

6. To Seek Sound Advice

[His Counsel and Preaching, Keys to Success](#)

[Introduction](#)

In this collection of admonishment, counsel, and advice, Imam Ali (p) invites people to honesty, truthfulness, and God-consciousness. This demonstrates his superior knowledge and highest level of spirituality. In a few words, he defines success, which is gaining salvation through prayers and thankfulness to God, repentance, and seeking forgiveness coupled with atonement. He is succinct, yet eloquent. The examples and scenarios here are likely to leave a profound impact on the reader.

[His Caution about This World](#)

The Book of God (The Qur'an) is among you, its arguments (are convincing), and its message is firm (and clear). It is like a building whose pillars are strong, and it is indestructible.

God deputed the Prophet (s) after a gap (in time) from the previous prophets, when there was much talk (among the people of his coming). With him, God ended the series of prophets and thereby completed His revelations. He (God) then defended him from those who rejected and opposed him. Those who are "spiritually blind" do not see beyond this (material) world. The sight of a seer (i.e., one who looks with the "eye of the heart") penetrates through and realizes that the (real) abode is beyond this world. The seer, therefore, looks forward to getting out of this world (through inevitable death), while the (spiritually) blind want to stay here (as long as possible). The former collects provision (from this world) for the next world, while the latter collects provision for this world only.

You should know that a human (who is attached to this world) is hardly ever satiated with the life (of this world), because he does not foresee benefit (in the Hereafter) after death.

You team together seeking (worldly) desires and compete fiercely with each other in accumulating wealth. The evil spirit (Satan) has confused you, and his deceit has misled you. I seek the help of God

for you and for myself.

(Sermon 132)

His Counsel

O creatures of God! Derive benefit from preaching and admonition. Your march is towards the place where everyone has to go, namely, death. The scripture says:

“With every person there is a driver and a witness.” (Qur’an 50:21)

The driver (Angel) leads him towards the day of Resurrection, while the witness (Angel) furnishes evidence about his deeds.

(Sermon 84)

His Admonition

God’s retribution against His enemies is harsh despite His boundless mercy, and His compassion for His friends is great despite His (power of) punishment. He overpowers the one who challenges Him and destroys the one who clashes with Him (e.g., the Pharaoh, who fought against Moses). He disgraces the one who opposes Him and gains sway over one who shows hostility. He is sufficient for the one who puts reliance on Him. He grants him who beseeches Him. He repays the one (generously) who lends Him. He rewards him, who thanks Him.

O creatures of God, examine yourselves (the deeds) before you are examined. Be submissive (to Him) before you are confronted. Know that if one does not become his own counselor (i.e., take charge of his own affairs), then no one else can (do it for him).

(Sermon 89)

Support of the Oppressed

By God, I will take revenge on behalf of the oppressed and will bring the oppressor to justice.

(Sermon 135)

Advice against Corruption and Oppression

O people of Arabia, you will be victims of calamities that are very near. You should avoid the intoxication of wealth, fear chastisement that will be in the form of adversities, and keep steadfast in the face of mischief. Beware, the mischief begins imperceptibly, but develops into great hideousness.

Oppressors start (mischief) by (mutual) consultation. They vie with each other in (securing things of) this lowly world. The follower will denounce the leader, and the leader (will dispute with) the follower. They will rebuke and curse one another. The hearts will become wavering (from lack of faith) after being firm, the people will be misled after guidance, the desires will increase, and opinions will become

contradictory.

Whoever advances towards this mischief will be ruined, sound judgment will be scarce, and the oppressors will be outspoken. This mischief will shake the pillars of faith and shatter the ties of firm belief. The wise will keep away from it, while the wicked will embrace it. It will create chaos. People will forsake kinship and will abandon faith.

Some (honest) people will be killed and become martyrs, and some others will be fear-stricken, (desperately) seeking protection. People will be deceived by phony pledges and fraudulent belief. At that time, you should not become party to mischief and innovations; instead, become the pillars of obedience (to God). Proceed towards meeting with God as one oppressed, rather than as an oppressor. Avoid the paths of Satan and the places that are plotting revolt. Do not fill your bellies with unlawful morsels. You will (ultimately) meet God, Who has made His obedience easy for you, and has declared disobedience unlawful.

(Sermon 150)

His Advice Against Heedlessness

God will make clear to the (unrepentant) sinners the punishment for their sins and remove the veils of their heedlessness. I warn you and myself from such a fate. A prudent individual listens, ponders, observes, and derives benefit from good counsel. He treads on a clear path and avoids pitfalls.

