

Right n. 46: The Right of Him from Whom You Ask

حق المسؤل

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الْمَسْئُولِ فَحَقُّهُ إِنْ أَعْطِيَ قَبْلَ مِنْهُ مَا أَعْطِيَ بِالشُّكْرِ لَهُ وَالْمَعْرِفَةِ لِفَضْلِهِ
وَطَلَبَ وَجْهِ الْعُذْرِ فِي مَنْعِهِ، وَأَحْسَنَ بِهِ الظَّنَّ. وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ إِنْ مَنَعَ [ف] مَالَهُ مَنَعَ
وَأَنْ لَيْسَ التَّثْرِبُ فِي مَالِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ ظَالِمًا فَإِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَظُلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ.

And the right of him from whom you ask¹ is that you should accept from him whatever he grants you with gratitude and acknowledge his nobility. And you should accept his excuse if he withholds and think well of him. And you should realize that if he withholds, he is withholding his own property, and that he could not be blamed for withholding his own property. If he is doing wrong, then “..indeed man is unfair and ungrateful” (14:34).

Therefore, Imam Sajjad recommends not to deprive one who is needy from our help if we are wealthy, and to pray to God to eliminate their poverty. If we doubt their claim, we should consider the possibility of Satan’s plans to deprive us from a divine blessing. The Imam instructs us to politely tell off the beggar if we cannot help him. He also recommends us to thank those from whom we ask for something if they grant us anything, and not blame them for not giving us anything since everyone naturally likes what he owns.

When to Ask

Islam recommends us to ask in order to learn. We read in the Holy Qur'an:

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“... If ye realize this not, ask of those who possess the message.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Na'ī/16:43]

Asking is one of the means for learning. However, what Imam Sajjad is discussing is not asking to learn. Rather he is discussing the situations when we ask someone for something due to our need. Begging is forbidden in Islam unless it becomes absolutely necessary like when one is about to die of poverty. In this situation, one can ask for something in order to save his life. In these conditions, the one being asked to help should assist the one who is asking for help. We read in the Holy Qur'an:

وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ

لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ

“And those in whose wealth is a recognized right for the (needy) who asks and him who is prevented (for some reason) from asking.” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Ma'arij 70:24-25]

Those who ask should not be deprived from presenting their petition. The Qur'an says:

وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ

“Nor repulse the petitioner (unheard).” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Dhuha 93:10]

Is the right mentioned in the verse 70:24-25 cited above referring to the alms, the one-fifth levy or other obligatory religious rights? Or is it a different right? Some believe it to refer to a different right, since the obligatory religious rights are incumbent upon all people whether they are pious or not. If we accept this interpretation, then we can conclude that those who pray also recognize a right in their wealth for the needy and the deprived for the sake of God.

Verse 93:10 cited above implies that we should not harshly push away those who ask us for something. This might imply those who ask us about scientific or religious issues, or those who are deprived, and ask us for financial help.²

Begging is Loathsome

Many traditions from the Immaculate Imams have expressed that begging is loathsome. Begging will cause the people to lose their trust in the beggar, and result in one's humility. A believer has honor and should not do something that causes him to lose his honor. Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of the Noble Prophet :

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى أَحَبُّ شَيْئاً لِنَفْسِهِ وَأَبْغَضُهُ لَخَلْقِهِ؛ أَبْغَضَ لَخَلْقِهِ الْمَسْأَلَةَ وَأَحَبَّ لِنَفْسِهِ أَنْ يُسْأَلَ، وَلَيْسَ شَيْءٌ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مِنْ أَنْ يُسْأَلَ فَلَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَسْأَلَ اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَوْ شِيعَ نَعْلِهِ.

“There is something that God the Exalted the High loves for Himself, but hates for others. He hates for people to ask from others, but He loves the people to ask from Him. Nothing is more loved by God the Exalted the High than to be asked for something. Therefore none of you should be ashamed of asking God from His Bounty, even if it be just for your shoe-lace.”³

It is obvious that one who begs from others has lost his trust in God. In another tradition he is quoted to have said:

إِيَّاكَ وَسُؤَالَ النَّاسِ فَإِنَّهُ ذُلٌّ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَفَقْرٌ تُعَجِّلُونَهُ وَحِسَابٌ طَوِيلٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ.

