

Right n. 41: The Right of Him Who Seeks Your Counsel

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وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الْمُسْتَنْصِحِ فَإِنَّ حَقَّهُ أَنْ تُؤَدِّيَ إِلَيْهِ النَّصِيحَةَ عَلَى الْحَقِّ الَّذِي تَرَى لَهُ أَنَّهُ يَحْمِلُ وَتَخْرُجَ الْمَخْرَجَ الَّذِي يَلِينُ عَلَى مَسَامِعِهِ، وَتُكَلِّمَهُ مِنَ الْكَلَامِ بِمَا يُطِيقُهُ عَقْلُهُ، فَإِنَّ لِكُلِّ عَقْلٍ طَبَقَةً مِنَ الْكَلَامِ يَعْرِفُهُ وَيَجْتَنِبُهُ، وَلَيْكُنْ مَذْهَبَكَ الرَّحْمَةَ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ..

And the right of him who seeks your counsel is that you should give him your counsel as much as you think he can bear. And you should talk with him with such gentle words that he listens to you and you should use such words that his intellect can understand. This is because for each person's intellect there is a certain way of talking that he can comprehend and respond to. You should choose having mercy as your course of action. And there is no power but in God.

In short, Imam Sajjad states that one who seeks counsel has the right to be advised as much as he can bear to hear. Advice should be given gently to help the listener accept it. One should also be kind when giving someone some advice. Giving counsel and wishing well are among the important topics stressed in Islam. The Qur'an has stressed that the Divine Prophets are social counselors. We read in the Chapter A`raaf of the Holy Qur'an that the Prophets give advice to people:

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَأُنصَحُ لَكُمْ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“I but fulfill towards you the duties of my Lord's mission: Sincere is my advice to you, and I know from God something that ye know not.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-A`raaf 7:62]

Prophets as Advisors

The Prophet Noah said the following to his nation:

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَأَنْصَحُ لَكُمْ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“I but fulfill towards you the duties of my Lord's mission: Sincere is my advice to you, and I know from God something that ye know not.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-A`raaf 7:62]

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُحِبُّونَ
النَّاصِحِينَ

So Salih left them, saying: “O my people! I did indeed convey to you the message for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel, but ye love not good counselors!” [The Holy Qur'an, al-A`raaf 7:79]

The Qur'an says the following regarding the Prophet Shu'aib :

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ فَكَيْفَ آسَىٰ عَلَىٰ
قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ

So Shu'aib left them, saying: “O my people! I did indeed convey to you the messages for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel, but how shall I lament over a people who refuse to believe!” [The Holy Qur'an, al-A`raaf 7:93]

All the Prophets of God were advisors to their nations. All men naturally welcome being advised except those who have lost their purely divine nature. Such people did not pay any attention to the Prophets and were thus seized by a severe punishment. It is interesting to note that even Satan uses giving advice as a means of fooling people. We read in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an about Satan's swearing to Adam and Eve that he is their sincere advisor:

وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ

“And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere advisor.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-A`raaf 7:21]

Thus, we should realize that our enemies might sometimes approach us as friends giving us advice in order to corrupt us. We learned that the Prophets were advisors to their nations. There are several traditions from the Immaculate Imams , which state that believers are also each other’s advisors.

Believers Advise Each Other

There is a chapter in *Usul al-Kafi* on “Believer’s Advice.” Imam Sadiq said:

يَجِبُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِ أَنْ يُنَاصِحَهُ.

“It is incumbent upon a believer to give sincere counsel to a(nother) believer.”¹

The late Allameh Majlisi said in his book *Mir’at al-Uqool*: “What is meant by advice is guiding them to improve their religious and worldly affairs, and training the ignorant people to fend off harm from them and bring them some benefits. If they do not accept your advice, you have shown your good intentions by advising them to do good deeds and refrain from evil acts.” The Noble Prophet of God said:

لِيُنصَحِ الرَّجُلُ مِنْكُمْ أَخَاهُ كَنُصِيحَتِهِ لِنَفْسِهِ.

“Each of you should give sincere advice to your brethren just as you give sincere advice to yourselves.”²

Advisors Are the Best of the People

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

إِنَّ أَعْظَمَ النَّاسِ مَنْزِلَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَمْشَاهُمْ فِي أَرْضِهِ بِالنَّصِيحَةِ لَخَلْقِهِ.

