

## 68. Poverty

Allah, the Wise, has said:

الشَّيْطَانُ يُعِدُّكُمْ الْفَقْرَ

***“Shaitaan threatens you with poverty”<sup>1</sup>***

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) has said:

تحفة المومن فى الدنيا الفقر

***“Poverty is a Mu'min's gift in the world”<sup>2</sup>***

### Short Explanation

Usually, those belonging to the lower class suffer from indigence and their numbers are large too. Since they are not contented and lack patience – hunger, thirst, lack of accommodation, inability of their children to tolerate penury and various sicknesses, brings about helplessness in their lives as a result of which they tend to extend their hands before others for assistance.

If poverty persists and a person lacks the ability to endure it, he may occasionally get inclined towards sins and even *kufr* (disbelief).

A poor person must rely on God, abstain from avarice, be contented and must exhibit patience to preserve his esteem and reputation, since the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) has said: *The best of this ummah are the indigent ones and they shall enter paradise before everyone else. Poverty is my glory; paradise is desirous of the indigent ones and they are the kings of the inmates*

## 1) The Poor Pious Person

Sa'di relates:

I heard that a poor pious person, due to extreme poverty, was in great adversity. Piece by piece he would repeatedly stitch his torn garment and for serenity of mind would say: *With dry bread and a patched woolen garment I shall content myself, my heavy burden I shall endure but not the burden of someone's obligation.*

A person said to him: *Why do you sit here? Do you not know that in the city there lives an honourable and magnanimous gentleman, who has resolved to help the needy ones and seeks the happiness of the pained ones? Go to him and inform him of your state for if he comes to know of your condition he shall provide you with food and new clothes and make you happy!*

The pious person retorted: *Keep quiet! Stitching patches repeatedly on one's clothes and exhibiting endurance is better than approaching a rich person and seeking clothes from him. Indeed, entering paradise as a result of a neighbour's intercession is equivalent to the tortures of the fire of hell.* 4

## 2) The Destitute and Retirement

An old blind man once came up to Amirul Mu'mineen (peace be upon him) and sought some monetary assistance from him (peace be upon him). Imam Ali (peace be upon him) turning to those around him asked: *Who is this person and how is his state?*

They replied: *O' Amirul Mu'mineen (peace be upon him)! He is a Christian;* and spoke in a manner which conveyed that he should not be given any assistance.

Noticing this, the Imam (peace be upon him) exclaimed: *What? Till such time that he had the strength to work, you extracted work from him, and now that he has turned frail, you leave him uncared-for! It appears that when he was strong, he used to work and serve.*

Having said this, the Imam (peace be upon him) ordered: *He should be given a pension from the Public Treasury.* 5

## 3) The Benefits of Assisting a Poor

One year, Abdullah Ibn Mubarak resolved to go to Makkah for Hajj. One day, as he was passing through a lane, he suddenly witnessed a woman, who bent down, picked up a dead and putrid fowl from the ground and hid it under her cloak!

Abdullah said to her: *O' Lady! Why have you picked up this fowl?*

The woman replied: *Need and adversity have compelled me to resort to such an act!*

When Abdullah heard this, he took the indigent woman to his house and handed her the five hundred dinars that he had set aside for Hajj.

That year, he did not go for Hajj. When the other pilgrims returned after having performed their pilgrimage, he proceeded to welcome them. As soon as they set their eyes upon him, they said to him: *We have seen you performing the rites of Hajj at A'rafaat, Mina and other places.*

Astonished, Abdullah approached the Imam (peace be upon him) and narrated the entire episode to him, whereupon he (peace be upon him) clarified: *God had created an angel, in your likeness, to perform the pilgrimage of the House of God (in your place).*<sup>6</sup>

#### **4) The Neighbour of Sayyid Jawaad**

Sayyid Jawaad A'amoli, a jurist and the author of the book *Miftaah al-Karaamah*, narrates:

