

Right n. 13: The Right of Charity

حق الصدقة

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّدَقَةِ فَإِنَّ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهَا ذُخْرُكَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ وَوَدِيعَتُكَ الَّتِي لَا تَحْتَاجُ إِلَى الْإِشْهَادِ، فَإِذَا عَلِمْتَ ذَلِكَ كُنْتَ بِمَا اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ سِرًّا أَوْثَقَ بِمَا اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ عَلَانِيَةً، وَكُنْتَ جَدِيرًا أَنْ تَكُونَ أُسْرَرْتَ إِلَيْهِ أَمْرًا أَعْلَنْتَهُ، وَكَانَ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ فِيهَا سِرًّا عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ وَلَمْ تَسْتَظْهَرْ عَلَيْهِ فِيمَا اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ مِنْهَا بِإِشْهَادِ الْأَسْمَاعِ وَالْأَبْصَارِ عَلَيْهِ بِهَا كَأَنَّهَا أَوْثَقُ فِي نَفْسِكَ لَا كَأَنَّكَ لَا تَثِقُ بِهِ فِي تَأْدِيَةِ وَدِيعَتِكَ إِلَيْكَ، ثُمَّ لَمْ تَمْتَنَّ بِهَا عَلَى أَحَدٍ لِأَنَّهَا لَكَ فَإِذَا امْتَنَّتَ بِهَا لَمْ تَأْمَنْ أَنْ تَكُونَ بِهَا مِثْلَ تَهْجِينِ حَالِكَ مِنْهَا إِلَى مَنْ مَنَّتَ بِهَا عَلَيْهِ لِأَنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ دَلِيلًا عَلَى أَنَّكَ لَمْ تُرِدْ نَفْسَكَ بِهَا، وَلَوْ أَرَدْتَ نَفْسَكَ بِهَا لَمْ تَمْتَنَّ بِهَا عَلَى أَحَدٍ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of charity is that you should know that it is a storing away with your Lord and a deposit for which you will have no need for witnesses. Then once you know this you will be more confident of it if you donate it in secret than if you donate it in public.¹ It is more appropriate for you to do privately what you now do in public and keep the affairs between you and Him secret under all circumstances. And you should also not take your hearing and sight as witnesses for the donations that you make in charity as if you have the most trust in yourself.²

It should not be as if you are not sure that your donations will be returned to you. Finally you should not remind others of your favors since you have done so for yourself. If you remind them of your favors, you will not be immune from being similarly reminded of others' favors to you.

Moreover this will prove that your intentions were not pure. If you had pure intentions you would not remind anyone of it. And there is no power but in God.

Imam Sajjad has stressed three important points here.

1) Charity is a form of savings. Therefore, it will not get lost. It might seem to us that we lose what we give away in charity while it is not so. Rather the Qur'an encourages us to benefit from the wealth of this world as we see in the following verse:

وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا

Nor forget thy portion in this world... [The Holy Qur'an, al-Qasas 28:77]

2) Giving charity in private is better than in public. That may be because there is a possibility of hypocrisy and showing off in acts of charity done in public. In addition to this, the one who is receiving charity will also be belittled when charity is given in public.

3) Charity should not be mixed with mentioning it since that will nullify its effect. As we will explain later, what is donated in charity will reach God first. Even more important is the fact that when charity is given in private it helps in the development of the understanding that God is the real donator in the mind of the one who is donating something. He realizes that he is only an intermediate agent in this affair and understands the real meaning of being a servant of God.

Charity as Viewed by the Qur'an

What Imam Sajjad expressed about charity is supported by many verses of the Holy Qur'an some of which we will discuss here. We should make it clear that charity implies what one donates from his own property in order to get closer to God. It is a general term and covers both the obligatory alms tax and the recommendable forms of giving donations. God the Almighty said:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ
سُنْبُلَةٍ مِئَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of God is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. God giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth: And God careth for all and He knoweth all things." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:261]

This parable of how a grain of corn grows and yields a manifold increase shows how one's charity is returned to God. The Qur'an says that each person's actions are a reflection of his personality. It is not true that our actions are manifestations of our physical powers. In this parable, the one who gives charity is said to be similar to one who plants corn. The result of his act is a manifold increase. Things done in the way of God imply acts done for pleasing God alone.