“The people of the highest rank near God on the Resurrection Day are those who were the most active on His earth in counseling His creatures.”³

This implies exerting efforts to advise the people and to improve their conditions. Sufyan ibn Uyaynah

narrated that he heard Imam Sadiq say:

عَلَيْكُمْ بِالنُّصْحِ لِلَّهِ فِي خَلْقِهِ فَلَنْ تَلْقَاهُ لِعَمَلٍ أَفْضَلَ مِنْهُ.

*“It is prescribed for you to advise the people for the sake of God. You will not find any better deed than this.”*⁴

We see that advice given sincerely for God’s sake is highly valued, not advice intended to corrupt the people or out of deceit or financial expectations. There is no reward but deprivation for such advice. The Noble Prophet of Islam delivered a sermon in Mina and said:

ثَلَاثٌ لَا يَغِلُّ عَلَيْهِنَّ قَلْبُ أَمْرِي مُسْلِمٍ: إِخْلَاصُ الْعَمَلِ لِلَّهِ وَالنَّصِيحَةُ لِأئِمَّةِ
الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَاللُّزُومُ لْجَمَاعَتِهِمْ.

*“Three things for which a Muslim’s heart should have no malice: sincere deeds for God, sincere advice and desiring what is good for the Imams of the Muslims, and adhering to their community.”*⁵

We note the importance of doing things for the sake of God, and the need of the leaders to be advised mentioned by the Prophet in this tradition.

How to Advise

We learned that advice should be given for the sake of God to be effective. It should also be as much as one being advised can accept. We cannot advise people in any way we want. We must learn how to advise, how to express our advice and how to influence the person being advised. Imam Sajjad said:

“You are not free to say whatever you wish, since the Prophet of God has said:

رَحِمَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا قَالَ خَيْرًا فَعَنِمَ أَوْ صَمَتَ فَسَلِمَ.

*“May God have mercy on the servant who speaks well and benefits, or is silent and remains secure.”*⁶

Imam Ali said:

إِيَّاكَ وَالْكَلامَ فِيمَا لَا تَعْرِفُ طَرِيقَتَهُ وَلَا تَعْلَمُ حَقِيقَتَهُ، فَإِنَّ قَوْلَكَ يَدُلُّ عَلَى عَقْلِكَ

وَعِبَارَتُكَ تُنْبِئُ عَن مَعْرِفَتِكَ.

“Refrain from speaking about what you do not know how to do, and do not know the truth about it. What you say is a sign of your intellect, and your words inform others of the degree of your knowledge and recognition.”⁷

One of the key elements in good advice is in its not being boring. Imam Ali said:

أَحْسَنُ الْكَلَامِ مَا لَا تَمِجُهُ الْأَذَانُ وَلَا يَتَعَبُ فَهْمُهُ الْأَفْهَامُ.

“The best speech is that which the ears do not eject (through forgetfulness), and the understanding of which does not fatigue the intellect.”⁸

This has been expressed as one of the rights of him who seeks your counsel by Imam Sajjad : “And you should talk with him in such gentle words that he listens to you and you should use such words that his intellect can understand.”

The Noble Prophet also said: “We the Prophets are appointed to talk to the people according to their level of intellect.” Imam Sajjad advises us to use mercy in dealing with the people we advise, and not use force, frightening or threatening. This is because such acts have no influence on the person being advised.

Mansour Seeking Advice from Imam Sadiq

Mansour, the Abbasid caliph, attempted to invite Imam Sadiq to his court in order to claim to be a just ruler. He sent Imam Sadiq the following message: “Why do you not associate with us in our court as other people do?” He thought that the Imam would fear his might. But the Imam replied: “O’ Mansour! We have nothing of this world for which to fear you, and find nothing of the Hereafter near you to put any hopes in. What is the benefit of my associating with you?”

Mansour felt bad receiving this response and sent another message saying: “Then come associate with us to give us some advice.” Imam Sadiq sent him the following response: “O’ Mansour! Whoever seeks (the blessings) of this world would not advise you, and whoever seeks the Hereafter would not associate with you.”⁹

1. Usul al-Kafi, v.2, p.208.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.389.
6. Sukhan wa Sukhanwari, p.44.
7. Sharh-i-Ghurar wa Durar, v.2, p.320.
8. Fehrest Mawdu'-i- Durar wa Ghurar, p.332.
9. Al-Imam al-Sadiq wa al-Madhahib al-Arba'ah, v. 1, p. 108.

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