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2. To Live A God-Conscious Life

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[Advice for Successful Life to His Son](#)

(Excerpts from Letter No. 31)

[Introduction](#)

The following excerpts are from the profound advice given by Imam Ali (p) to his son. This advice covers many aspects of life, the relationship with God, the method of supplicating to God, behavior with other people (emphasizing family, neighbors, friends, even foes), and preparing for the life in the Hereafter. The impeccable character of Imam Ali, his spiritual excellence, his relationship with God, his struggle for justice, and his hard-earned lessons of life are evident from this advice. He practiced every bit of what he preached. This document is bound to leave a deep impression on the reader.

[Importance of God-Consciousness](#)

My first and foremost advice to you, My Son, is to be God-conscious. Be His obedient servant. Keep the thought of Him always fresh in your mind. Be attached to and carefully guard the principles of Islam

(submission to God) that connect you with God. Can any other connection be stronger, more durable, and more lasting than this, so that you may command greater respect and consideration from God?

Accept good exhortations (advice) and refresh your mind with them. Adopt God-consciousness and overcome your excessive desires with its help. Build your character with the help of true faith in religion and God.

As you are a noble, virtuous, and pious young man, I am confident that you will receive Divine Guidance and Succour. I firmly believe that God will help you to achieve your aims in life. I ask you to make a promise to yourself to follow my advice carefully.

The Creator is also the Annihilator. The One who annihilates has the power to bring everything back again into existence. The One who sends calamities also has the power to protect you from the calamities.

Remember, My Son, had there been any other god besides the One True God, he (the other) would have also sent his (own) prophets, and they would have pointed out to humankind the domain and glory of the other god. Nothing like that has occurred. He is the One True God, Whom all should acknowledge and worship. He has explained this Himself (in the Qur'an). Nobody is a partner with Him in His Domain, Might, and Glory. He is Eternal, He has always been that way, and He shall always remain as such.

He existed before the universe came into being. His Existence is without a beginning. He shall remain when every other thing (in His creation) shall perish. His Existence is without end. God's Glory and His Existence are preeminent, transcendent, and incomparable. He is beyond the grasp of (human) intellect. No one has the ability to understand or visualize God.

When you have accepted these facts, then your behavior should be like that of a person who realizes that his own status, power, and position are nothing compared to that of the Lord. You would want to be the one who desires to gain His Blessings through prayers and obedience, the one who fears His wrath and His punishments and who is absolutely in need of His help and protection. Remember, My Son, God has not ordered you to do anything but that which is good and which propagates goodness, and He has not prohibited you from anything except that which is evil and which will lead to bad consequences.

Remember, My Son, the best of my advices to you is to be God-conscious, to perform the duties made incumbent upon you by God, and to follow in the footsteps of your (noble and pious) ancestors and relatives. Verily, they carefully evaluated their thoughts and deeds, and they carefully evaluated before saying anything, or before taking an action. I advise you to follow their example.

[How to Pray to God for Your Needs](#)

Do not seek help or protection from anybody but God. Reserve your prayers, your requests, and your solicitations for God only, because to withhold, to deprive, and to deny lies in His Power alone.

Therefore, the best thing for you is to seek guidance from the One who has created you, Who maintains and nourishes you, Who has given you a balanced mind and a normally working body. Your invocations should be reserved for Him alone, your requests and solicitations should be to Him alone, and you should only fear Him.

Realize this truth, my son, that the Lord, who owns and holds the treasures of heaven and the earth, has given you permission to ask and to beg (Him) for them, and He has promised to grant your prayers. [11](#) He has told you to pray for His favors, that He may grant them to you, and to ask for His Blessings, that He may bestow them upon you. God has not appointed guards to prevent your prayers from reaching Him, nor is there any need for anybody to intercede with Him on your behalf.

He hears you whenever you call Him and accepts your prayer whenever you pray to Him. Invoke God to grant you your heart's desire, lay before Him the secrets of your heart, tell Him about all the calamities that have befallen you, the misfortunes that face you, and beseech His help to overcome them. Invoke God's help and support in all difficulties and distresses.

Remember that the little that is granted to you by God will be more useful, honorable, and respectable for you than what is granted by a human (even if it is) in abundance. What can a human give you, but only that which is from God?

You may implore Him to grant you long life and sound health; you may pray to Him for prosperity; you may request Him for such favors and grants that none but He (alone) can bestow.

Think over it, that by simply granting you the privilege of praying to Him for His favors and mercies, He has handed over the keys of His treasures to you. Whenever you are in need, you should pray, and He will confer His bounties and blessings (on you). Sometimes you will find that your requests are not immediately granted, but you need not be disappointed, because the granting of prayers often rests with the true purpose and intention of the seeker. Sometimes the prayers are delayed because the Merciful Lord wants you to receive further rewards for patiently bearing calamities and sufferings, to continue to believe sincerely in (receiving) His help. Thus, you may be awarded better favors than you had requested.

Sometimes your prayers are turned down; this may be to your benefit, because you often unknowingly ask for things that are harmful to you. If your requests are granted, then they will do you more harm than good, and many of your requests may be such that, if they are answered, they will result in your eternal damnation. Thus, the refusal to answer your solicitations is a blessing in disguise. Therefore, you should be very careful in asking God for His favors. Pray for such things that are beneficial to you. Remember, my dear Son, that wealth and power (if you pray for them) are such things that they will not always remain with you and they may bring you harm in the life Hereafter.

Know, My Son, that you cannot have every wish of yours granted. You cannot expect to escape from death. Therefore, be realistic in your expectations, desires, and cravings. Be reasonable (and realistic) in

making requests.

Virtues of Patience

Develop the virtue of patience against sufferings, calamities, and adversities. Patience is one of the highest forms of morality, nobility, and it is the best trait one can acquire. Put trust in God and seek His protection in every calamity and suffering, because you will thereby entrust yourself and your affairs to the best Trustee and to the mightiest Guardian.

