a.s.) was pleased with his actions? (so that Allah (S.w.T.) may please the noble man). Imam (a.s.) replied:

"By Allah he has pleased my ancestors! By Allah he has pleased Amir ul-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) and the Holy Prophet (S) and he has pleased the Almighty Allah at the High Heaven."



## Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) and ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin

Ibrahim Jamil wanted to meet ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin, the Prime Minister of Harun the Caliph, but he was not granted an audience. The same year ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin was honoured by Hajj and later went to Madinah and decided to meet Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) but Imam (a.s.) did not permit him to enter. Again the next day he presented himself and upon the refusal of Imam (a.s.) asked as to what sin he had committed that Imam (a.s.) did not want to meet him. Imam (a.s.) said that since he had refused to meet his brother, the Almighty Allah would not allow his efforts to succeed, till the time Ibrahim Jamil does not forgive him. ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin said that since he was in Madinah and Ibrahim Jamil in Kufa how was it possible to obtain his forgiveness at that moment?

Imam (a.s.) said,

“When it is dark, go alone to Baqqa, and do not let anyone know it. You will find a thoroughbred horse there. Mount that horse.”

‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin did as instructed and in a short time found himself at the door of Ibrahim Jamil. He knocked at the door and announced “I am ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin.” Ibrahim Jamil said from inside, “What do I have to do with ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin?”

‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin said that he had some urgent work with him and begged for the permission to enter. When he was allowed inside he said, “My Master has refused to see me till you forgive me.”

Ibrahim said, “May Allah forgive you.”

‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin fell down and implored him to put his foot on his (‘Ali’s) face. Ibrahim did not agree. ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin again implored him in the Name of Allah. Ibrahim complied with his request. Then ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin said, “O Allah be a witness,” and mounted the horse again. Within a few minutes he found himself at the door of Imam (a.s.). He knocked and Imam (a.s.) permitted him to enter.

By these traditions we can judge the importance of helping our believing brothers. ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin was one of the closest companions of Imam (a.s.) and has assumed the ministership by the order of Imam (a.s.). He was also held in such high esteem that on the day of Eid-uz-Zuha Imam (a.s.) said,

“I did not recall anyone else’s name. I just prayed for ‘Ali Ibn Yaqtin!”

In spite of such an honourable position he was not able to satisfy Imam (a.s.) till he had satisfied his believing brother. We must exercise utmost caution in our daily lives that we may not cause any believer’s rights to be trespassed; which may bring down the anger of Allah (S.w.T.) and the Holy Prophet (S) upon us.

## His own needs are fulfilled

It must be known that one who strives to fulfill the needs of a believing brother or wards off oppression from an oppressed soul, apart from the rewards of the Hereafter he is also bestowed honour in this world and his own needs are fulfilled. We have many traditions to prove this, however we shall mention only one such incident.

The esteemed scholar, Ahmed bin Muhammad bin Khalid Al Barqi who was present in the life time of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and also during the Minor Occultation, says in his book Mahasin:

I was under the patronage of the tax collector of the city of Pahencha Kootkeen. His name was Abul Hasan Madarani. He had given me a yearly endowment, which I used to collect as tax from an area at Kashan, but he was so busy that he became inattentive towards me and my own taxes were demanded from me. I was much worried, when one day a noble and pious man came to me. He was very weak and it seemed as if he had no blood in his body. He was like a walking corpse. He told me, "O Abu Abdillah! There is a relation of common faith and purity between you and me and the relation of devotion to the Pure Imams (a.s.). Please do something for me for the sake of pleasing Allah (S.w.T.) and for the sake of the love of Sadiq." I asked him as to what he wished? He said, "People have falsely spread the rumour that I have given some secret information against Kufani to the Sultan. Hence, they have confiscated all my property."

I promised to help him out and he went away. I thought to myself that if I approached the collector with two requests at the same time I would not be able to achieve them both. On the other hand if I presented the problem of only the old man then what of my own difficulty? I went inside my library and was in deep thought when a tradition of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) came to my mind. It was to the effect that if a person strives, sincerely, to solve the difficulty of a believer, his own difficulty is solved by Allah." I got up at once and went to Abul Hasan Madarani. When I entered I saw that he was sitting on his chair with a pillow to rest his back and he held a stick in his hand. He told me to sit. At that very moment a Qur'anic verse came to my mind and I recited it loudly:

***"And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers." (Surah al-Qa'aa 28:77)***

Abul Hasan said that since I have recited this verse I must be in some need? He told me to mention it clearly. I said that people have spread false rumours against such and such person. He asked me if he was a Shia and if he was acquainted with him. I said, "Yes"! He called for the register and I saw that a large property had been seized from the old man. Abul Hasan ordered all the seized property to be restored to its owner. He also told his servants to give him a mule and a new dress and accompany him to his family with respect. After this he said, "O Abu Abdillah you have corrected my mistake." Then he

picked up a slip of paper and wrote an order transferring the rights of the particular piece of land in my name. Again he waited for sometime then ordered the old man to be paid 10,000 dirhams extra, saying, “Because he had guided us to the correct way!”

I requested him to let me kiss his hands but he said that if I kissed his hands he would kiss my feet and said that he did not wish to waste away his good deed. It was nothing much for him as he was holding the rope of the Progeny of Muhammad (S).

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1. al-Kāfi
  2. Safinat'ul-Bihar
  3. Safinat'ul-Bihar
  4. Safinat'ul-Bihar
  5. Dirus Salim
  6. Bihar al-Anwar
  7. al-Kāfi
  8. Makasib
  9. Wasa'il ul-Shia
  10. Mustadrak
  11. Ma'ni al Akhbār
  12. Wasa'il ul-Shia
  13. Al Amr bil Ma'rūf
  14. Usul al-Kāfi

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