

Right n. 23: The Right of the Father

حق الأب

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ أَبِيكَ فَتَعَلَّمْ أَنَّهُ أَصْلُكَ، وَأَنَّكَ فَرْعُهُ، وَأَنَّكَ لَوْلَاهُ لَمْ تَكُنْ. فَمَهْمَا رَأَيْتَ فِي نَفْسِكَ مِمَّا يُعْجِبُكَ فَأَعْلَمْ أَنَّ أَبَاكَ أَصْلُ النِّعْمَةِ عَلَيْكَ فِيهِ وَاحْمَدِ اللَّهَ وَاشْكُرْهُ عَلَى قَدْرِ ذَلِكَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of your father is that you should know that he is your root and you are his branch. And without him, you would not be. Whenever you see anything in yourself which pleases you, you should know that your father is the root of its blessing upon you. So praise God and thank Him in recognition of that. And there is no power but in God.

Father as the Root of the Child

Imam Sajjad points out the most fundamental cause-effect relationship between a father and his child. This scientific and philosophical principle states that the father is the root of the child, or the cause of the existence of the child. Were it not for the existence of the father, the child would not exist. The existence of the child is dependent on the existence of his father. This is manifested all over the world.

The Imam reminds the children of the importance of the existence of the father and explicitly declares that the father is the root and the children are like his branches. Thus, whatever is manifested in the child has its roots in the existence of his father. Another important issue is that once a child is born he starts to grow up and continues his development while his father may have already completed his growth or be near its completion.

Therefore, it is always the cause that as the child is flourishing and becoming stronger day by day, his father is getting weaker every day. The child who realizes that he is getting stronger than his father might become too proud of himself. If he starts to feel superior to his father, he might forget to respect his father or even disrespect him. Imam Sajjad advises the children to remember that their father is the root of whatever excellent qualities they have whenever they feel this way.

This will help them overcome such sense of superiority over their father. Imam Sajjad also recommends the children to be grateful and recognize the blessings granted to them. Hence, they will be responsible children and fulfill all their duties regarding their father. This way they will also be saved from the harms they might experience in case their parents damn them.

At last, Imam Sajjad stresses that recognizing the blessings from our father, his rights and properly performing our duties regarding him is only possible through divine assistance, and we should ask God to help us in this respect. In the chapter on the rights of the mother, the Qur'anic verses stress that we should treat our parents with kindness. We will not reiterate those here again, and suffice to the presentation of traditions related to respect for the father.

Traditions on the Importance of the Father

Muhammad ibn Yahya quoted on the authority of Ahmad ibn Esa on the authority of Hasan ibn Mahboob on the authority of Abi Val'lad Han'nat who asked Imam Sadiq regarding the meaning of the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

وَيَا لَوْلَا الدِّينَ إِحْسَانًا

“...And that ye be kind to parents.” [The Holy Qur'an, Bani Israil 17:23]

Imam Sadiq said:

الإِحْسَانُ أَنْ تُحْسِنَ صُحْبَتَهُمَا وَأَنْ لَا تُكَلِّفَهُمَا أَنْ يَسْأَلَكَ شَيْئًا مِمَّا يَحْتَاجَانِ إِلَيْهِ
وَإِنْ كَانَا مُسْتَغْنِيَيْنِ.

“Goodness (ihsan) is that you associate with them well and that you do not constrain them to ask you for what they need, even if they may be rich.”

Then Imam Sadiq mentioned the verse of Holy Qur'an that states that you cannot get any food unless you give in charity out of what you like. Then Imam Sadiq said:

وَأَمَّا قَوْلُ اللَّهِ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى: "إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرهُمَا" قَالَ: "إِنْ أَضْجَرَكَ فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرهُمَا إِنْ ضَرَبَكَ وَقَالَ "وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا" قَالَ: فَإِنْ ضَرَبَكَ فَقُلْ لَهُمَا غَفَرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمَا فَذَلِكَ مِنْكَ قَوْلٌ كَرِيمٌ، قَالَ "وَإِخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ" قَالَ: لَا تَمَلَأْ عَيْنَيْكَ مِنَ النَّظَرِ إِلَيْهِمَا إِلَّا بِرَحْمَةٍ وَرِقَّةٍ، وَلَا تَرْفَعْ صَوْتَكَ فَوْقَ أَصْوَاتِهِمَا وَلَا يَدَيْكَ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمَا، وَلَا تُقَدِّمَ قَدَامَهُمَا.