Life of This World

Those who have carefully studied the life of this world, they spend their days as if they know that they are travelers here who have to leave a place that is famine-stricken, unwholesome, and (often) unfriendly. They know that they have to proceed towards lands (of the next world) which are fertile, congenial, where there are abundant provisions, comforts, and pleasures. They have eagerly embarked on the journey. They feel happy, cherishing the hope of future blessings and (eternal) peace. They have willingly accepted the sufferings, troubles, and the hazards of the way (in this world), the parting with friends, scarcity of food, and lack of comfort during the journey (in this world), so that they may reach the destination (Paradise), a happy place. They do not resent bearing hardships, and they do not begrudge giving charity and assistance to the poor and the needy.

Each step they take towards their goal, tiring and exhausting as it may be, is a happy event in their lives.

On the contrary, the people who are attached to this world are sadly engulfed in its short-lived, fast-fading, and depraved pleasures. They are like travelers who are in a fertile and happy region and they know that the journey they have to undertake will lead them to an arid and infertile land. Could anything be more loathsome and abhorrent than the journey of theirs?

Nothing in this world is (truly) useful to you, unless it has some utility and value in the next world. If you lament over things that you have lost in this world, then worry much more about the loss of things of eternal benefit (in the Hereafter). Your past, and with it most of what was in your possession, has departed from you. All that is in your possession at present will also leave you (upon your death).

The Fate of Humankind

Subdue your untamed soul (unrestrained desires of the heart) with the vision (i.e., thought) of death; make it see the transient nature of life and all of its trappings. Let your natural self-realize the inevitability of (encountering) misfortunes, adversities, changing circumstances, and changing times. Study the lives of people gone by. See the ruined cities, the dilapidated palaces, the decaying signs, the relics of fallen empires, and the perished nations. Then meditate over the lives of those people, as to what they did when they were alive and were in power, what they accomplished, and what was their contribution to human welfare.

If you carefully ponder over these, you will find that each one of those individuals has parted company with the others, leaving behind all that he cherished and loved, and now he is in a solitary abode (grave). Therefore, (realize that) you will also depart (from this world) in a similar manner.

Take care to provide for your future abode. Do not trade away eternal blessings for the transient pleasures of this mortal world.

Do not talk about things that you do not know. Do not speculate about or pass verdicts on subjects about which you are not in a position to form an opinion, particularly when no one has asked you for an opinion. Give up that pursuit where there is a possibility of your going astray. When there is risk of your wandering in the wilderness of ignorance and the possibility of losing sight of your goal, then it is better for you to give up the quest than to face unforeseen dangers (by losing the straight path).

Defend the Cause of God

Defend the cause of God. When defending the cause of God, do not be afraid that people will mock you, censure your actions, or even slander you. Help (and defend) the truth and justice fearlessly and boldly. Bear patiently the sufferings encountered and face bravely the obstacles that come your way. Try to be well versed with jurisprudence and theology, and acquire a thorough knowledge of the canons of the religion.

Your Dealings with Others

Whatever you like for yourself, the same you like for others; whatever you dislike to happen to you, spare others from such happenings. Do not oppress and tyrannize anyone, because you surely do not like to be oppressed and tyrannized. Be kind and sympathetic to others, as you desire others to treat you. If you notice objectionable and loathsome habits in others, abstain from developing those habits in yourself. If you feel happy and satisfied in receiving a certain kind of treatment from others, then treat others in the same way. Do not speak about others in a way that you do not like others to speak about you. Avoid scandal, libel, and defamation, as you do not like yourself to be scandalized.

Vanity is a Folly that Brings Harm

Remember, Son, vanity and conceit are a folly. These traits will bring serious harm to you and will endanger your well-being. Therefore, lead a well-balanced life (i.e., neither be conceited nor suffer from inferiority complex) and strive to earn an honest living. Do not be a “treasurer” for others [Note: this is an apt analogy of a miserly person who hoards wealth and dies, leaving behind his wealth to be enjoyed by others]. Whenever you receive guidance from the Lord to achieve a thing you desire, then do not become proud of your blessing, but be humble and submissive to God, realizing that your success was due to His mercy.

Give While You Can

Remember that your charity and your good deeds are like loans (to God), which He will pay back to you, much in this world, and much more in the Hereafter. Therefore, when you are affluent and have power, make use of your wealth and power in such a way that you will get that returned to you on the Day of Judgment, when you will be needy and helpless. Be it known, My Son, that your passage (from this world to the next world) lies through a dreadful valley, an extremely difficult and arduous journey.

On this journey, a man (traveling) with less weight (i.e., fewer sins and liabilities) is far better than an overburdened person is (with sins and dishonest earnings). The former can travel faster and easier than the latter. You shall have to pass through this valley. The journey will lead you either to Paradise or to Hell. Therefore, it is wise to send your provision beforehand, so that it reaches there (to Paradise) ahead of you. Make advance reservation and arrangements for your stay before you arrive, because after death, there is no possibility of a second chance to make up for the wrongs.

If you find poor and needy persons who are willing to carry your load (i.e., recipients of your disposable wealth given in charity) on your journey to the Day of Judgment, then consider this a blessing. Thus, relieve yourself from the heavy responsibility and liability of submitting an account on the Day of Judgment of how you have made use of God's bounties (i.e., health, wealth, power, and position).

Importance of Self-Respect

Earn your livelihood through scrupulously honest means and be content with such earnings. Do not let your desires drive you such that you encounter disappointment and loss. Remember that everyone who prays (to God) for a thing will not always get it. One who controls his/her desires safeguards self-respect. At times, you may secure your heart's desires by means that make you lose your self-respect, but nothing in this world can compensate for the loss of self-respect, nobility, and honor.

Take care, My Son, and beware that you do not make yourself a slave (subservient) to another person. God has created you a free man. Do not barter away your freedom in return for anything (of this world). There is no goodness in wealth and power acquired dishonorably.

Greed Leads to Destruction

Beware, My Son, so that avarice and greed may not drive you towards destruction and damnation. Make nobody but God your benefactor. Do your best to achieve this nobility, because God will grant you your share (of bounties) whether or not others help you.

To safeguard your possessions and to economize is better than to ask from others. The bitterness of poverty is, in reality, better than the disgrace of begging. Often, an individual tries to acquire a thing that proves to be harmful when gained.

