198024 - A servant is not getting her salary or food

the question

I work as a servant for an Arab family, and for three months, since I started work and up till now, I have not received my wages, and I feel too shy to ask for them. Sometimes I feel brave and I ask them for my wages, and they tell me that they will give them to me, but I do not see anything. Is it part of Islam to delay wages? What is the ruling on this attitude? There is another matter: the family for whom I work are Muslims, but they do not give me any food; it is as if I am not present with them. When food is cooked, they eat it all, and if there is anything left over, they order me to put it in the fridge. Sometimes they give me something, and as I am in need of nourishment, I might eat a handful, and I might drink some juice, enough to make me able to move. It is what I am doing right or wrong?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Respected sister

We are grieved by your suffering and by the hardship and difficulties that you are encountering in your work and your life with your employers. As you asked about Islam in this situation that you are suffering, what does any of that treatment have to do with Islam? What kind of Islam is there when the employer eats his fill and the servant goes hungry?

Indeed, what kind of Islam is there when a person eats his fill and his neighbour goes hungry?

Indeed, what kind of Islam is there when a person eats his fill and his mount on which he works and the pets in his house go hungry, and he does not feed them?

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Feed them from what you eat, and clothe them from what you wear.” Narrated by Muslim, 3007.

He also said: “A slave is entitled to his food and clothing, and he should not be burdened except with that which he can bear.”

Narrated by Muslim, 1662

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If the servant of one of you prepares his food, let him make him sit down and eat with him, and if he does not do that, then let him take a morsel; he should hand it to him.”

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, 12/292, no. 7338. The commentators said: Its isnaad is saheeh according to the conditions of the two shaykhs (al-Bukhaari and Muslim).

Our advice to you is not to remain silent about your wrongful treatment, and to ask for your wages openly and clearly; when doing that, you should use words that are gentle and polite. What this family is doing of delaying your wages and depriving you of food is the worst and most reprehensible type of mistreatment, in which a rich person takes advantage of a poor worker and delays giving him his wages and his dues for the longest possible time for no reason but heedlessness or for the deliberate purpose of causing harm.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah, may He be exalted, says: ‘There are three whose opponent I shall be on the Day of Resurrection … [One of whom is] a man who hired a worker and availed himself of his labour to the fullest extent, but did not give him his wages.’” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2270.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), that he said: “The Muslim is the brother of his fellow-Muslim. He does not wrong him, let him down or despise him.”

Narrated by Muslim in his Saheeh, 2564.

Woe to those tyrannical people who exploit others and consume their wealth unlawfully, when

what they should do is treat them kindly and be generous towards them over and above what they give them as wages, in order to help them bear the costs of living in this world, and not merely give them their rights.

So what do you think if they transgress against those rights and dues, and consume them, or delay them with no justification? Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And those who, when an oppressive wrong is done to them, they take revenge.

The recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof, but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah. Verily, He likes not the Zalimoon (oppressors, polytheists, and wrong-doers, etc.).

And indeed whosoever takes revenge after he has suffered wrong, for such there is no way (of blame) against them.

The way (of blame) is only against those who oppress men and wrongly rebel in the earth, for such there will be a painful torment.

And verily, whosoever shows patience and forgives that would truly be from the things recommended by Allah.”

[ash-Shoora 42:39-43].

If the contract under which you are working stipulates that the cost of your food is to be borne by the people for whom you are working, or if the general custom dictates that, in that case there is no blame on you for what you eat or drink without the knowledge of the family for whom you are working, because that is your right as agreed upon with them.

But if the contract states that you are to bear the costs of your food and drink, or this is the general custom, then the basic principle is that you should supply your food at your own expense.

In the event that you do not receive your wages or they are delayed, it is permissible for you to

eat (from their food) on a reasonable basis, in order to meet your needs if you do not have any money with which you can buy food.

And Allah knows best.