Charity Helps Solve Social Class Problems

The gap between the various social classes has always been one of the major problems facing man. It is even worse today even though there have been tremendous technological advances. There are some people who are extremely rich and many others who are extremely poor today. It is clear that a society in which most of the people are hungry and poor, and some are very wealthy cannot last very long. Undoubtedly there will be stress, animosities or even fights in such a society.

A careful examination of the verses of the Qur'an on this issue clearly indicates that Islam aims to eliminate unjust social differences between the rich and the poor. It aims to establish certain means by which the standard of living of the poor people can be elevated to a point at which they can at least benefit from minimum living necessities. To achieve this goal Islam has absolutely forbidden usury. It has also established certain obligatory taxes such as the alms-tax and the one-fifth levy. It has also encouraged many voluntary forms of charity to help achieve this goal.

Motivations for Charity

The Qur'an clearly shows the various results of charity using various examples and drawing similitude. Consider the following verse in this regard:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ
النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ
فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

“O ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury, – like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in God nor in the Last Day. They are in parable like a hard, barren rock, on which is a little soil: on it falls heavy rain, which leaves it (just) a bare stone. They will be able to do nothing with aught they have earned. And God guideth not those who reject faith.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:264]

Consider a hard rock covered by a thin layer of dirt. If seeds are planted in the dirt, there is plenty of good weather and sunshine, and then there is a heavy rainfall, the seeds will be washed off along with

the dirt. The rock is so hard that the seed cannot grow on it and the barren hard appearance of the rock will appear again.

This does not happen because the sunshine, the good climate or the rains have had a bad effect. Rather it is because the place was not suitable for growth. It has had a good appearance, but it has been solid hardness beneath.

There has been only a small layer of dirt on the surface while a deep layer of soft soil is needed for the roots to be able to grow and extract nutrients to ensure proper growth. The Qur'an draws a similitude between hypocritical acts of charity that are at times even accompanied by hurting and mentioning; and a shallow layer of dirt on a barren hard rock. This act cannot bear any fruits. It will only result in the efforts being wasted. That is why Imam Sajjad said: "Finally you should not remind others of your favors since you have done so for yourself."

Now let us consider the points mentioned in Tafsir-i-Namoonah regarding this verse. First, it can be concluded from this verse that some deeds might eliminate the results of other deeds. Secondly, the similitude used here is a very good one since hypocrites usually cover up their wicked inner thoughts with superficial acts of charity that are not deeply rooted in their beliefs. They do so in order to fool the people, but the vicissitudes of life will ultimately uncover their inner thoughts.³

Another Example from the Qur'an

Consider a beautiful garden on a high mountainside. The cool breeze and plentiful sunshine and rain make the flowers and trees grow. Even when there is no rain, the moisture from the dew will maintain the garden's freshness and beauty. Because of this, the garden will yield double the amount that other gardens produce. Consider the following verse that draws such a similitude:

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيْتًا مِّنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍ
بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَآتَتْ أُكُلَهَا ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ فَطَلَّ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

"And the likeness of those who spend their substance, seeking to please God and to strengthen their souls, is as a garden, high and fertile: heavy rain falls on it but makes it yield a double increase of harvest, and if it receives not heavy rain, light moisture sufficeth it. God seeth well whatever ye do." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:265]

Being located on the slope of a high mountainside, the garden presents a beautiful scene to passers-by and is safe from the threats of flooding. The people who give charity for the sake of God due to their certain belief in God are similar to such a garden. They will generate great products. It is worth

mentioning here that proper motivations for charity are expressed to be seeking God’s pleasure, strengthening one’s faith and gaining a feeling of peace and tranquility in one’s heart.