“Beware of begging from people, for it is humiliation in this world, poverty that you hasten, and a prolonged Reckoning on the Resurrection Day.”⁴

In another tradition we read that Husayn ibn Abil'ala quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

رَحِمَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا عَفًّا وَتَعَفَّفَ وَكَفَّ عَنِ الْمَسْأَلَةِ فَإِنَّهُ يَتَعَجَّلُ الدُّنْيَةَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يُغْنِي النَّاسُ عَنْهُ شَيْئًا.

“May God have mercy upon the servant who is chaste, and abstains (from what is unlawful), and refrains

from asking, for it hastens baseness in this world, and people will not benefit from it at all.”⁵

Maintaining Human Nobility

In his will, the Commander of the Faithful gave the following advice to Imam Hasan regarding human nobility, and the loss of one’s honor and respect due to begging:

وَأَكْرَمِ نَفْسَكَ عَنْ كُلِّ دَنِيَّةٍ وَإِنْ سَأَقْتِكَ إِلَى الرَّغَائِبِ فَإِنَّكَ لَنْ تَعْتَاضَ بِمَا تَبْذُلُ
مِنْ نَفْسِكَ عَوْضاً وَلَا تَكُنْ عَبْدَ غَيْرِكَ وَقَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ حُرّاً.

“O my son! Honor yourself and do not debase yourself even if it will help you reach your goal. You can never get back the equivalent of your lost honor if you do so. Do not be a servant of others, since God has created you to be free.”⁶

In another part of the will we read:

وَإِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ لَا يَكُونَ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ ذُو نِعْمَةٍ فَافْعَلْ، فَإِنَّكَ مُدْرِكٌ قِسْمِكَ
وَأَخِذْ سَهْمَكَ وَإِنَّ الْيَسِيرَ مِنَ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ أَعْظَمُ وَأَكْرَمُ مِنَ الْكَثِيرِ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ وَإِنْ
كَانَ كُلُّهُ مِنْهُ.

“Try not to establish anyone between you and your God – who is the owner of the blessings. You will only get your share of the daily bread. Although all the blessings which are directed to you come from Him, a little bit received directly from God is loftier and more respectful than a lot received from His servants.”⁷

We can see that the Imam advises his son not to humiliate himself since God is the Nourisher of all. Therefore, we should not beg since this will result in the loss of our honor. He also said:

السُّؤَالُ يُضْعِفُ لِسَانَ الْمُتَكَلِّمِ وَيُكْسِرُ قَلْبَ الشُّجَاعِ الْبَطْلِ وَيُوقِفُ الْحُرَّ الْعَزِيزَ
مَوْقِفَ الْعَبْدِ الذَّلِيلِ وَيُذْهِبُ بِهَاءِ الْوَجْهِ وَيَمْحَقُ الرِّزْقَ.

“Begging will weaken the speaker’s tongue; it will break the heart of the brave, and place a free and powerful person in the position of a lowly slave. It will result in the loss of his honor and destroy his sustenance.”⁸

Avoid the Humiliation of Begging

Imam Sajjad said:

طَلَبُ الْحَوَائِجِ إِلَى النَّاسِ مَذَلَّةٌ لِلْحَيَاةِ وَمَذْهَبَةٌ لِلْحَيَاءِ وَاسْتِخْفَافٌ بِالْوَقَارِ وَهُوَ
الْفَقْرُ الْحَاضِرُ.

*“Seeking one’s needs from people is humiliation in this life a cause of becoming bereft of shame and taking one’s honor lightly, and it is present poverty.”*⁹

The Imam Sadiq said:

طَلَبُ الْحَوَائِجِ إِلَى النَّاسِ اسْتِلَابٌ لِلْعِزَّةِ وَمُذْهَبَةٌ لِلْحَيَاءِ، وَالْيَأْسُ مِمَّا فِي أَيْدِي
النَّاسِ عِزٌّ لِلْمُؤْمِنِ فِي دِينِهِ، وَالطَّمَعُ هُوَ الْفَقْرُ الْحَاضِرُ.