O my listeners! Come out of lethargy, wake up from slumber, and check your hasty actions. Ponder over what has come to you through the Prophet, i.e., the inevitable (the Day of Judgment). Do away with your vanity, drop your haughtiness, and recall your final place of rest (i.e., the grave). You will be dealt with as you deal with others, you will reap what you sow, and what you send today will confront you tomorrow. So provide for your day (of reckoning). Fear, O listeners! Act now, O careless! No one will warn you like him who is bestowed with knowledge (from God).

If a person leaves this world to meet God with one of the following acts unrepentant, then his good deeds will not save him from punishment:

- a) Associated a partner with God
- b) Wilfully killed an innocent human being
- c) Broadcast the faults and sins of others
- d) Introduced innovation in religion for personal benefit
- e) Dealt with people with a double face
- f) Engaged in double-dealings

(Sermon 152)

Fate of an Oppressive Leader

I advise you to be God-conscious. You should know that among all the creation, the most distinguished person before God is a just Imam (leader) who is (divinely) guided and he, in turn, guides others. He stands by the recognized ways of the Prophet's teachings and opposes innovations (in religion). Certainly, the worst person before God is an oppressive Imam (leader) who went astray, and thereby misguided others.

(Sermon 163)

Fulfilling the Rights of Others

God, the Glorified, has sent down a guiding Book (the Qur'an), wherein He has explained virtue and vice. You should adopt virtue, whereby you will receive guidance, and keep away from vice, so that you walk on the right path. Fulfill your obligations for the sake of God, and it will lead you to Paradise. Surely God has made certain things unlawful, and He has declared certain things lawful. He has declared paying respect to fellow believers to be highly important. He has placed their rights in the same degree (of importance) as devotion (to Himself). Therefore, a believer is one from whose tongue and hand every (other)believer is safe. Thus, it is unlawful to oppress or harass a believer.

Be God-conscious in the matter of (the rights of) His creatures and His cities, because you will be questioned even about the land and the beasts (i.e., environment and ecosystem). Obey God. When you see virtue, adopt it, and when you see vice, avoid it.

(Sermon 166)

Caution against the Deception of this World

O creatures of God! I advise you to be God-conscious, because it is the best advice and the best of all things in the sight of God. You should carry out your duties and desist from the prohibited (acts). Do not make haste in (acting upon) a matter until you have ascertained its correctness.

Know that this world, which you covet, sometimes upsets you and sometimes pleases; it is not your (permanent) abode, nor the place of your stay for which you were created. Know that it will not last forever, nor will you live here indefinitely. While you are here, advance towards that house to which you have been called (in the Hereafter) and your hearts turn away from (love of) this world.

(Sermon 172)

His Advice to Be Obedient to God

Obey the commandments of God, because God has provided you clear guidance and you have no excuse (to act otherwise). He has clearly explained to you the acts He approves and the acts He

disapproves. The Prophet of God used to say: “(The Road to) Paradise is surrounded by unpleasant things (i.e., duties, trials, and tribulations), while (the Road to) Hell is surrounded by (alluring) desires.”

You should know that obedience to God might appear to be unpleasant (sometimes), while His disobedience may seem enjoyable (often). May God have mercy on the person who controlled his desires and curbed (vain) appetites of his heart, because the heart leads to disobedience through desires.

O creatures of God, know that this Qur’an is a counselor and a guide that never deceives or misleads and does not contain any falsehood. No one will read or listen to this Qur’an but that his guidance will increase, or a certain (spiritual) blindness will be removed. Therefore, seek cure for your ailments from it and seek its help in (overcoming) your distresses (and difficulties). It cures many spiritual ailments, like unbelief, hypocrisy, misguidance, etc. Therefore, seek approach to God through it (the recitation of the Qur’an) and through prayers.

(Sermon 175)

About Verbal Abuse of One’s Enemies

I dislike you badmouthing (even) your enemies. However, if you recollect and recount their actions, that would be better. Instead of abusing them, say, “O God! Save our blood and their blood, produce reconciliation between them and us, and lead them out of their misguidance, so that he who is ignorant of the truth may acquire knowledge of it, and he who inclines towards rebellion may turn away from it.”

(Sermon 205)

About Self-Deception, Neglect, and Ignorance

O people! What has emboldened you to (commit) sin? What has deceived you about God and made you content with self-destruction? Is there no cure for your ailment or no awakening from your sleep (of heedlessness)? Do you not take pity on yourself, as you do on others? Generally, when you see anyone exposed to hot sunlight, you provide him with shade, or if you see anyone afflicted with severe pain, you weep (show compassion) out of pity for him. What has made you so tolerant about your own (spiritual) affliction? What has prevented you from weeping over yourselves, although your life is the most precious of all lives to you, and why does not the fear of an ailment that may befall you at night keep you wakeful, although you are on the way to the wrath of God because of your sins?