Treat Your Family Well

Do not ill-treat members of your family, and do not behave with them as if you are “the cruelest person alive.” Do not run after a person who tries to avoid you.

The greatest achievement of your character is that, despite the hostility of your brother, you continue to show friendship to him. Do good to your brother, even when he is bent upon doing harm to you. When he ignores or declines to recognize the kinship (with you), attempt to befriend him, help him when he is needy, and try to maintain a relationship. If he acts miserly with you and refuses to help you, be generous with him and support him financially (in his need). If he causes you grief or hurt, be kind and considerate to him in return. If he harms you, accept his excuses. Behave with him as if he is the benefactor and you are the beneficiary.

Be mindful that do not do it inappropriately and when dealing with those who do not deserve.

Treat members of your family with love and respect, because “they are the wings with which you fly and the hands that support and defend you.” They are people towards whom you turn when you are in trouble and need help.

Deal with Your Enemy with Consideration

Be considerate to your enemy, because it will allow you to rise (morally) above him/ her, and/or it will reduce the intensity of his/ her hostility.

If you want to sever relations with your friend, then do not break them off completely, in case you may want to make up with him/ her later.

How to Deal with Oppression

If you are a victim of oppression, let it not worry you excessively, because an oppressor, in reality, brings harm to himself, and he opens up ways of (spiritual) benefit to you.

Pearls of Wisdom and Guidance to His Son

- A sensible person pays heed to advice and draws benefit from it. Do not be like a person on whom advice has no effect.
- Beasts are the ones that require coercion for compliance.
- Overcome sorrows, worries, and misfortunes with patience, and with faith in the merciful Lord.
- One who gives up the straight path (forgoes virtue) thereby loses honesty and rational thinking and, as a result, harms himself.

- A true friend is one who speaks well of you behind your back.
- Excessive desires lead to misfortunes.
- Whoever forsakes the truth makes his/her life constrictive and distressed.
- Honesty and contentment are assets that bring prestige and safeguard the status.
- The strongest relationship is the one that is cultivated between God and His subject.
- The person who does not care about you is (akin to) your enemy.
- If there is likelihood of death or harm in pursuing a goal, then safety lies in not pursuing it.
- Do not talk about weaknesses and shortcomings (of others).
- Opportunities do not repeat themselves.
- At times, the wise fail to achieve their goal, whereas the unwise are able to.
- Avoiding ignorant persons is akin to connecting with the wise ones.
- Whoever trusts this world is betrayed, and whoever gives importance to it is disgraced.
- Not every arrow of yours will hit the bull's eye.
- Before buying a house, inquire about the neighbors you will have.
- Avoid ridiculous topics in your conversation, even if you are quoting others.
- Do not let down a person who has a good opinion about you; do not let him change his opinion.
- Do not jeopardize your well-being through irrational, unreasonable, and extravagant hopes.
- Vain hopes are assets of fools.
- Do not be fooled by flattery.
- There are two kinds of livelihood: the one you are pursuing and the other that pursues you. God has the latter destined for you, and it will reach you, even if you do not pursue it.
- Do not befriend the enemy of your friend, lest your friend becomes your enemy.
- Wisdom lies in remembering past experiences and drawing benefit from them.
- The best experience is the one that offers the best advice and teaches caution.

- Take advantage of opportunities before you lose them.
- Not everyone who tries, succeeds.
- No one will return after departing from this world.
- The worst folly is to waste opportunities (to do good) in this life and thereby lose salvation.
- To be submissive and to beg when in need, and to be arrogant and oppressive when affluent and powerful, are two of the ugliest traits of human character.
- Never ill-treat a person who has done you some good.
- Remember, do not overburden yourself with obligations (i.e., do not commit yourself to too many responsibilities), so that you may not be able to fulfill them honorably.

Concluding Remarks in the Letter

My Dear Son! After having given these pieces of advice to you, I entrust you to the Lord. He will help, guide, and protect you in this world and the Hereafter. I beseech Him to take you under His protection in both the worlds.

Justice, Injustice, and Oppression

One of the most beautiful names of God is *Al-'Adl*, "The Just." The concept of justice (*'Adl*) is central to the faith of a believer, because God is Just and demands justice from us. Those who practice injustice towards fellow human beings and die unrepentant will carry a heavy burden on the Day of Judgment. Imam Ali (p) practiced the highest standards of justice. He advised his subordinates, the governors, the tax collectors, and the armed forces to uphold the highest standards of justice and showed zero tolerance for unjust behavior. In the following passages, Imam Ali beautifully ties justice together with self-purification, spiritual excellence, and the good pleasure of God.

God is Just to His Subjects

Certainly, God is not **unjust** to His creatures.

(Sermon 177)

God is Too Exalted to Be Unjust

He is too exalted to be unjust to His creatures. He deals with equity among His creation and is **just** in His commands.

(Sermon 184)

God's Justice is for Both the Rich and the Poor

He ordained livelihood with plentitude and with paucity. He distributed it sparingly as well as generously. He did it with **justice**, to test whomever He desired with prosperity or with destitution, and to test the gratefulness and endurance of the rich as well as the poor. His **justice** extends to all of them, and His bounty encompasses them despite their shortcomings.

(Sermon 90)

Justice in Distribution of Shares from Public Treasury

When someone asked Imam Ali for an extra share of money from the public treasury,¹² this was his reply: Do you command me that I should oppress those over whom I have been appointed (to administer)? By God, I will not do it, as long as the earth survives, and as long as the stars remain. Even if it were my (personal) property, I would have distributed it equally among them, especially when this property belongs to God. Beware; certainly, the giving of wealth to the undeserving is wastefulness and lavishness. It may elevate the giver (in the eyes of the people) in this world, but it lowers his status in the next world (in the sight of God). It may honor him before the people, but disgraces him before God. If a man gives his property to those who have no right to it, or they do not deserve it, then God deprives him (the giver) of the gratefulness of the recipients. Then, if he (the benefactor) were to fall into hard times and needed help, they (the undeserving recipients) would likely be unworthy comrades and ignoble friends.

(Sermon 125)

Imam Ali's Exhortation to Avoid Vanity, to Take Pride in Being Just, and to Perform Good Deeds

Your pride should be for acquiring good qualities, praiseworthy acts, and admirable matters.