*“Seeking one’s needs from the people is a deprivation of honor and a cause of becoming bereft of shame. Cutting off hope in what the people possess will cause a believer to have honor in his religion; and greed is present poverty.”*¹⁰

The Noble Prophet of Islam said:

مَنْ فَتَحَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بَابَ مَسْأَلَةٍ فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ سَبْعِينَ بَابًا مِنَ الْفَقْرِ لَا يَسُدُّ أَدْنَاهَا
شَيْءٌ.

*“Whoever opens up to himself a path of begging from the people will cause God to open up seventy paths of descension of poverty upon him in such a way that nothing can block even the narrowest of these seventy paths.”*¹¹

The Prophet of God advised Abu-Dharr:

يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ! إِيَّاكَ وَالسُّؤَالَ فَإِنَّهُ ذُلٌّ حَاضِرٌ وَفَقْرٌ تَتَعَجَّلُهُ وَفِيهِ حِسَابٌ طَوِيلٌ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ. يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ! لَا تَسْأَلْ بِكَفِّكَ، وَإِنْ أَتَاكَ شَيْءٌ فَاقْبَلْهُ.

*“O Abu–Dharr! Beware of begging from the people since that is the present humiliation, and poverty that you hasten. There is also extensive Reckoning for it on the Resurrection Day. O Abu–Dharr! Do not beg from the people, but accept what is granted to you in any other way.”*¹²

Imam Ridha said: “A man went to see the Prophet and asked the Prophet to teach him something that will not hinder his going to Heaven. The Prophet said:

لَا تَغْضَبْ وَلَا تَسْأَلِ النَّاسَ وَأَرْضِ لِلنَّاسِ مَا تَرْضَى لِنَفْسِكَ.

*“Do not get angry and do not beg from people, and love for others what you love for yourself.”*¹³

There are also several poems that support this idea in the literature.

Once when Imam Ali saw a man who was begging in Arafah. He admonished him and said: “Woe to you who beg from people (instead of asking God) for what you need on such a day.”¹⁴

The Prophet said: “Do not beg from the people.” A poor man had come there to beg from the Prophet . The Prophet repeatedly said:

مَنْ سَأَلْنَا أُعْطِينَاهُ وَمَنْ اسْتَعْنَى أَغْنَاهُ اللَّهُ.

*“Whoever asks us, we will grant him, but whoever is content, God will make free of need.”*¹⁵

The poor man did not ask for anything and returned home. Then his wife asked him the reason, and he told her what the Prophet had said. He then went to the desert, started to pick dried plants, and brought them back home for sale. This way he got rich after some time. He returned to the Prophet and told him what had happened. The Prophet again said: “I told you that God will make rich whoever does not beg from the people.”

So far we have discussed how begging affects one’s honor, social status, and psychological state of mind. We have also discussed how begging will make one poor. Therefore, one should not beg as much as possible. However, what should one do, and whom should he turn to if he really becomes needy?

Whom to Ask for Help

The Commander of the Faithful said:

فَوْتُ الْحَاجَةِ أَهْوَنُ مِنْ طَلَبِهَا إِلَى غَيْرِ أَهْلِهَا.

“Giving up one’s need is easier than to ask for it from the wrong person.” 16

In another statement he said:

مَاءٌ وَجْهَكَ جَامِدٌ يَقْطُرُهُ السُّؤَالُ، فَاَنْظُرْ عِنْدَ مَنْ تَقْطُرُهُ.

“Your honor is in a state of solidity. Begging will make it fall in drops. Thus be careful before whom you let it fall.” 17

He also said:

لَا تَسْأَلُ مَنْ تَخَافُ مَنَعَهُ.

“Do not ask from one whose refusal you fear.” 18

Imam Sadiq said:

فَوْتُ الْحَاجَةِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ طَلْبِهَا مِنْ غَيْرِ أَهْلِهَا.

“It is better to give up one’s need than to ask for it from the wrong person.” 19

Imam Baqir said:

إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَاجَةِ إِلَى مَنْ أَصَابَ مَالَهُ حَدِيثًا كَمَثَلِ الدَّرْهِمِ فِي فَمِ الْأَفْعَى؛ أَنْتَ إِلَيْهِ مُحُوجٌ وَأَنْتَ مِنْهَا عَلَى خَطَرٍ.