You should strive to get rid of the ailment that has afflicted your heart, and wake up from the sleep of the heedless. Strive to be obedient to God and love (enjoy) remembering Him. You are running away from Him, while He is calling you to Himself. He is calling you to forgive and cover your faults out of His kindness. Certainly exalted is God Almighty, Who is generous, whereas you are weak (in faith), yet so bold to disobey Him, knowing that you live under His protection and your nourishment comes from His unlimited kindness. He does not deprive you of His kindness and does not remove His protection. In

fact, you have not been without His kindnesses even for a single moment, a favor that He conferred, a sin that He concealed, or a calamity that He warded off!

Truly, the world did not deceive you, but you chose to be deceived by it. It is a fair abode for him who is not attached to it and an agreeable place for him who does not regard it as a permanent abode.

Only those who reject (attachment to) this world will be regarded as virtuous in the Hereafter. When the earthquake will shake the earth and the Day of Resurrection is heralded with all its severities, then the people will seek refuge in the places of their worship. They will cling to the object of their devotion. People will be in groups with their respective leaders. On that Day, arguments will prove useless and excuses will be rejected.

Therefore, you should now adopt for yourself the course with which your excuse may hold good and your plea may be accepted. From the things of this world, take those that will be of use to you (in the next world), gather provisions for your (eternal) journey, and keep (your) sight on the deliverance (in the Hereafter).

(Sermon 221)

[A Man in the Audience Requested Imam Ali to Preach about Leading a Sober Life](#)

Imam Ali thereupon advised him thus:

Do not be among those people who want to gain good returns without working for them, or those who have big hopes and keep on postponing repentance and penance, and who talk like the pious but prefer worldly pleasures.

Do not be among those who are dissatisfied despite being bountiful; they are not content with their modest means. They do not thank God for what they receive and keep on asking for more. They invite others to good deeds that they themselves do not practice; they appreciate goodness in other people, but do not adopt it; they dislike evil and vicious people, but actually they follow their ways of life. They are afraid of death because of their numerous sins, but do not amend their sinful lifestyle. If fallen ill, they show repentance, but on regaining health they fall back into their old ways; when faced with misfortune, they turn to God, beseeching Him for relief, and when relief comes, they are deluded by their ease and comfort and become heedless, and they forsake (mandatory ritual) prayers.

Their minds are allured by daydreaming and high hopes, and they abhor facing the realities of life; they predict severe punishment for the sins of others, but for their own sins they expect very light chastisement. Riches make such people arrogant, rebellious, and wicked; and financial difficulty makes them despondent and dejected.

Calamities and adversities make them lose hope, and they become impatient. They are good at preaching but poor in implementing. They are quick to acquire temporal pleasures but are careless

about earning benefits of the Hereafter. They often censure others, being quick to pass verdicts, and are boastful of their own deeds while they overlook their own faults. They prefer the company of the rich and influential, wasting time in luxuries and vices, and they are averse to the company of the less privileged, pious people. They demand obedience from others, but they are not obedient to God. They collect their dues readily, but do not readily give up that which belongs to others. They do not fear God; they fear His subjects instead.

(Letter 31)

His Advice (Will) to His Sons

(This advice was given before his death, after an enemy fatally injured Imam Ali on the head with a poisoned blade while he was praying in the mosque.¹)

My sons, I advise you to be God-conscious. Do not go after this corrupt world, though it may try to entice you. Do not seek it, though it may seek you, and do not grieve over and yearn for things that this world denies you. Let the eternal reward and blessings of God guide you for all that you say and do. Despise tyrants and oppressors and be a friend and helper for the oppressed.

To you, and to my other children, and to my relatives, and to all who receive a will of mine, I enjoin you to be God-conscious and to be pious; to do fair and honest dealings with one another; and to strengthen bonds with your kin, because I have heard your grandfather, the Prophet (s), saying: *“To remove mutual enmity, ill feeling, and hatred is better than (optional) prayers and fasting.”*

Be God-wary when the helpless orphans are the issue. You should never let them starve. As long as you are there to guard and protect them, no harm should come to them. The Prophet (s) had always advised, cautioned, and reminded us of this responsibility, so much so that we often wondered that the Prophet of God might even assign the (orphans) a share from our inheritance.

Be God-wary regarding what is in the Holy Qur’an, lest others should surpass you in following its tenets and obeying its commands. Fear God in regards to keeping up with (obligatory) prayers, because (obligatory) prayers are pillars of your faith. Be God-wary in regard to His Holy House (K’aba). Let it not be deserted, because if it is deserted, then you will be the losers.

