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The Holy Imams' Benevolence to Slaves

Fortunate were those slaves who lived under the care of Ahl ul-Bayt. It was much better for them than freedom. Though Islam allowed slavery, it laid down such duties on the slave owner that the rights of the slaves were protected. Along with this Islam also prescribed great rewards for emancipation of slaves. It prescribed freeing of slaves as penalties for omitting incumbent and obligatory acts. The kind behavior that the Holy Imams (a.s) accorded to their slaves is such that to find its equal is not possible. The following incidents illustrate how our Holy Imams (a.s) made the slaves and maids happy and how they were always finding excuses to free bondsmen.

Imam Ali's Kind Behavior To The Slaves

Qambar the slave of Imam Ali (a.s) says: I spent my days under the slavery of Amir'ul-Mu'minin (a.s) in such a way that he used to feed me first then eat himself. First he clothed me then he wore himself. One day the Imam purchased two shirts. He saw that the shirt of Salman Farsi was patched at many places. So he gave one shirt to him and told me to put on the second. I said that the Imam's shirt was also quite worn out, but he said, "You wear it. I will buy another one for myself when it is possible." He never awoke me for some errand and never made me work when I was sick. He never gave me tasks beyond my strength or capacity. The Imam tried to free me many times but I implored and pleaded the Imam not to do so.

Imam Hasan's (a.s) Kind Behavior To The Slaves

Imam Hasan (a.s) used to be very affectionate to the slaves. He freed many slaves for rendering ordinary services.

One day the Imam was sleeping. A slave began to fan him. The Imam awoke and freed him.

A slave dropped a bowl of curry and it spilled on the garment of Imam (a.s). He was so terrified that he began to tremble and recite the verse:

...and those who restrain (their) anger **and pardon men; and Allah loves the doers of good (to others).** (Surah Aale Imran 3: 134)

The Imam forgave his mistake and told him, "I free you for the sake of Allah."

Imam Husayn 's (a.s) had a slave who was very obedient. One day the Imam was pleased of his good services and he freed him. The slave began to weep bitterly. The Imam asked the reason. He said, "O son of Allah's Messenger, I do not want to leave you. This slavery of mine is a thousand times better than freedom." The Imam said, "I have freed you. Now you can live with me happily like a relative."

One day Imam Husayn (a.s) saw a slave feeding a dog from his food. When the Imam asked him the reason he said, "O son of Allah's Messenger. I am a trouble-stricken person, by making this dog happy I expect happiness from Allah in return." The Imam asked him what his problem was. He said, "I am a slave of a Jew and I want freedom from him." The Imam was moved at this slave's yearning. He immediately came to the Jew, purchased the slave for 200 gold coins and freed him.

Imam Zainul Abideen's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

Imam Zainul Abideen (a.s) was extremely kind and affectionate towards slaves and slave girls. He used to take very less work from them for his personal needs. One day a slave girl began to weep after hearing about the incidents of Karbala' from him. When the Imam saw this devotion of hers, he said, "Go, I have freed you for the sake of Allah." She said, "O son of Allah's Messenger (S), I will continue to remain in your service. Being at your feet is everlasting happiness for me."

Tawus Yamani says that he saw Imam Zainul Abideen (a.s) surrounded by his slaves and slave girls. He was telling them, "I have forgive your mistakes. You all pray to Allah that He forgives the mistakes of Ali Ibnul Husayn ."

Since it is obvious that no sin was committed by the Holy Imam, these pleas for forgiveness of sins were for the expression of his servitude to Allah.

Imam Muhammad Baqir's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s) was extremely affectionate towards his bondsmen. The slaves were always yearning that Imam should take their services, but the Imam mostly used to do his own work. He first fed the male and female slaves than ate himself. He gave them better food and himself ate ordinary things. A slightest excuse was sufficient for him to free the slaves. He was never harsh with any of his slaves and never beat anyone of them.

Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

The Imam was very kind upon the slaves and always overlooked their mistakes. Once he had sent a slave on some errand, but when he took a long time to return the Imam went out to search for him and found him sleeping at one place. Instead of awaking him, the Imam began to fan him. When the fellow awoke the Imam told him, "You have the habit of sleeping in the day as well as at night. Allah has made the day for work and night for rest."

