

7. To Govern Justly

- Letter to Maalik-al-Ashtar, the New Governor of Egypt
- Advice to Governors and Public Officials
- His Instructions to Army Officers
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[Letter to Maalik-al-Ashtar, the New Governor of Egypt](#)

Due to its excellence, this letter was read in the United Nations by the secretary general

[Introduction](#)

This letter contains orders issued by Imam Ali (p) to Maalik- al-Ashtar, the newly appointed governor of Egypt. The governor's duties included collecting religious tax, combating the enemy, looking after the welfare of the people, and ensuring the region's prosperity. The principles laid down in this letter are profound, unique, and of far-reaching significance. These principles of governing in a just and honest manner are so outstanding that this letter was read in an economic forum in the United Nations by the then Secretary General as guidelines for world leaders.

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, I order you, O Maalik, to be God-conscious at all times, to give priority to worshipping Him, and to obey His Commands in preference to everything else in life, to obey the commandments faithfully according to the Holy Scripture, as well as the teachings of the Prophet (s). The success of a person to achieve happiness in this world and in the next world depends on it.

I order you to use all your faculties and limbs to help your subjects (the creatures of God), because Almighty God helps those who sincerely try to help Him (through helping people). God has further ordered you to keep your desires under control and to restrain yourself against vice and wickedness.

Your soul (base self) incites and drags you towards infamy and damnation, unless the Merciful Lord comes to your help (to guide).

This is only a portion of the lengthy document. For reading the full document, please refer to the original text in English at www.nahjulbalagha.com [1]

Let it be known to you, that I am sending you as the governor to the country that has seen many regime changes. Some of them were benign, sympathetic, and good, while others were tyrannical, oppressive, and cruel. People will judge your administration in the same manner as you have done to other regimes.

You must know that a good and virtuous person is recognized by the words of approval by others. Therefore, make yourself a fountainhead of goodness in thoughts, intentions, and deeds. This can only be achieved by controlling desires, regardless of how strong they are. Remember that the best way to do justice to your inner self and to keep it out of harm's way is to exercise restraint from falling victim to vice and (base) desires.

You must create in your mind kindness, compassion, and love for your subjects. Do not behave towards them as if you are a ravenous beast and as if your success lies in devouring them.

Use Mercy and Compassion in Dealing with Your Subjects

Remember, your subjects are of two categories: Either brothers of yours in faith, or peers of yours in humanity. People of either category suffer from the same weaknesses and defects that human beings are inclined to; they commit sins, indulge in vices, either intentionally or unintentionally, not realizing the enormity of their deeds. Let your mercy and compassion come to their rescue in the same way that you expect God to show you mercy and forgiveness. You must never forget that you are a ruler over them, the Caliph is the ruler over you, and God is the Supreme Lord over the Caliph. The truth is that God has appointed you as the governor to test you by giving you authority over people.

A false sense of prestige is akin to declaring war against God. You can never free yourself from the need of God's Mercy and Compassion.

Do not hesitate to forgive and forget. Do not be too quick to punish, and do not be proud of your powers. Do not get easily angered, and do not lose your temper over the mistakes and failures of your subordinates. Be patient and be sympathetic. Anger or desire of vengeance will not help you. Never tell yourself, "I am their Lord, their ruler, and I must be obeyed submissively and humbly," because such a thought will make you vain and arrogant, and it will weaken your faith in God. If you take pride or feel vain because of your authority, then think of the supreme authority and rule of the Lord of the Universe. Think of the vastness of His creation, His Might, His Glory, His absolute Power to do whatever He wills, which you cannot even dream of possessing. Such thoughts will keep you away from vanity, arrogance, and haughtiness, and it will restore sanity and balance in your mind.

Oppression Invokes God's Wrath

Never pretend to possess power and might similar to that of God's, because the Mighty Lord will always humiliate and degrade tyrants. As far as your personal affairs (including relatives and friends) are concerned, make sure that they do not conflict with the duties of your office laid down upon you by God, and that you do not usurp the rights of the people. Be impartial and be just to them, because if you give up equity and justice, then you will certainly become a tyrant and an oppressor. Whoever oppresses the subjects of God will earn His wrath and the hatred of those oppressed; and whoever earns the wrath of God, he loses the chances of attaining salvation. He will not have an excuse to offer on the Day of Judgment.