True sincere donors of charity are those who do so to please God, develop noble characteristics within themselves and terminate their conscious feelings of responsibility for the deprived. The verse ends with a warning that God sees well whatever we do in order to alert us not to harbor ill intentions in our deeds.⁴

Public vs. Private Acts of Charity

By saying “And you should not take your hearing and sight as witnesses for the donations that you make in charity...” Imam Sajjad highly stresses giving charity in private. Of course, this applies to the recommendable forms of charity. Obligatory forms of charity such as the alms–tax can obviously be given in public. Consider the following verse:

إِنْ تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَيُكَفِّرُ
عَنْكُمْ مِنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

“If ye disclose (acts of) charity, even so it is well, but if ye conceal them, and make them reach those (really) in need, that is best for you: It will remove from you some of your (stains of) evil. And God is well acquainted with what ye do.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:271]

There is no doubt that both forms of public and private charities are beneficial. When charity is given in public, others get encouraged to participate. This is even more effective if it is the obligatory form of charity. This will also end probable accusations that one has not performed his obligatory duties. If the charity is in a recommendable form, then it can serve as a means to encourage others to serve the poor and the deprived people. However, when charity is given privately it is certainly void of hypocrisy.

We read in Majma’ al-Bayan that “obligatory donations of charity should be made in public, while it is better for recommended donations of charity to be made in private.”⁵ Charity helps remove some of our sins. What are important are one’s sincerity and good intentions. It does not matter whether the people know or do not know what we do. It suffices that God knows, as He is aware of everything, whether it be done in public or private.

The Role of Charity in Man’s Life

Consider the following verse:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَمَا
تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ

“It is not required of thee (O Apostle), to set them on the right path, but God sets on the right path whom He pleaseth. Whatever of good ye give benefits your own souls, and ye shall only do so seeking the “Face”⁶ of God. Whatever good ye give, shall be rendered back to you, and ye shall not be dealt with unjustly.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:272]

It has been quoted on the authority of Ibn `Abbas that Muslims were not willing to give charity to non-Muslims.⁷ Then the above verse was revealed to permit them to do so when necessary. From this verse, we also realize that the benefits of what we do return to ourselves. We all know that when man knows that the results of what he does will benefit him, he will be more eager to do that deed. There are many material and spiritual benefits for charity. The spiritual effect of charity is that it strengthens our sense of self-sacrifice, giving and love for others. Therefore, it is a powerful tool for the development of one’s personality.

The economic benefits of charity are to help reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. Undoubtedly the existence of poor and deprived people in the society will lead to an outbreak of violence and crimes which may at times lead to anarchy. This would make life hard for both the rich and the poor people. Therefore giving charity is good for the society and those who make donations both economically and spiritually.

The reference to “the Face of God” in the above verse is used in a symbolic way meaning that those who give charity should sincerely do it for the sake of God. We are also warned that we will not just gain a small reward for what we give in charity. Rather we get back all that we give and not the least bit of injustice is done to us. This could also mean that our deeds will have a manifestation. After reviewing some of the verses of the Qur’an on this issue let us now study some of the relevant traditions.

Traditions on Charity and its Effects

There are many traditions about charity. We will briefly present a few of them here.

An Increase in Our Share of Daily Bread

Giving charity will increase our share of daily bread. Sakuni quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq on the authority of God’s Prophet :

تَصَدَّقُوا فَإِنَّ الصَّدَقَةَ تَزِيدُ فِي الْمَالِ كَثْرَةً، فَتَصَدَّقُوا رَحِمَكُمُ اللَّهُ.

*“Give charity since it will cause an increase in your wealth. Therefore give charity and God will have Mercy upon you.”*⁸

Imam Kazim said:

اسْتَنْزِلُوا الرِّزْقَ بِالصَّدَقَةِ.

*“By giving charity seek the descension of your daily bread.”*⁹

Imam Ridha quoted on the authority of his father on the authority of the Noble Prophet :

خَيْرُ مَالِ الْمَرْءِ وَذَخَائِرُهُ الصَّدَقَةُ.

*“The best of a person’s wealth and savings is what he gives in charity.”*¹⁰

Treatment of Our Patients

The Prophet of God said:

دَاوُوا مَرْضَاكُمْ بِالصَّدَقَةِ.

