

Serving the Servants of God

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Cooperation, mutual aid, and serving people, especially serving the faithful and the pious, are among the most crucial qualities in Islamic ethics. It can be understood from Islamic teachings and the conduct of the Imams (a) that serving the servants of God is the second best means to reach God, after performing religious obligations. Friends of God have always been serving people and personally fulfilling their needs.

Furthermore, it can be understood from the Glorious Qur'an that what is beneficial for people will remain forever and what is not beneficial will die away and disappear like foam on the waves. God, the Almighty states,

“...As for the scum, it leaves as dross, and that which profits the people remains in the earth. That is how Allah draws comparisons.” (13: 17)

When Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) was interpreting the *ayah*, “He has made me blessed, wherever I may be...” (19:31), which was sent down about Jesus Christ (a), he said that the meaning of “He has made me blessed” is “He has made me very beneficial”;¹ that is, God made him very beneficial for people.

In another hadith, it is narrated that the Noble Prophet (s) was asked, “Who is most liked among people?” And he (s) answered, “One whose existence is more beneficial for people.”²

In another hadith, it is narrated that the Prophet (s) said,

“People are the household of God, so the most liked among the people in the sight of God is the one who is beneficial for the household of God and brings happiness to their house.”³

¹ Kulayni, *Usul al-Kāfi*, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1363 A.H.S.) vol. 2, 165, hadith no. 11.

² Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 164, hadith no. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 164, hadith no. 6.

Imam al-Şādiq (a) said,

“The person who circles around the Ka‘bah seven times, God, the Almighty and Glorious, counts six thousand rewards for him and wipes off six thousand sins from his book of deeds and upgrades him by six thousand grades”. Then Ishāq ibn ‘Ammār adds that the Imam (a) said, ‘God fulfils six thousand of their requests.’ Then, Imam al-Şādiq (a) said, “Fulfilling the request of the faithful is better than circling around the Ka‘bah ten times.”⁴

The Noble Prophet (s) said,

“A servant [of God] entered Heaven because of removing a thorny bush from the path of the Muslims.”⁵

Some people think that worship is restricted to prayer and fasting. Some of these people are so ignorant and selfish that even if people die of hunger in front of them, it would not make any difference to them.

It is frequently seen that during pilgrimages to holy places and Hajj, such people spend all their time visiting holy sites, reading supplications and performing individual recommended acts but they never help their companions and fellow travellers, even though they know that there are weak and infirm people among them who desperately need help. However, one of the means of progression on the spiritual journey is to have good relations with people and to be benevolent towards the servants of God. This quality keeps the person away from selfishness and self-seeking and enables them to embody divine attributes. God, the Glorious, orders you that since God treats you with mercy and grace, you must show grace and goodness towards each other: “...so do not forget graciousness among yourselves...” (2: 237). May we never forget this innate divine relation!

The Noble Prophet (s) said, “The most pious among people is the one who is most caring towards people and most kind-hearted to all Muslims.”⁶

Imam al-Şādiq (a) addressed Sufyan ibn ‘Uyaynah saying, “May you be, for the sake of God, solicitous towards His servants and know that you shall never see any more favoured action before Him.”⁷

⁴ Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, 164, hadith no. 7.

⁵ Shaykh ‘Abbas Qumi, *Safīnat al-Bihār*, (Tehran: Dar al-Usvah, 1414 A.H.) vol. 5, 291.

⁶ Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

Thus, we should be happy if people refer to us regarding their needs since this indicates that God has loved us. And if the door of our office or house is closed to people or they do not or could not come to us we should know that we are deprived of God's mercy and should be sad about this.