Do not be forgetful of God. Struggle in His cause with your tongue, with your wealth, and with your lives. Develop mutual friendships, love, and support for one another. Take care that you do not spurn and treat one another in an uncaring and unsympathetic manner. Exhort people to do good and enjoin them to abstain from evil. If you do not, then the vicious and the wicked will become your rulers, and if you willingly allow them to be your rulers, then God will not answer your prayers. O people, let there be no (acts of) revenge against my murderer, and do not roam about withdrawn swords. Moreover, do not start a massacre of my opponents and enemies.

See to it that only my assassin alone is executed as punishment (according to the law of the land), for

the punishment of the crime of murder is death for the murderer, and nobody else should be molested.

The execution of the man who injured me shall take place only when I succumb to the wound delivered by him, and this punishment shall be only one stroke of the sword to end his life. He should not be tortured before his death, and his hands and feet should not be amputated, because I have heard the Prophet (s) saying: *“Do not mutilate anyone, be it a vicious dog.”*

(Letter 47)

The Wonderful Human Brain

Look at the brain of a human being; it is a wonderful organ. Look what good and bad tendencies originate from it. On one hand, it holds treasures of knowledge and wisdom, and on the other hand, it harbors lowly desires. If a man gives way to avarice, then excessive desires ruin him. If he is disappointed, then he is overcome with despondency. If he gets agitated, he loses temper. If he is pleased, then he gives up precaution.

Sudden fear makes him stunned and nervous, and he is unable to think and find a way out of the situation. During times of peace and prosperity, he becomes careless and unmindful of the future. If he acquires wealth, then he becomes haughty and arrogant. If he is plunged in distress, then his agitation, impatience, and nervousness disgrace him. If he is overtaken by poverty, he finds himself in a very sad plight. Hunger makes him weak and overeating harms him. In short, every kind of loss and gain makes him mentally (and emotionally) unstable.

(A Saying)

The World is a Place to Earn Rewards in the afterlife

Certainly, this world is a house of truth for those who look into it carefully. It is an abode of peace and rest for those who understand its ways and moods, and it is the best working place for those who want to earn rewards for life in the Hereafter. It is a place of acquiring knowledge and wisdom for the seeker and a place of worship for the friends of God. It is the place where Prophets received revelations from God. It is the place for virtuous people and saints to perform good deeds and to earn rewards. Only in this world could they earn God's favors, rewards, and blessings by performing good deeds. Where else could all these be accomplished? It has taught us that all of its inhabitants are to face death (eventually). It has given an indication of calamities that may befall, and its pleasures are short-lived. It raises hope of prosperity in the evening and causes anxieties and worries the next morning. There are people who will praise this world on the Day of Judgment for reminding them of the Hereafter, for they benefited in the afterlife from their works (in the worldly life).

(A Saying)

Keys to Success

Possessing the following four qualities are keys to benefit and success:

1. One who prays to God and beseeches Him will not be deprived of the answer to his/her prayers.
2. One who repents (sincerely) will not be denied acceptance of the repentance.
3. One who atones for his/her sins will not be deprived of the salvation.
4. One who shows gratitude to God for blessings and bounties will not be denied the continuation (of blessings) and may receive an increase in the bounties.

God grants the request of one who asks him, grants forgiveness to one who repents, and He will increase the bounties and blessings for one who shows gratitude to Him.

(A Saying)

Advice to His Son

My son, learn four things from me, and through them you will learn four more. If you keep them in mind, your actions will not bring any harm to you.

1. The greatest wealth is wisdom.
2. The greatest poverty is stupidity.
3. The worst antisocial traits are vanity and self-glorification.
4. The best nobility of descent exhibits itself in politeness and in refinement of manners.

The next four things, my son, are:

1. Do not make friendship with a foolish person, because when he tries to do you good, he will actually do you harm.
2. Do not make a miser your friend, because he will run away from you at the time of your dire need.
3. Do not be friendly with a vicious and wicked person, because he will sell you and your friendship at the cheapest price.
4. Do not befriend a liar, because, like a mirage, he will make you see things near which in reality are very far, and vice versa.

His Advice to His Uncle

Sometimes a man feels happy for obtaining a thing, being unaware that it would have come to him in any case because it was so destined. Sometimes a man becomes sad at not being able to obtain a (certain) thing, being unaware that it was not destined for him and he could never have acquired it. The things that should please you are the ones that will bring you reward in the Hereafter, whereas you should feel sorry only for losing the rewards of the next world.

(Letter 22)

1. Ali (p) survived for three days after the injuries. He continued to advise and preach, and made his last will and testament.

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