“Seeking a need from one who has recently acquired wealth is like a dirham in the mouth of a viper – you are in need of it, but you are in danger from the snake.” 20

A Bedouin went to see Imam Ali and said: “O Commander of the Faithful! I have three problems: pain in the body, poverty and ignorance.” Imam Ali said: “O Arab brother! Please go to a doctor for your physical illness, go to a knowledgeable man for your ignorance, and turn to the generous people for your poverty.”

Then the man said: “You are a doctor, a knowledgeable one, and a generous person.” Imam Ali ordered three-thousand Dirhams to be paid to him from state funds. Then he told him: “Use one-thousand Dirhams to treat your illness. Use another one-thousand Dirhams to treat your ignorance, and use the remaining one-thousand Dirhams to treat your poverty.”²¹

Begging From Imam Hasan

A beggar came to Imam Hasan, sat down, and wrote: “Nothing is left for me to be sold. It suffices for you to look at me to realize this. There is only my honor left to be sold. I found no customer better than you to sell my honor to.” Imam Hasan asked his servant: “How much money is in the house?” The servant replied: “Twelve-thousand Dirhams.” Imam Hasan told the servant: “I am shy of this man. Please give him all that money.”

Then the servant was surprised and asked: “Should I give all your money to him?” The Imam said: “Yes. Have a good opinion about God.” The servant then brought all the money to give to that man. Imam Hasan said: “Please excuse us. We could not provide any more. You came in rushing to us but you were granted a little. If you could come later, and were not in a rush, we could give you more. Take this small gift, and know that you made no deal with us. I am not the customer for your merchandise.²² I cannot buy it.”²³

One should realize that charity first reaches God. Thus, we should not mention our charity to the one who receives it. We notice how Imam Hasan treated the beggar with nobility. He gave him all the money that he had, and yet he apologized to him for the small gift he had given him. Thus, Imam Hasan taught his followers a great lesson.

Begging From Imam Husayn

Ibn Asakir wrote in *Tarikh-i-Kabir* that a beggar was walking in the alleys of Medina until he reached Imam Husayn’s house. He knocked at the door and said: “No beggar has lost hopes in your grants so far. Whoever knocked at your door did not lose hopes. You are considered the owner of generosity, and its treasure. Your noble father was the killer of the corrupt people.”

Imam Husayn was busy saying his prayers. Then he finished his prayer, came to the door and noticed the pale face of the beggar. He called Qanbar and asked: “How much money do you have?” Qanbar replied: “Two hundred Dirhams which you ordered me to give to your children.” Then Imam Husayn said: “Someone else has come who is more needy than they are. Bring the money.”

Then Qanbar brought the money. Imam Husayn granted it to the beggar and said: “Take this donation. I apologize to you. Know that I like you. If the times were different, I would have given you much more. Know that the times are changing, and we have very little of the worldly goods.” The Arab took the money, stepped back and said: “You and your family are adorned with the garment of purity and you are

blessed whenever your name is said. You are great. The knowledge of the Book, the divine revelations and the Qur'anic verses are in your house. Whoever is not associated with Imam Ali has nothing to be proud of among the people.”²⁴

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1. In the other version it continues: “is that you accept from him with gratitude and recognition of his bounty if he gives, and you accept his excuse if he withholds.”
 2. Tafsir-i-Namunah, v.27, p. 107.
 3. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.478-479.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, letter no. 31.
 8. Akhlaq wa Ta'lim wa Tarbiyat Islami, p.329, quoted from Ghurar al-Hikam, v.2, p. 141.
 9. Bihar al-Anwar, v.7;8, p. 136.
 10. Akhlaq wa Ta'lim wa Tarbiyat Islami, p.329, quoted from Jami' al-Sa'adat, v.2, p.97.
 11. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.484.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Ibid.
 14. The rites of Hajj include circling the Ka'ba seven times and going seven times between the hillocks of Safa and Marwa, as Hagar did during her search for water. Then the pilgrims stand together in Arafah and ask God for what they wish and for His forgiveness, in what is often thought of as a preview of the Day of Judgment.
 15. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.483.
 16. Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, Hikmat 66: “To miss what one needs is easier than to beg from an inappropriate person.”
 17. Sharh-i-Ghurar wa Durar, v.6, p.243, 264.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Tuhaf al-'Uqul, p.264.
 20. Ibid. p.214.
 21. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.504.
 22. His honor.
 23. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.506.
 24. Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v.2, p.506.

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