It is narrated in a hadith that the Noble Prophet (s) said, "The closest ones to me among you in the hereafter are those more honest in their speech and more trustworthy in keeping what has been entrusted to them and with a more pleasant disposition and closer to people and more serving of them."⁸

Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) said,

O' Rufā'ah!, a person does not have faith in God, Muhammad (s) or in 'Ali (a), if they do not receive their faithful brother [in faith] who is having problems, with open arms. In such a case, if that person is able to solve the problem of their brother [in faith], they should instantly take urgent action and if not, they must ask others for help so that the problem of their faithful brother is solved. If someone does not do as I have described, there would be no relation of guardianship between us and them."⁹

Furthermore, the Noble Prophet (s) said,

"Surely, in their sympathy with each other, the faithful are like one body; when one member of them is in pain, the other members of the body show sympathy for it and become feverish and restless."¹⁰

It is likely that this hadith inspired Sa'di of Shiraz to write his famous poem, which says,

Adam's sons are body limbs, to say;
For they are created of the same clay.
Should one organ be troubled by pain,
Others would suffer severe strain.
Thou, careless of people's suffering,

⁸ Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 72, 94.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁰ Shaykh 'Abbas Qumi, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 56. This hadith has been quoted with the same meaning [in other forms] in Qurtubi's tafsir, *Al-Jami' Li Abkam al-Qur'an* (Ch. 16, 327, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr) and *Usul al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, 165 and 166, hadith no. 1 and 4.

Deserve not the name, “human being”.¹¹

It is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), “The Prophet (s) made a speech in Mina in which he said, ‘Muslims are brothers of one another. The value of their blood is the same and the promise of the least of them is to be respected by all. They are united against others.’”¹²

Thus, a Muslim should never be indifferent to other Muslims’ hardships and sufferings or be unaware of their conditions, because such a person would also be indifferent to more important social issues and would not react to them. Such people, consciously or unconsciously, are selfish, do not think about others and do not have an attitude of assistance and goodwill whereas the Noble Qur’an invites Muslims to cooperation in good deeds: “...Cooperate in piety and God-wariness...” (5: 2).

Unconcerned and selfish people ignore the necessity of cooperation and assistance in matters of social welfare, which is an important Islamic order. Thus, a person who wishes to embody good qualities should cultivate the attitude of cooperation and sympathy in themselves and through struggle and practice, change their indifference and apathy to compassion and sympathy and his aloofness to sociability thus generating prompt involvement once they notice sadness or need in their brother and the taking of appropriate measures to solve the problem. Indeed, it would be even better to help one’s brother before being asked to do so.

The Noble Prophet (s) said, “One who wakes up in the morning not caring about Muslims’ affairs, is not one of them and one who hears someone calling, ‘O Muslims!’ [for help] and does not answers this call, is not a Muslim.”¹³ It is understood from this hadith that whoever does not use their God-given means in fulfilling the needs of their brothers in faith, would use them in the service of the enemies of God and for committing sins.

¹¹ *Gulistan of Sa’di*, Ch. 1 translated by H. Vahid Dastjerdi, in *Mashriq-e-Ma’rifat*, (Qom: Ansariyan, 2006). However, the Prophet (s) refers to Muslims as one body, not all human beings, and this is true, since there is nothing but disbelief and hypocrisy in wars, disputes, selfishness and deceit and also faith and disbelief cannot be present together in one place.

¹² Shaykh Hurr al-‘Amili, *Wasā’il as-Shi’a*, (Beirut: Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabi, 1391 A.H.) vol. 19, 55, hadith no. 1; Saduq, *Amālī*, (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-A’lami Lilmatbu’at, 1400 A.H.) Session no. 56, 287, hadith no. 3.

¹³ Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 164, hadith no. 5.

Imam Baqir (a) said, "One who is stingy in helping their brothers and rising to their needs will later be afflicted with having to help a person who offends them and such a person will not be rewarded."¹⁴

In another hadith, Abi Baṣīr quoted from Imam Ṣādiq (a) saying, "If one of our Shi'ites goes to one of his brothers [in faith] and asks him for help regarding his need and he does not help him, although he is able to do so, he will be afflicted by God to fulfil the needs of those from among our enemies, and God will punish him on the Day of Judgment."¹⁵

Humiliation in this World and in the Hereafter

In another hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) said, "None of the faithful would humiliate their brothers while they are able to help them without God humiliating them in this world and in the hereafter."¹⁶

Betraying God and the Prophet (s)

It is mentioned in a hadith that a person who refuses to fulfil the needs of their religious brothers has betrayed God and the Prophet (s) and will be in hell. Imam Ṣādiq (a) said,

Any of the faithful who deprives another from what is needed while able to provide it personally or through others, will be resurrected by God on the Judgment Day, dark-faced and blue swollen-eyed handcuffed to his neck. They will be addressed, 'This is the betrayer who betrayed God and His Messenger (s).' Then, they will be directed towards hell.¹⁷

Deprivation of God's Mercy

Imam Ṣādiq (a) said,

If someone who has a house prevents a person who needs shelter from settling there, God the Almighty and the Glorious, will say, 'O My angels! Because this servant of Mine was stingy about letting My other servant settle in a house in

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 366, hadith no. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 366, hadith no. 2.