You should take pride in praiseworthy habits like helping a neighbor, fulfillment of contracts, being with the virtuous, opposing the haughty, extending generosity, avoiding bloodshed, doing **justice**, controlling anger, and avoidance of making trouble on the earth.

(Sermon 191)

About the People who Remember (Praise) God, Practice Justice, and Invite Others to Do the Same

There are some people who are devoted to the remembrance (of God), who have adopted it in preference to worldly matters (material pursuits) so that commerce or trade does not distract them away from God's remembrance. They pass their lives in this manner. They speak to the neglectful persons, warning them against matters held unlawful by God. They enjoin **justice, which** they themselves practice, and when they forbid the unlawful (and evil) acts, they themselves refrain from them.

(Sermon 220)

His Instructions to His Soldiers Not to Initiate Fighting

Do not take the initiative in fighting (do not initiate hostilities)³ let your enemy begin it. It is the Favor of God that you are on the side of truth and **justice**. Leave them (the enemy) until they begin their hostilities (fighting) and then you are at liberty to fight back. Their (the enemy's) starting the hostilities will be another proof of your obedience to God.

(Letter 14)

His Prayer When Faced with the Enemy

Lord! Let the truth prevail; let the people realize our **just and** honest stance.

(Letter 15)

His Advice to a Government Official

If it is possible for you to be sincerely God-conscious and have sincere faith in His **Justice**, Mercy, and Love (of God), then try to hold firmly the two beliefs (i.e., Heaven and Hell). A man entertains and cherishes the love, reverence, and veneration of God in proportion to His God-consciousness and awe that develops in his mind. Verily, he who fully believes in His **Justice** and fears punishment should expect the best reward in return from God.

(Letter 27)

Part of a Letter Advising His Governors

Remember: always treat them (your subjects) sympathetically, kindly, courteously, and cheerfully.⁴When dealing them, whether rich or poor, big or small in status, you should behave as if they are your equals, so that important persons of the State may not desire to derive undue advantage out of you, and the poor people may not lose hope in your **justice** and sympathy....If you give up equity and **justice**, then you will certainly be considered a tyrant and an oppressor....Remember that nothing can make up for tyranny and oppression.

(Letters 46, 53, 59)

His Advice to the Tax Collectors

Treat the taxpayers with equity and **justice**; listen to their needs with patience and kindness, because you are the representative of the people, and the officer representing the authority over you.

(Letter 51)

One of His Sayings

When Imam Ali (p) was asked about faith, he replied that four pillars support the structure of faith: endurance, conviction, justice, and jihad (struggle):

Justice has four aspects: depth of understanding, profoundness of knowledge, fairness of judgment, and clarity of mind; because whoever tries his best to understand a problem will have to study it, and whoever studies the subject that he is to deal with will develop a clear mind and will come to correct decisions. Whoever tries to achieve all this will have to develop ample patience and forbearance; whoever does this has done justice for the cause of religion, and has led a life of good repute. As far as **justice** and equity are concerned, your treatment should be fair and unprejudiced to everyone.⁵ (Saying 31)⁶

Injustice and Oppression

Know that injustice is of three kinds: 1) the injustice that God will not forgive; 2) the injustice that will not be left unquestioned; and, 3) the injustice that may be forgiven without being questioned. The injustice that will not be forgiven is joining other gods with God (polytheism).

God says: “Verily, God forgives not that (anything) be associated with Him” (referring to polytheism). (Qur’an 4:48, 116)

The injustice that will be forgiven is the one that a man does to himself by committing small sins, and the injustice that will be questioned is that done against others. The retribution in such a case may be severe.

O people, blessed is the man whose own shortcomings keep him from (looking into) the shortcomings of others. Blessed is the man who confines himself to his own affairs, eats his (honestly acquired) sustenance, busies himself with obeying God, weeps (in repentance) over his sins, and people are safe (from any mischief) from him.

(Sermon 175)

A Great Injustice

In a community composed of honest, sober, and virtuous people, forming a bad opinion about one of its members, when nothing unrighteous was actually seen of him, is a great injustice to him.

(A saying)

Rights of Others

Introduction

Recognizing and fulfilling the rights of others holds a pivotal role in any civilized society. It ensures justice, mutual happiness, and peace. Islam has emphasized rights that are mentioned in the scripture. Moreover, Ali bin Husain, the great grandson of Prophet Muhammad (s), wrote a manual 1,400 years ago known as the “Treatise of Rights.” It describes the rights of God over His subjects, the rights of people over God, the rights of parents, children, neighbors, fellow citizens, the ruler, the ruled, etc. About fifty categories of rights have been described.⁷ In the following pages, Imam Ali (p) has touched upon some of these rights.

Rights of God Almighty

O people, remember God, and (remember) that He has enjoined you in His Book (The Qur’an), and His **rights** that He has entrusted to you. Verily, God has not created you in vain, nor left you free, nor left you by yourself, in ignorance.

(Sermon 85)

Seek assistance of God for fulfillment of His obligatory rights (to testify to His Oneness, not associate anyone else with Him, and to worship Him alone) and (thanking Him) for His countless bounties and obligations.

(Sermon 98)

We praise Him in all His affairs and seek His assistance for fulfillment of His **rights**.

(Sermon 99)

To Fulfill the Rights of God

Seek nearness to God by fulfilling His **rights** that He has enjoined upon you In His Book (The Qur’an). He has clearly stated His demands to you.²⁸ I am a witness and I shall plead on your behalf on the Day of Judgment.

(Sermon 175)

About Rights of the Subjects

Nor should he (the ruler) deal unjustly with wealth, thus preferring one group over another, nor should he accept a bribe while making decisions, as he would forfeit the rights (of others).

(Sermon 130)

Fulfilling the Rights of Others

On whomever God bestows wealth, he should use it in extending goodness to his kinsmen, in pleasing them, in releasing those in chains (of poverty and ignorance), for those suffering from illness, in giving to

the poor and to those in debt, and even endure hardship in order to fulfill the rights (of others). Certainly, the achievement of these qualities is the greatest accomplishment in this world, and a means of earning distinction in the next world (the Hereafter), if God so wills.