One night as I was having my meals, someone knocked at the door. Opening the door, I saw it was the servant of Sayyid Bahr al-U'loom. He said to me: *The dinner of Sayyid Bahr al-U'loom is ready and he awaits you.*

I accompanied the servant to the house of Sayyid Bahr al-U'loom; as soon as I arrived in his presence, he said: *Do you not fear God that you tend to be so negligent?*

I said humbly: *O' Teacher! What is the matter?*

He said: *One of your brethren in faith, out of indigence, has only been able to provide his family dates, and that too on credit; seven days have passed without them having eaten anything except dates. Today he approached a grocer to procure something, but the grocer flatly refused causing him immense embarrassment. At the present moment he (Muhammad Najm A'amoli) and his family have gone to sleep without dinner. You eat a full dinner while you have a neighbor, who is needy and deserving!*

I pleaded: *I possessed no information whatsoever of his condition!* Sayyid replied: *And had you been aware of his state and yet not helped him, you would have been regarded as a Jew or even, an infidel; I am distressed as to why you do not investigate the state of your brethren in faith? My servant shall now carry these utensils of food; go with him to that person's house and tell him: "I desire that tonight we have dinner together". Then place this bag of money (120 riyals) under his carpet and do not bring back the utensils.*

Sayyid Jawaad says: *I proceeded to the person's house in the company of the servant and acted as per the teacher's instructions. The neighbour said to me: No Arab can prepare this kind of meal. Tell me! To*

*whom does this food belong?* Upon his insistence, I confessed: *It belongs to Sayyid Bahr al-U'loom.*

Hearing this, he was filled with great astonishment over this act of Sayyid; taking an oath, he confided: *No one, save for God, has been aware of my state – not even my next-door neighbours, let alone those individuals who stay far from me.*<sup>7</sup>

## **5) Abandoning Poverty is also Difficult!**

During the time of the King Husain Kurt (771 – 732), there lived a person by the name of Maulana Arshadi, who was well known for his poverty and beggary; however, he possessed a beautiful voice by means of which he would move the hearts of the people. When Husain Kurt desired to send a messenger king Shujah of Shiraz, to convey his message to him, the people suggested: *The speech of Maulana Arshad, the beggar, is excellent.*

King Husain summoned him and said: *I intend to send you upon an important mission. The only flaw that you possess is that you beg. However, I am willing to send you to Shiraz if you promise not to bring my name into disrepute by begging there.*

Saying this, he gave him twenty thousand dinars; on his part, Maulana Arshadi promised that he would not beg in Shiraz.

Preparations were made for the journey, the money was handed over to him and he eventually set out for Shiraz. Reaching there, he was given the reply for the message that he had from King Husain; however, when he desired to return, king Shujah and the members of his administration expressed their desire to hear some sermon in his voice.

It was decided that he would preach in the mosque after the Friday prayers. People as well as the members of the king's administration had gathered in the mosque to hear him speak.

On Friday, as he began to speak, it was not long before he had captivated everyone by his voice; observing this, his trait of beggary stimulated his greed and so, unable to restrain himself, he said: *I have been placed under oath not to speak of my indigence and beggary. However, from the time I have entered your city I have not witnessed any charity from your side! Is it that all of you have taken an oath not to give me any alms?*

Hearing this, the people burst out in laughter, and then proceeded to give him so much money that he was left pleased and satisfied.<sup>8</sup>

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1. Holy Qur'an, ch. Al-Baqarah (2), vs. 268.

2. Jaame' Al-Sa'adaat, vol. 2, pg. 83.

3. Ihyaa Al-Quloob, pg. 89.

4. Hikaayat-ha-e-Gulistan, pg. 151.
5. Baa Mardum In Guneh Barkhord Kuneem, pg. 30; Tahdheeb, vol. 6, pg. 292.
6. Namunah-e-Ma'arif, vol. 2, pg. 413; L'aali al-Akhbaar, pg. 253.
7. Pand-e-Taareekh, vol. 1, pg. 140; Kalimah-e-Tayyibah, pg. 111.
8. Lataaif al-Tawaaif, pg. 371.

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