As for the statement of God, the Blessed, the High: **‘Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them’ (17:23)**, the Imam said: “If they vex you, then do not say a word of contempt to them and do not repel them if they strike you.” He said: **“But address them in terms of honour’ (17:23)**, means: Even if they strike you, say to them: ‘May God forgive you’, and that will be your addressing them in terms of honour”. He said: **“And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility’ (17:24)**, means: Do not look at them directly except with mercy and compassion. Do not raise your voice above their voices, or your hands above theirs, and do not walk ahead of them.”¹

All this means that you should not hurt them.

Ibn Mahboob quoted on the authority of Khalid ibn Nafih Bujali on the authority of Muhammad ibn Marwan on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

إِنَّ رَجُلًا أَتَى النَّبِيَّ (ص) فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَوْصِنِي، فَقَالَ:

“A man went to see the Prophet and asked him for advice. The Prophet said:

لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَإِنْ حُرِّقْتَ بِالنَّارِ وَعُذِّبْتَ إِلَّا وَقَلْبُكَ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ،
وَوَالِدَيْكَ فَأَطِعْهُمَا وَبِرَّهُمَا حَيِّينَ كَانَا أَوْ مَيِّتَيْنِ، وَإِنْ أَمْرَاكَ أَنْ تَخْرُجَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ
وَمَالِكَ فَافْعَلْ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ.

“Do not set any partners for God even if you are tortured or burnt in fire, but that your heart should be secure in faith. Obey your parents, and be kind to them whether they are living or deceased. If they order you to leave your family and your possessions, do so, since that is part of faith.”²

Ali ibn Ibrahim quoted on the authority of Muhammad ibn Esa ibn Ubayd on the authority of Yunus ibn

Abdul Rahman on the authority of Durust ibn Abi Mansoor on the authority of Imam Kazim : “A man asked the Noble Prophet about the right of a father incumbent upon his child. The Prophet replied:

لَا يُسَمِّيهِ بِاسْمِهِ، وَلَا يَمْشِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ، وَلَا يَجْلِسُ قَبْلَهُ، وَلَا يَسْتَسِبُّ لَهُ.

“He should not call his father by his name, and he should not walk ahead of him. He should not sit down before he does, and should not do things to cause his father to be blamed or sworn at.”³

Muhammad ibn Yahya quoted on the authority of so and so on the authority of Ibrahim ibn Shoaib that he told Imam Sadiq : “My father has gotten old, and is so weak that I have to accompany him to the toilet. Should I do so?” The Prophet said:

إِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ تَلِيَ ذَلِكَ مِنْهُ فافْعَلْ، وَلَقَمَّهُ بِيَدِكَ، فَإِنَّهُ جَنَّةٌ لَكَ غَدًا.

“Do so if you can. Put food in his mouth with your own hands, and you will see that your reward will be the Garden of Heaven in the Hereafter.”⁴

Therefore, Imam Sadiq recommends that children take care of their parents when they get old and weak just as they did when the children were young and weak.

The establishment of homes for the elderly can be justified today if they are to house ill, poor, homeless and lonely old people, or those elders who want to live in such homes themselves. However, it is very bad and painful that some children or grandchildren use these homes to reach their selfish desires; and force their old parents or grandparents to leave home and go live in such places.

They hurt their feelings in this way, and even expedite their death. The rights of the parents are so important that Islam has stressed their respect being incumbent upon children even if they are not Muslims. Ali ibn Ibrahim quoted on the authority of so and so, on the authority of Ansabat ibn Mus'ab, on the authority of Imam Baqir :

ثَلَاثٌ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِيهِنَّ رُخْصَةً: أَدَاءُ الْأَمَانَةِ إِلَى الْبَرِّ وَالْفَاجِرِ، وَالْوَفَاءُ بِالْعَهْدِ لِلْبَرِّ وَالْفَاجِرِ، وَبِرُّ الْوَالِدَيْنِ بَرِّينَ كَانَا أَوْ فَاجِرَيْنِ.