(Sermon 141)

He (God) has declared paying regard to (the needs of the) believers as the highest of all regards. He has placed their rights in the same grade (of importance) as devotion (to Himself and His Oneness). Therefore, a believer is one from whose tongue and hand every (other) believer is safe, save in the matter of truth. It is not, therefore, lawful to molest a believer, except when it is ordained (by the Law).

(Sermon 166)

Mutual Rights of the Ruler and the Ruled

The greatest of the rights that God, the Glorified, has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the ruled and the right of the ruled over the ruler. This is an obligation which God, the Glorified, has placed on each other. He has made it the basis of their (mutual) affection, and an honor for their religion. Consequently, the ruled cannot prosper unless the rulers are sound, while the rulers cannot be sound unless the ruled are steadfast.

(Sermon 215)

Rulers Who Denied the People Their Rights

Verily, previous rulers have come to a sad end because they denied people their rights; they became corrupted and could be purchased, then succumbed to the temptations of sins and vices, which led them astray, and they followed the wicked.

(Letter 79)

Distribution of Funds (Charity) from Public Treasury

Woe to the person against whom the poor, the destitute, the beggars, and those who have been deprived of their **rights** complain before God.

(Letter 26)

Rights of a Friend

Do not violate the rights of your friend, because when he is deprived of his **rights**, he will no more remain your friend.

(Letter 31)

Kindness, Courtesy, Good Behaviour towards Kin

Introduction

The ultimate aim of all goodness is to please God and gain His nearness and not to expect worldly returns. As Imam Ali (p) points out below, any act to please (exclusively) someone other than God is not accepted by God and may not earn reward in the Hereafter. A vain and arrogant person will not get close to God. Kindness and humility are stressed in the Qur'an.⁹ It was practiced and taught by Prophet Muhammad (s), so much so that God says in the Qur'an that he was the best example to follow, and that he was an example of "sublime morality."¹⁰ Imam Ali (p) reminds us about the bounties of God, cautions against envy, exhorts his followers to take care of the needs of kin, and reminds us that the first individual who demonstrated arrogance and vanity was Satan.

Verily, the Divine orders descend from Heaven to Earth like drops of rain, bringing to every individual what is destined for him, either plentitude or paucity. Therefore, if you see your comrade with abundant wealth or offspring, you should not feel envious. A believer should not commit such an act that, if it is disclosed, it will make him hang his head low in shame.

A believer who keeps away from the dishonest lifestyle expects one of two good things: a generous livelihood in this life or rewards in the life Hereafter. Wealth and children are the adornments of this world, while virtuous deeds are the source of blessings for the next world. To some individuals, God may grant both of these blessings.

Beware of what God has cautioned you, and be God-conscious so that you may not have to make excuses afterwards. Do not be ostentatious, for if a man acts to please someone else other than God, then God does not accept it.

We ask God (to grant us in the Hereafter) the position of the martyrs (who lay their lives for the sake of God), the company of the virtuous and of the prophets.

O people! Surely no one (even though he may be rich) can do without the help and support of relatives, whether be it physical or moral. They alone are his support, who can ward off troubles and show kindness when tribulations fall. The good memories that a godly man leaves behind among people are better than the property that he leaves behind.

Be careful! If any one of you finds your near relatives in want or starvation, he should not desist from helping them. If one holds back, his hand from (helping) his relatives in need, then at the time of his own need, many hands may remain held back from helping him. One who is sweet tempered in dealing with relatives earns their enduring love (and respect).

(Sermon 23)

Silence will earn respect and dignity; justice and fair dealings will increase friends; benevolence and

charity will enhance prestige and position; courtesy will draw benevolence; service of humanity will enhance leadership; and good words will overcome powerful enemies.

(Saying of Imam Ali)

God Does Not Force Humility

If God wanted to create Adam from a light whose glare would have dazzled the eyes, whose handsomeness would have amazed the wits, and whose smell would have caught the breath, He could have done so. If He had done so, everyone would have bowed to him in humility, and the trial of Satan and the angels would have been much easier.

(Sermon 191)

Patience and Nobility of Character

This virtue of patience is one of the highest values of morality, nobility of character, and it is the best behavior that one can adopt.

(Letter 31)

On Politeness

The best nobility of descent exhibits itself in politeness and in refinement of manners.

(Saying of Imam Ali)

His Advice Regarding Generosity and Good Traits

You too should take pride in praiseworthy habits, like helping neighbors, the fulfilling of contracts, being with the virtuous, opposing the arrogant, being **generous to all**.

(Sermon 191)

When one is sure of the returns, he is inclined towards generosity.

(Saying of Imam Ali)

Advice to One of His Governors

Associate with persons belonging to pious and noble families with high ideals and exalted traditions, families well known for their bravery, courage, generosity, and magnanimity.

(Letter 53)

Virtue, Abstinence, and Qualities of a Believer

Introduction

Moderation in every aspect of life is emphasized in Islam. It was both practiced and preached by Prophet Muhammad (s). Lavishness and asceticism are discouraged. On the other hand, even excessive worship resulting in neglecting one's worldly duties is discouraged. The pursuit of vain desires is a human weakness and a potent weapon of Satan to seduce and misguide. In the following passages, Imam Ali cautions people to stay focused on God in order to avoid Satan's trap.

About Curbing Desires

O people! Abstinence means to shorten the desires, to show gratitude to God for His bounties, and to keep away from prohibited things. Do not let abstaining from prohibited things make you lose patience (and demeanor). God has exhausted His arguments to you, through clear, shining examples in His manifest books (the Qur'an, the Torah, and the Gospel).

(Sermon 80)

Characteristics of a Believer

O creatures of God! The most beloved of God is he whom God has given control over his passions. The lamp of guidance is lighted in his heart. He regards what others regard distant (death and resurrection) to be near. He remembers (God) much and strives in His cause. He has a balanced approach to life. He has put off (vain and excessive) desires and is safe from misguidance and passions. He is the key to the doors of guidance and has locked shut the doors of misguidance.