¹⁶ Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, 312 and vol. 72, 17; Saduq, *ibid.*, Majlis no.73, 393, hadith no. 16.

¹⁷ Kulayni, vol. 2, 1367; Barqi, *Al-Mahāsin*, (Qom: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya,) 100, hadith no. 71.

the world, I swear by My Honor and Glory that they will never ever come to My heaven.¹⁸

These hadiths and many other similar ones imply that if a person is able to fulfil one's brother's need but avoids doing so, one will earn the wrath of God the Almighty and cause humiliation and contempt for themselves in this world and the hereafter. Thus, no one who could be at the service of their brothers in faith, should refrain from doing that. Furthermore, if someone appeals to you, you must receive them in a friendly and approachable manner and consider it as a blessing from God, because the needs and requests of the servants of God are blessings [for those who can fulfil them]. Blessed are those who leave the doors of their houses open to people and punished are those who dismiss people from their houses.

Imam Ṣādiq (a) said, "When a person asks me for something, I would hasten to fulfil their request fearing that they fulfil their need and I do not have an opportunity to do so."¹⁹

Reward for the Fulfilment of the Faithful's Needs

Imam Ṣādiq (a) said,

If someone fulfils the need of his faithful brother, God, the Almighty and Glorious will fulfil a hundred thousand needs for him, the first of which is [entering] heaven and among the rest of which is admitting their relatives, acquaintances and brothers to heaven provided they are not Nasibites.²⁰

Elsewhere he (a) also said, "Fulfilling the need of a faithful person is better than releasing a thousand slaves or loading a thousand horses [with goods and donating them] for the sake of God."²¹ In another hadith, he (a) said, "God, the Almighty will address the Muslim who fulfils another Muslim's need saying, 'Your reward is upon Me and I will not be content to give you less than Heaven.'²²

In a hadith, Imam 'Ali (a) has quoted from the Prophet (s), "The one who fulfils the need of his brother in faith is like a person serving God

¹⁸ Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 367, hadith no. 3.

¹⁹ Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, p 286 and 317.

²⁰ Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 193, hadith no. 1, with a slight difference.

²¹ *Ibid.*, hadith no. 3; Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, 324; Shaykh Mufid, *Ikhtisās*, (Qom: Maktabat al-Zahra, 1402 A.H.) 26 with a slight difference.

²² Himyari, *Qurb al-Asnād*, (Qom: Mu'assasah al-Theqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1417 A.H.) 48, hadith no. 116; Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 194, hadith no. 7; Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, 285.

throughout his lifetime.”²³ Elsewhere he (s) said, “If one strives to fulfil the need of a brother in faith, it is as if one had worshipped God for nine thousand years, fasting during the days and praying during the nights.”²⁴ Furthermore, the Commander of the Faithful (a) told Kumayl ibn Ziyad,

O Kumayl! direct your people to go out in the day to achieve noble traits and to go out in the night to meet the needs of those who might be sleeping, for I swear by Him Whose hearing extends to all voices that if ever someone pleases another’s heart, Allah will create a special blessing out of this pleasing so that whenever any hardship befalls him it will come running like flowing water and drive away the hardship as wild camels are driven away.²⁵

Generally it can be concluded that there is so much advice about assisting brothers in faith and fulfilling their needs that even if a person takes steps to fulfil a brother’s need but is not successful, nevertheless one will receive great rewards from God. This is so to such an extent that Imam Baqir (a) said,

God, the Almighty and Glorious revealed the message to Moses (a) that, ‘There are those among my servants who seek closeness to Me through doing a good deed and I will make them settled in Heaven.’ Moses (a) asked, ‘O’ God! What is that good deed?’ God said, ‘Accompanying their brothers to fulfil their needs whether or not they are fulfilled.’²⁶

Imam Šādiq (a) said, “There is none among the faithful who takes steps to fulfil the need of his brother [in faith] but for each of their steps, God will write a merit for him and wipe out a sin from his record and upgrade him by one level.”²⁷

In a hadith, the Prophet (s) said, “For each step of the person who walks on the way to fulfilling the need of his Muslim brother, God writes seventy merits and wipes seventy sins from his record.”²⁸

Two Necessary Points:

²³ Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, 302, hadith no. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁵ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, translated by Syed ‘Ali Raza, 2nd Ed., WOFIS, 1987, Tehran.