*“Treat your patients by giving charity.”*¹¹

Thus we realize that the ill can be treated by both medications and giving charity. Abdullah ibn San’an quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

دَاوُوا مَرْضَاكُمْ بِالصَّدَقَةِ وَادْفَعُوا الْبَلَاءَ بِالدُّعَاءِ وَاسْتَنْزِلُوا الرِّزْقَ بِالصَّدَقَةِ فَإِنَّهَا تَفُكُّ مِنْ بَيْنِ لَحْيِ سَبْعِمِائَةِ شَيْطَانٍ.

*“Treat your patients by giving charity, and fend off calamities by supplications. Seek the descension of your share of the daily bread by giving charity since it will free you from the jaws of seven hundred Satans.”*¹²

Abdullah ibn San’an quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq who said:

يُسْتَحَبُّ لِلْمَرِيضِ أَنْ يُعْطِيَ السَّائِلَ بِيَدِهِ وَيَأْمُرَ السَّائِلَ أَنْ يَدْعُوَ لَهُ.

“It is recommended for an ill person to give charity to a poor person with his own hands and ask the poor man to pray for him.”¹³

Preventing Calamities

Musa ibn Hasan quoted on the authority of Imam Ridha :

ظَهَرَ فِي بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ قَحْطٌ شَدِيدٌ سِنِينَ مُتَوَاتِرَةً، وَكَانَ عِنْدَ امْرَأَةٍ لُقْمَةٌ مِنْ خُبْزٍ فَوَضَعَتْهَا فِي فِيهَا لِتَأْكُلَهَا فَنَادَى السَّائِلُ: يَا أُمَّةَ اللَّهِ، الْجُوعَ! فَقَالَتِ الْمَرْأَةُ: أَتَصَدَّقُ فِي مِثْلِ هَذَا الزَّمَانِ. فَأَخْرَجَتْهَا مِنْ فِيهَا وَدَفَعَتْهَا إِلَى السَّائِلِ. وَكَانَ لَهَا وَلَدٌ صَغِيرٌ يَحْتَطِبُ فِي الصَّحْرَاءِ، فَجَاءَ ذئبٌ فَحَمَلَهُ. فَوَقَعَتِ الصَّيْحَةَ فَعَدَّتِ الْأُمُّ فِي أَثَرِ الذِّئْبِ. فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ جِبْرَائِيلَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فَأَخْرَجَ الْغُلَامَ مِنْ فَمِ الذِّئْبِ فَدَفَعَهُ إِلَى أُمِّهِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهَا جِبْرَائِيلُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: يَا أُمَّةَ اللَّهِ، أَرْضَيْتِ لُقْمَةَ بِلُقْمَةٍ؟

There was famine among the children of Israel for many consecutive years. A woman had just one morsel to eat. She put it in her mouth to eat, but a poor man called out and said: “O lady! I am about to die of hunger.” The woman thought that it was time to give charity, so she withdrew the food from her mouth and gave it to the poor man. She had a small child who had gone to the desert to collect some wood to burn.

A wolf came and carried him away and he screamed. The woman heard him scream, and went after the wolf. God sent Gabriel down to save the child from the wolf’s mouth and to hand him over to his mother. Then Gabriel told her: “O bondmaid of God! Are you satisfied with a morsel for a morsel?”¹⁴

This is a clear example of what is meant when Imam Sajjad says: “your donations will be returned to you.”

There is another event supporting this. Ali ibn Ibrahim quoted the following tradition about the events that happened to a Jew at the time of the Prophet on the authority of Ahmad ibn Muhammad, on the authority of Salim ibn Mukarram, on the authority of Imam Sadiq . The man was going to go somewhere. The Prophet said that a black snake would follow him and kill him. The Jew went and returned after a while with a load of wooden sticks on his back. The Prophet asked him to drop the load on the ground. He did so, and a black snake came out.

The Prophet asked the Jew what he had done that day. The Jew said that he had done nothing special. He said that he had picked up the wooden sticks and had given one of the two loaves of bread he had to eat to a poor man and had eaten one himself. The Prophet told him that his life had been saved due to his act of charity. Then the Prophet said:

الصَّدَقَةُ تَدْفَعُ مِيتَةَ السُّوءِ.