He has held the most reliable and strongest supports. His conviction in God is like that of the brightness of the sun. He has devoted himself to serve God, the Glorified. He is like a lamp (of guidance) in the dark. Everything he did was for the sake of God, so God made him His favorite. He is like a mine of faith (and belief). He has enjoined upon himself (to act with) justice.

The first step of justice for him is the rejection of desires of the heart. He describes what is right and acts according to it. The Qur'an is his guide (in all affairs).

(Sermon 86)

Those Who Walk on the Right Path Are in a Minority

O people, do not wonder at the small number of those who adhere to the right path. O people, you are grouped (in the sight of God) according to your choice of associating with good or evil. (Recount the story of the people of Thamud in the Scripture ;) only one individual killed the (sacred) camel (in a show of rebellion), but God held all the inhabitants accountable and punished them, because all of them consented to his evil act. They, along with their land, were destroyed. O people, he who treads the clear path (of guidance) reaches the spring of (cool) water, and whoever abandons the right path is like the thirsty traveler who strays into a desert that has no water.

(Sermon 200)

His Advice

Therefore, man should secure honor by adopting the following qualities: He should fear the Day of Judgment before it arrives; he should realize that the earthly life is short and it is a place of temporary stay. Blessed be he who possesses a virtuous heart, who is obedient to the (righteous) leader and the guide, and dissociates from him who misguides him; therefore, he treads the path of safety (and virtue). By obeying the leader, he hastens towards guidance before its doors are closed and opens the door of repentance and forgiveness, and thereby removes the (stain of) sin.

(Sermon 213)

God-Consciousness

Introduction

The Arabic word for God-consciousness is "*Taqwa*." It is actually a comprehensive word with many shades of meaning, including piety, God-consciousness, God-fearing, reverence of God, God-wariness, and fear of disconnecting from God. In the Qur'an, the word *Taqwa* is used more than two hundred times in various situations. All the Prophets (p) of God practiced God-consciousness in its highest form. They taught and guided their followers to God-consciousness. God-consciousness, not wealth or power, brings a person close to God.

Characteristics of a God-Conscious Person

The admonitions (from God) are effective only on people with pure hearts, listening ears, firm beliefs, and clear minds. One who is God-conscious listens (to good advice), (humbly) accepts it; when having committed sin, admits it; when fearing (the consequence of sin), it causes him to correct his fault; when apprehensive (about the Hereafter), he hastens (towards good acts); and, he performs virtuous acts out of firm belief. When admonished, he pays heed; when asked to abstain (from evil), he complies. He responds to the call (of God) and is drawn (towards Him); when he falls (into evil), he repents; and, when he was shown (the right path), he adopted it.

Such a man was busy in search of truth and got rid (of evils). He collected provision (of good acts), purified his inner self, and collected provision for the next world, being aware of his departure from this world (death); kept in focus his journey (to the next world), and the provisions he will need there. He sent (provision) ahead of himself for the abode of his (permanent) stay (in the Hereafter). O creatures of God, be God-conscious and keep in view the reason for which He has created you. Make yourself deserving of that which He has promised you (bounties). Have trust in His promises and fear the Day of Judgment.

(Sermon 82)

Enjoining God-consciousness

O creatures of God, I advise you to be conscious of God, who has given examples (for your guidance). He has provided clothing to cover yourselves, and He has provided abundant sustenance for you. He has surrounded you with His signs (so that you may know Him). He has bestowed upon you vast bounties and extensive gifts. He has warned you through convincing arguments (against disobeying Him). He has fixed for you a lifespan in this place of trials (the world). You are tested in this world and will give account (on the Day of Judgment).

(Sermon 82)

O creatures of God! I advise you to be God-conscious; it is the provision with which you will return (to the next world). This provision will help you to make your journey to the next world and reach your destination successfully.

O creatures of God! Certainly, God-consciousness saves the God-loving people from unlawful acts. They pass their nights in wakefulness (in prayers), and during the day, they bear thirst (e.g., from fasting for the sake of God). They achieve ease and comfort (in the Hereafter) through bearing hardship and achieve satiation (spiritual) through bearing thirst. They consider death to be near and therefore hasten to perform (good) deeds. They control (unrestrained and vile desires) and keep death in their sight.

The (life of the) world is filled with tribulations, changing fortunes, and (bitter) lessons. It afflicts the living with death, the healthy with ailment, and the one in ease and comfort with distress and calamity.

An Example of Tribulations

You see a man who collects (wealth) that he may not (fully) make use of, and builds (structures) wherein he may not reside. Then he leaves (this world) to meet his Lord, but he goes without taking the wealth or the real property with him.

An Example of Changing Fortunes

You see a contemptible man who becomes enviable and an enviable man who becomes contemptible by losing his wealth and being struck with destitution and misfortune.

As for Its (Bitter) Lessons

A man is close to achieving his (cherished) desires, and then (suddenly) death strikes; thus, neither the desire is achieved nor the seeker is spared. Glory be to God, how deceitful are the world's pleasures, how insatiable is the thirst for worldly pleasures, and how sunny (hot) is its shade. The approach (of death) cannot be turned back, and the one who departs never returns. Glory be to God, how close death may be to someone, striking (when least expected), and how far removed are the dead (taken to a place of no return).

Nothing is more terrible than evil except its punishment (for the unrepentant), and nothing is more enjoyable than good except its reward. You should know that a little (earned through honest means) is rewarded with much in the next world, and that which is much (earned dishonestly) in this world would earn no reward. In so many cases, little is profitable, while much is a loss.

God has guaranteed your livelihood and has commanded you to act (righteously). Therefore, the pursuit of that which (already) has been guaranteed to you should not get preference over that which has been enjoined upon you (the obligations).

So, hasten towards (good) actions, strive to be pious, and prepare yourself for death (that may approach you unannounced).

(Sermon 113)

Praise be to God, Who made His praise and remembrance a means for the increase of His bounties.

O creatures of God! Time will eventually deal with the living in the same way it dealt with those who passed away. The time gone will not be recovered, and whatever it holds will not remain forever. He who busies himself with something other than reforming himself invites destruction. His base nature immerses him deeply in vices and makes his bad deeds appear (to him) good. Paradise is the destination of those who are forward (in good deeds), and Hell is the abode of those who commit (major) sins (and die unrepentant).