²⁶ Shaykh Hurr al-‘Amili, *Al-Jawābir al-Sanīyyah fi al-Ahadith al-Qodsīyyah*, (Qom: Yas, 1402 A.H.) 41; Kulayni, vol. 2, 195, hadith no. 2.

²⁷ Shaykh Mufid, *ibid.*, 27.

²⁸ Ghazzālī, *Mukāshafat al-Qulub*, (1306 A.H.), 131.

1. Expressing need to brothers in faith is a sign of hope and trust in them and of their reliability. Therefore, one must react in such a way towards this feeling that it is not weakened, but rather so that it is supported and strengthened just as Imam Ṣādiq (a) said,

“It is enough to prove someone’s trust in their brother that they felt able to express their need to them.”²⁹

2. In Islamic culture, the needs of people are interpreted as mercy and blessings. Therefore, naturally many needs and requests are referred to those who are wealthy or who have a special social position; so they must realise that the gates of divine mercy are being opened to them and thus they will not become tired or annoyed by an abundance of blessings.

Accordingly, Imam Husayn (a) said, “Surely, directing needs and requests of people to you [for solution] is among the blessings of God upon you; thus, do not feel tired of these blessings [the needs and requests of people].”³⁰

Also, Imam Musā Kāzim (a) said, “Fulfilling the needs of one’s brother is surely a blessing from God, the Exalted and Almighty, which is bestowed upon one ...”³¹ Therefore, every Muslim must welcome these blessings of God and make every effort to fulfil the needs of the needy; and even if they are unable to do so, they must answer them in such a way that at least they become hopeful, since this is what the Prophet (s) would behave. “He (s) would not reject anyone who asked him for something. He (s) would provide them with it or answer them in a hopeful manner.”³²

O Friend! As much as you can
Satisfy the needs of the needy
Since winning the hearts of the poor
Brings prosperity to those of means.

At any rate, if one is unable to fulfil the needs of needy people, one should at least speak to them so that they do not become frustrated.

The Noble Qur’an states, “And if you have to overlook them [for now], seeking the mercy of your Lord which you expect [in the future], speak to them gentle words.” (17: 28) After the revelation of this ayah, whenever a

²⁹ Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 198, hadith no. 8.

³⁰ Majlisi, *ibid.*, vol. 71, 318.

³¹ Kulayni, *ibid.*, vol. 2, 196; Shaykh Hurr al-‘Amili, *ibid.*, vol. 11, 578, hadith no. 9.

³² Fayz Kashani, *Mahajjat al-Bayda’*, (Tehran: Maktabat al-Saduq, 1340 A.H.) vol 4, 161.

person asked the Prophet (s) for something and he (s) did not have anything to give that person, he (s) would say, “May Allah provide me and you with His grace”³³ A person who is unable to fulfil someone’s needs should express sympathy by saying heartening words such as: “I hope God fulfils your needs, and I will try my best to help you”. They should not speak to them harshly and disappoint them because such a person will not be sheltered by God in the hereafter, as only those who shelter the needy, will be sheltered there. Imam Ṣādiq (a) underscored this point by saying, “Surely, God has servants on earth, to whom He sends people to appeal to them regarding their worldly and spiritual needs. They are true believers believing in the Day of Judgment.”³⁴

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³³ Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayān*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabi, 1379 A.H.) vol. 3, 411.

³⁴ Harrani, *Tuhaf al-Uqūl*, (Qom: Mu’assasah al-Nashr al-Islami, 1404 A.H.) 376. A hadith containing the same concept has been quoted in *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 74, 157, Beirut.