*“Giving charity drives away a bad death.”*¹⁵

Hanan ibn Sodayr quoted on the authority of his father on the authority of Imam Baqir :

إِنَّ الصَّدَقَةَ لَتَدْفَعُ سَبْعِينَ بَلِيَّةً مِنْ بَلَايَا الدُّنْيَا مَعَ مِيتَةِ السُّوءِ، وَإِنَّ صَاحِبَهَا لَا يَمُوتُ مِيتَةَ السُّوءِ أَبَدًا مَعَ مَا يُدَّخِرُ لِصَاحِبِهَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ.

*“Giving charity will fend off seventy of this world’s calamities and save you from a bad death in addition to granting you the rewards for the Hereafter.”*¹⁶

As seen from the Qur’anic verses cited above giving charity in private or in public is recommendable and has a reward. There are also several traditions that point this out. Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

صَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُطْفِئُ غَضَبَ الرَّبِّ

*“Giving charity secretly will quench God’s wrath.”*¹⁷

Umar ibn Yazid quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

صَدَقَةُ الْعَلَانِيَةِ تَدْفَعُ سَبْعِينَ نَوْعًا مِنْ أَنْوَاعِ الْبَلَاءِ وَصَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُطْفِئُ غَضَبَ الرَّبِّ.

*“Giving charity openly will fend off seventy types of calamities and giving charity secretly will extinguish the wrath of the Lord.”*¹⁸

Fazl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabarsi wrote in Majma' al-Bayan that the Imam said:

صَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُطْفِئُ غَضَبَ الرَّبِّ وَتُطْفِئُ الْخَطِيئَةَ كَمَا يُطْفِئُ الْمَاءُ النَّارَ وَتَدْفَعُ
سَبْعِينَ بَاباً مِنَ الْبَلَاءِ.

*“Giving charity in secret will quench the Wrath of the Lord and wipe out wrong-doings just as water puts out fire. It will also ward off seventy types of calamities.”*¹⁹

Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of God's Prophet :

أَرْضُ الْقِيَامَةِ نَارٌ مَا خَلَا ظِلُّ الْمُؤْمِنِ؛ فَإِنَّ صَدَقَتَهُ تُظِلُّهُ.

*“The plains of the Day of Judgment will be full of Fire except for the shadow of the believer, for his acts of charity will shade him.”*²⁰

The Commander of the Faithful said:

صَدَقَةُ السِّرِّ تُكَفِّرُ الْخَطِيئَةَ وَصَدَقَةُ الْعَلَانِيَةِ مِثْرَاءٌ فِي الْمَالِ.

*“Giving charity in secret will compensate for wrong-doings and sins, and giving charity in public will increase your wealth.”*²¹

He also said:

سَبْعَةٌ يُظِلُّهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظِلِّهِ يَوْمَ لَا ظِلَّ إِلَّا ظِلُّهُ... وَرَجُلٌ تَصَدَّقَ بِصَدَقَةٍ فَأَخْفَاهَا
حَتَّى لَمْ تَعْلَمْ يَمِينُهُ مَا تُنْفِقُ شِمَالُهُ.

*“God will shade seven (groups of people) under His Shadow on the Day when there is no shadow other than His... One are those who give charity in the most secret way so that their right hand does not know what their left has given in charity!”*²²

1. In the other version it is followed by: “You should know that it repels calamities and illnesses in this world and it will repel

the Fire from you in the Hereafter”.

2. That your donations in charity will be returned to you.

3. Tafsir-i-Namuneh, v.2, p.243.

4. Tafsir-i-Namuneh, v.2, p.243.

5. Majma' al-Bayan, v.2, p.384.

6. The Arabic word “wajh” literally means face, countenance; hence favor, glory, Self, Presence.

7. Majma' al-Bayan.

8. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.6, p.257.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid. p.258.

11. Ibid. p.260.

12. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.6, p.260.

13. Ibid. v.6, p.262.

14. Ibid. p.265.

15. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, pp.268-277.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, p.277.

20. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, p.256.

21. Sharh-i-Ghurar wa Durar, v.4. p.207.

22. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, v.6, p.207.

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