Know O creatures of God that God-consciousness is (like) a strong house that gives protection, while impiety is a weak house, which does not protect its people who take refuge therein.

O creatures of God, He has shown you the way of truthfulness and illuminated its paths. Therefore, (you may) choose either misfortune (of pursuing falsehood), or the eternal bliss of the truthful. Collect provision in this life for the Hereafter. Beware the one who was created for the next world; what does he have to do with this world? What will a person do with the wealth that he would shortly leave behind, while carrying only its ill effects (of unlawful hoarding)?

O creatures of God! Do not disregard the good that God has promised to you, and do not covet the evil that He asked you to refrain from. O creatures of God! Be God-conscious and fear the Day when your actions will be judged.

O creatures of God! Your “self” (soul or conscience) is like a guard (watching) over you; your limbs are vigil keepers that preserve (the record of) your deeds, and (even record) the number of your breaths. The gloom of the dark night cannot conceal your deeds from them, nor can you hide even behind closed doors. Surely tomorrow (the Day of Reckoning) is near.

The present will depart with all that it holds, and the future will come in its wake. Everyone will face death and end up in that lonely place, the grave. Then, (the curtains of) falsehood would be removed

from you, and your excuses at that time would be of no consequence. The truth will become evident. All matters related to you would earn their rewards (good or bad). Therefore, take good counsel, learn from examples, and pay heed to warnings.

(Sermon 156)

An Account of People of the Past and Learning from Their Lives

I advise you, O creatures of God, to practice reverential fear of God (practice God-consciousness), He gave you good clothing and bestowed an abundance of sustenance on you. If there was anyone (in history) who could secure a ladder (to climb up to heaven) to an everlasting life, or a way to avoid death, it was Solomon, son of David (p). He was given control over the domain of the Jinn and men, along with bestowal of prophethood and an honored position, but when he finished what was his due in food (end of life of this world) and exhausted his (fixed) time, the bow of destruction shot him with the arrow of death. His houses became vacant and his habitations became empty. Eventually, another group of people inherited them. Certainly, the bygone centuries have a lesson for you.

Where are the Pharaohs? Where are those who advanced with armies, defeated their foes, mobilized forces, and populated the cities?

(Sermon 181)

Importance of Being God-Conscious

You should, therefore, strive to be God-conscious, because it is a rope that is strong, its height is lofty, and it is indestructible. Be prepared for death before its approach, because the reckoning will be, without doubt, on the Day of Judgment.

“This is a warning for the one with understanding, and a lesson for one who did not know.”

(Qur’an 39:73)

They are safe from chastisement and punishment. Their abode will be peaceful and they will be pleased with their lodging. They are the people whose actions in this world were chaste, their eyes were tearful, their nights in this world were like days because of fearing and seeking forgiveness, and their days were like nights because of feelings of loneliness and separation (from their Lord). Therefore, God made Paradise the place of their (eventual) return as a reward and recompense.

Be patient in trials; do not make haste in matters in which God has not asked for haste. Any one of you who dies in his bed while he had knowledge of the rights of God, the rights of His Prophet, and members of the Prophet’s house, he will die as a martyr. His reward is incumbent on God and will be eligible to the recompense of what good acts he had intended to do.

(Sermon 189)

Advice to Practice God-consciousness and Caution Against the Love of this World

I advise you, O creature of God, that you should have God-consciousness, because it is a right of God over you and it creates your right over God, and that you should seek God's help in (achieving) it, and its (God-consciousness') help in (seeking closeness to) God. Certainly, God-consciousness is a protection and a shield, and for tomorrow (the Day of Judgment), it is the road to Paradise. It is a clear path, and whoever treads on it, succeeds. How few will be those who will tread on this path and practice righteousness! They will be very few in number, and they are the people referred to by God Almighty in the scripture as follows:

“And very few of My creatures are grateful!” (Qur'an 34: 13)

Therefore, hasten towards it (practice God-consciousness) and strive to achieve it. Exchange your sleep (of heedlessness) for wakefulness (of the heedful). Make it (practice God-consciousness) an adornment of your hearts, cleanse your sins with it, and cure your (spiritual) ailments with it. Take a lesson from him (the unfortunate) who neglected it. Beware, you should take care of it and should take care of yourselves through it.

Do not regard him lowly (from his appearance) whom God may have given a high (spiritual) position, and do not consider him high (in spiritual position), simply because this world has given him a high position. Do not cast your eyes on the shining things of the world, do not listen to him who brags about them and beckons you towards them. Its glamour is deceitful, its promises are false, and its wealth is destined to perish.

Beware, this world first attracts (an individual) and then it lets down. It tells lies and misappropriates. It disowns and is ungrateful. It is malicious and abandons (its lovers). It attracts but makes trouble. Its conditions are ever changing, its steps are faltering, its honor is actually disgrace, its seriousness is jest, and its height is lowliness. It is a place of plunder, pillage, ruin, and destruction. About the lovers of the world, the ungodly, the scripture says:

“So wept not on them the heavens and the earth, nor were they respited.” (Qur'an 44:29)

(Sermon 190)

God-consciousness is the key to receiving guidance, the provision for the next world, freedom from every type of slavery, and deliverance from ruin. With its help, the seeker hopes to achieve success (salvation).

Perform (good) deeds while high returns are expected, while repentance may be of benefit, while the prayers are heard, and while the conditions are peaceful. Hasten towards (virtuous) actions before old age (makes you feeble), illness incapacitates, or death (overtakes you). Certainly, death will end your joys and pleasures, and it will cause your (worldly) objectives to be unfulfilled. Certainly, it is an unwelcome visitor, but an invincible adversary. It will be as if it came to you all of a sudden.

Therefore, it is up to you to earn the provisions for the life Hereafter. Let not the life of this world deceive you, as it deceived those who came and departed earlier. Their graves became their abodes and their wealth was inherited by others. They were not aware as to who visited them (at their graves) and they could not even hear those who wept over them. Therefore, beware of this world, which is treacherous, deceitful, and dishonest. Its pleasures are temporary, and the effects from its calamities are lasting.