“There are three things that God has not permitted anyone to abandon:

- 1 – Returning what we are entrusted with to its owner whether he is a good-doer or wicked.
- 2 – Honoring our covenants whether it be with good-doers or wicked people.

3 – Being kind to our parents whether they are good-doers or wicked people.”⁵

Duties of the Youth

The duties of the youth who believe in Islam was clarified in the Qur’anic verse and traditions presented so far. They should realize that their parents have a great right over them. They must be thankful to their parents and should never neglect or hurt them even if the parents do not perform their duties well. Imam Sadiq said:

مَنْ نَظَرَ إِلَىٰ وَالِدَيْهِ نَظْرَ مَا قَتَّ وَهُمَا ظَالِمَانِ لَهُ لَمْ تُقْبَلْ لَهُ صَلَاةٌ.

“God will not accept the prayers of one who looks at his parents with hatred, even if they have not performed their duties towards him.”⁶

Thus, we realize that even if parents hurt their children, the children must overlook their mistakes.

The Effects of Killing One’s Father

Muhammad ibn Suhayl narrated that once during the rule of Montasar he saw a Persian rug decorated with faces of kings and some Persian script. He looked at the images more carefully and saw the face of a crowned king. Below it he read: “This is the face of King Shiroyeh who killed his father King Khosrow Parviz, but his rule did not last more than six months.

Then on the left side of the rug he saw the image of Yazeed ibn Valid ibn Abdulmalik who killed his cousin to take over his rule, but he did not last more than six months too. Then he thought that Montasar’s rule would not last more than six months because he had also killed his father to get into power.⁷

The details are as follows. Mutawakkil who was one of the Caliphs of the Abbasid clan despised Imam Ali and insulted him in his court. His son Montasar was not pleased with this behavior, and used to object to his father’s action. Once when Mutawakkil was in a meeting with several important people, he insulted Imam Ali. Montasar got upset and objected to his father. Mutawakkil verbally humiliated him in front of others present. Montasar who was twenty-five years old could not stand being insulted in front of the people. He then decided to kill his father.

Al-Mutawakkil’s Murder

Montasar employed several Turkish slaves in the court to kill his father. One night when Mutawakkil was having a party and was drunk having fun with ladies, he was left in the court with Fath ibn Khaqan who

had a very high rank. Then the slaves attacked them with their swords and killed them both. Then they pledged allegiance to Montaser the same night. Although Mutawakkil's own behavior led to his being murdered; Montasar did not last more than six months either. It was the constant blaming of Montasar by his father that ended this way. Consider what Imam Ali said in this regard:

الإفراطُ في الملامة تشبُّ نيرانَ اللجاج.

*“Excessive blaming will fuel the flames of stubbornness.”*⁸

The Father's Right Over the Child

Muhaqqiq Ardebili said: “It is reasonable to say that one should avoid being damned by his parents. Traditions and Qur’anic verses also support this. Children must obey their parents. The jurists have stated that if the leader has not declared holy war or the infidels have not attacked Muslim lands, parents can prevent their children from going to war.⁹

Whatever is forbidden or incumbent upon one regarding strangers also holds for parents:

- 1) One cannot travel without the permission of his parents.
- 2) One must obey his parents.
- 3) Parents can prevent one from participation in war.
- 4) If one is to obey his parents or say his prayers, he should put off the prayers and do what his parents ask him to do.
- 5) There are times when parents can prevent one from attending the congregational prayer.¹⁰

1. Usul al-Kafi, v.2, p. 157.

2. Ibid. p. 158.

3. Usul al-Kafi, v.2, p. 158.

4. Ibid. v.2, p. 162.

5. Ibid.

6. Usul al-Kafi, v.2, p.349.

7. Tatamat al-Muntaha, p.243.

8. Jawan (Guftar-i-Falsafi), quoted from Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.84.

9. Footnotes of Usul al-Kafi, v.2, p.349.

10. Ibid.

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