Once a slave of his fell sick. The Imam visited him and found that he was groaning due to a severe headache. "What is the problem?" asked the Imam. He said that he had a terrible headache. The Imam began to press his head. The slave got up abruptly and said, "Son of Allah's Messenger more than the headache it is painful for me that you press my head. I can never accept it." Another slave was standing there. He tried to press the sick man's head but the Imam said, "Man! Why do you want to deprive me from a great reward?"

Imam Musa Kadhim (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

A slave girl of Imam Musa Kadhim (a.s) fell sick and her illness was prolonged. Everyone was fed up of her care. But Imam Musa Kadhim (a.s) continued to be affectionate to her. Every morning and evening asked her what she felt like eating, and whatever she desired was brought for her. She used to invoke blessings for the Imam. Finally she passed away in that illness. The Imam wept profusely at her funeral and performed her last rites in the same way as he would do for a relative.

Imam Ridha's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

Abu Bakr Suli says that his grandmother used to narrate: I and three friends of mine were in the service of Imam Ridha' (a.s) for many years. The Imam took very less work from us. One day we said to him, "Mamun has sent us to serve you and not to live in comfort." The Imam said, "It is my service only that you fulfill the obligations of Allah." The Holy Imam used to teach us the religious rules everyday. Being in the Imam's service I memorized nearly 400 traditions, that now I have forgotten. Most of the time it so happened that the Imam used to fill up a pot of water for ritual ablution (wuzu), kept it besides us and then awoke us in a very very gentle way saying, "This is not the time to sleep, it is time for Allah's remembrance." We used to be very ashamed of such affection of the Holy Imam. When he was martyred we were sent back to Mamun's house. But in spite of all the facilities available there I felt very lonely and the royal palaces seemed like dark dungeons. I used to remember the Imam (a.s) and weep day and night.

Imam Muhammad Taqi's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

Ummul Fadl the daughter of Mamun had brought some slave girls with her and she used to be very harsh with them and beat them with canes. Imam Muhammad Taqi (a.s) used to stop her from such harshness and said, "They are Allah's creatures. If you are not merciful on them, Allah would not be merciful on you." The words of the Imam had no effect on Ummul Fadl. One day she beat a slave girl in such a bad way that she began to bleed. When the Imam came home and saw her condition he rebuked Ummul Fadl. She was so angry at this, that she went to her father's home. The Imam began to treat and serve the slave girl. He himself washed her wounds and applied ointment. He nursed the slave girl for almost a fortnight till she recovered. Then the Imam said to her, "Now you go to Ummul Fadl." She said, "I prefer to be killed than see the face of such a heartless mistress."

Imam Ali Naqi's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

Like his forefathers, Imam Ali Naqi (a.s) also used to be very kind on the slaves. One day he was going somewhere when he saw that a master was beating his slave a lot. The Imam said to him, "Mister, is this weak man your creature?" "Not my creature, he is my slave," replied the man. The Imam said, "You have not created him, you have only purchased him for some dirhams and you have the right to beat him this much." The man said, "Yes, that is why I am beating him. He is my disobedient slave." The Imam said, "If according to you a disobedient slave is eligible for such punishment, for how much punishment would a disobedient creature be eligible? Do you not disobey the commands of Allah? Are you not the same person who lied there drunk? If Allah punishes you for that disobedience, what your condition would be."

Imam Hasan Askari's (a.s) Kind Behavior To Slaves

Imam Hasan Askari (a.s) used to be very affectionate to the slaves. One day a slave, who was a Shia of Ali (a.s) came to the Imam and said, "My owner troubles me a lot. I want to be freed from him somehow." The Imam said, "If he agrees to sell you, I can pay the price." The slave spoke to his master and persuaded him to sell him for 200 dirhams. The Imam paid the money and purchased him. Then he freed him the same day for the sake of Allah. In the same way the Imam purchased many slaves from other people and released them. The Imam's slave, Mohlib used to say, "I have never seen a master as kind as Imam Hasan Askari (a.s)." The Imam used to be affectionate towards his male and female slaves like a father is to his children.

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