(Sermon 228)

His Description of a Pious Person

The God-fearing are the people of distinction. Their speech is to the point, their dress is modest, and their gait is humble. They keep their eyes closed to what God has made unlawful for them, and they tune their ears to the knowledge that is beneficial to them. During times of trial, they remain calm. The greatness of the Creator is in their hearts, and everything else appears insignificant to them. To them, Paradise and its enjoyments are as if they are visualizing them. To them, the sufferings and punishment of Hell are as if they are actually witnessing them.

Their hearts are grieved (from seeing the suffering around them), they protect themselves from evil, their bodies are lean (due to fasting and eating less), their needs are few, and their souls are chaste. They endure (hardship of this life) for a brief period, and they, in return, secure lasting bliss (of the Hereafter). It is a beneficial transaction, and God made it available to them. The world tried to allure them, but they did not respond to it. It laid its snare for them, but they avoided it.

During the nights, they recite the Holy Scripture (the Qur'an), and through its recitation they seek spiritual (uplifting and) purification. When they come across a verse describing Paradise, they are attracted to it and visualize it in their imagination. When they come across a verse which contains descriptions of Hell, they feel as though the sounds of Hell are reaching their ears. They prostrate themselves and beseech God, the Sublime, for their deliverance.

They downplay their good deeds. They are quick to accept blame. When someone praises them, they say to themselves, "I know myself better than others, and my Lord knows me better than I know." They then pray: "O' God, do not deal with me according to what they say, make me better than what they think of me, and forgive me for (those of my shortcomings) which they do not know."

The characteristic of the pious one is that he has strength in religion, he has firmness along with leniency, he has faith with conviction, eagerness in (seeking) knowledge, moderation in riches, devotion in worship, gracefulness in deprivation, endurance in hardship, desire for the lawful, and dislike for greed. He performs virtuous deeds but still feels fear (for not doing enough). He thanks and praises God morning and evening. The coolness of his eye lies in the gifts that are everlasting (in the Hereafter), in preference to the things of this world.

His worldly hopes and aspirations are few and simple, his spirit is contented, his meals are small and

simple, his religion safe, and his anger is suppressed. Only good is expected from him. Evil is far removed from him. He forgives him who wrongs him, and he gives to him who deprives him. He behaves well with him who behaves ill with him.

He is soft-spoken; indecent speech is far removed from him. His sins are nonexistent and his virtues are ever many. His manner is dignified during calamities; he is patient in times of distress and is thankful (to God) during times of ease. He deals justly with people, even if he dislikes them, and does not commit sins for the sake of his loved ones. He admits truth, even before evidence is brought against him. He does not withhold what is in his custody and does not forget his obligation. He does not give bad names to others, nor does he harm his neighbor. He does not feel happy at the misfortunes of others; he avoids what is wrong and adheres to what is right.

If he is wronged, he endures and lets God take revenge on his behalf. People feel safe from him. He endures hardships in this life for the sake of the life in the Hereafter. His keeping away from others is by way of asceticism and purification, and his nearness to those to whom he is near is by way of kindness. His keeping away from people is not by way of vanity or feeling of superiority, nor is his closeness to them just for show.

(Sermon 192)

Benefits to the God-Conscious

A God-conscious person keeps troubles away from himself; the difficulties become easy for him, the sustenance increases, God's favors pour forth, and blessings descend down like showers. Therefore, be God-conscious. God gives you good advice. He sent His Messenger to preach to you, and He bestows favors upon you. Thus, devote yourselves exclusively to God.

(Sermon 197)

Individuals Whom Neither Merchandise nor Any Sale Diverts from Remembrance of God

Certainly, God, the Glorified and Sublime, has made His remembrance as a light for the hearts. With the help of this light, the Godly people acquire insight, which guides them to submit to the Divine Will.

During the times when there were no Prophets among people, there were Godly individuals (Saints) through whom God guided His subjects. They gave the good tidings of deliverance to whoever adopted the righteous way, but whoever adopted the wrong ways, they warned him of ruin. In this way, they served as lamps (of guidance) in the midst of darkneses of ignorance.

There are people devoted to remembrance (of God) who have preferred it in place of worldly matters; the commerce or trade does not turn them away from remembrance of God.

You will find them to be fountainheads of guidance. Angels will be circling around them, messages of

peace (from heaven) will be descending upon them, and they will be highly honored because God appreciated their services. They call upon Him with humility, beseeching Him for forgiveness and requesting bounties. God does not become poor by giving, and He does not disappoint those who strive to approach Him.

(Sermon 220)

1. 1 “Your Lord says: “call unto me, I will answer you”(Qur’an 40:60)

2. 1 In those days, funds received from land tax, Zakaat, which is obligatory charity, and other incomes to the state were maintained in the public treasury, and then distributed to the needy population.

3. This was the strict policy of Prophet Muhammad. Imam Ali also adhered to it. Unfortunately, subsequent rulers did not always practice it.

4. The Governor of Province was a virtual ruler in those days.

5. Meaning, rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged, of different religious beliefs, etc.

6. For explanation of the term “Saying,” please refer to the section of abbreviations.

7. See <https://www.al-islam.org/treatise-rights-risalat-al-huquq-imam-zain-ul-a...> [1]

8. 2 The greatest right of God over humankind is that man should worship Him alone and not associate anything or anyone with Him. Belief in strict monotheism is a key message of God in the scripture Qur’an. God says:

“I have not created the Jinn and humans except that they serve (worship) Me” (Qur’an 51:56).

For an explanation of Jinn, please refer to glossary section. Higher form of worship is through knowing God. Serving God is through serving humanity.

9. “And lower for them (your parents) the wings of humility out of compassion and say: ‘Lord, have Mercy on them, as they cherished me when I was little’ ” (Qur’an 17:2).

“God does not forbid you regarding those who have not fought you due to your religion, nor drove you out of your homes, if you show them kindness, and be just to them; verily God loves the just ones” (Qur’an 60:7).

10. “ Indeed, there is for you in the Messenger of God (Muhammad) an excellent pattern of conduct, for him who places his hope in God, and the latter day (Day of Judgment), and remembers God much” (Qur’an 33:21).

“And most certainly you (Muhammad) stand on a sublime standard of morality” (Qur’an 68:4).

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