Every tyrant and oppressor is an enemy of God, unless he repents and reforms. Remember, there is nothing in this world more likely to turn God's Blessings into His wrath than to persist upon oppressing His subjects, because the Merciful God always hears the prayers of the oppressed. You must adopt a policy that is neither too severe nor too lenient, a policy that is based upon equity. Remember that the dissatisfaction of common folks and the have-nots weighs heavier than the approval of a few important persons. The displeasure of a few important people will be excused by the Lord if the masses are happy with you.

The poor and Less Privileged are Strong in Faith

Remember! The "big and important" persons are (quite often) mentally the scum of the human society. They will be a drag upon you during your moments of peace and happiness, and they will be least useful to you during your hours of need. They hate justice the most, will keep on demanding from you more and more of the State's resources, and will seldom be satisfied with what they receive. They will not feel obliged for the many favors received, if any of their unjustified demands are rejected; they will never accept any reasonable excuse or any rational argument. You will not find them faithful and loyal.

The common folks, the poor, and the less privileged among your subjects are the pillars of the religion. They are the real power and defense against the enemies of the state. Pay due attention to their affairs, be friendly with them, and gain their trust and goodwill. Do not pry into shortcomings in people that are not obvious. Leave them to God. However, those weaknesses in your subjects that come to your attention, you must help them to overcome those weaknesses. Do not expose the shortcomings of the people, so that God may conceal yours.

Discourage envy among the people and try to root out mutual distrust and enmity among your subjects.

Deal with All using Justice

Be fair and just in your dealings with all, and be careful not to make your personality, position, and actions as a source of malice. Do not let any undeserving person get too close to you. Never lower your

dignity and prestige. Remember that backbiters and scandalmongers belong to a mean and cunning group, though they pretend to be sincere advisers. Do not make haste to believe in the news they bring and do not pay (much) heed to their advice.

Do not accept the advice of miserly people; they will try to keep you away from acts of kindness and good deeds. They will try to make you fear poverty.

Similarly, do not let cowards act as your advisers, because they will make you timid in enforcing your orders, scare you from courageously handling important affairs, and make you less effective. At the same time, avoid a greedy and covetous person who would aspire to the position of acting as your counselor and advise you to exploit the community and oppress the people. Remember that miserliness, cowardice, and greed arise from lack of faith and trust in God.

The worst among your officers will be the ones who had served under despotic rulers and had committed atrocities. Find individuals who are wise, learned, honest, truthful, and pious. Such individuals will prove the least troublesome to you. They will be sympathetic to your causes. Keep such people with you as your companions and take them to official public meetings. Some of them would receive your full confidence and trust. They are those who can always speak out the truth without reservation, without fear of your status, and would refuse to cooperate with you in any action that God may not approve. Train them not to flatter you and not to seek your favor by false praises, because flattery and false praises create vanity and conceit.

You should not treat good and bad people alike, because in this way you will be discouraging good persons and emboldening the wicked. Everyone should be treated according to what he/she deserves.

Realize that a ruler can create goodwill, faithfulness, and sincerity in the minds of his subjects only when he is kind and considerate to them when addressing their needs and does not oppress and demand from them what is beyond their means. These are the principles that you should keep in mind, and you must act upon them.

Let your attitude be such that people do not lose faith in you, because good faith on their part will reduce many troubles of your administration and will relieve you of many worries and anxieties. Put your confidence and trust in those whom you have tested. Do not give up those practices which have created unity and amity among the various sections of the society and which have benefited the masses. Do not break them and do not introduce innovations, because if you do away with the good rules and traditions, the divine punishment of having despoiled them will be your lot.

Different Classes of People in the Society

You must know that the people over whom you rule are divided into various classes. The prosperity and welfare of the classes of the society is interdependent upon their mutual well-being, such that the whole setup is like a closely woven net. One class cannot exist peacefully, happily, and cannot function without

the support and the goodwill of the other.

There is the class of soldiers who defend (the state for) God's cause. The next class is that of the secretaries and the clerks. The third is that of the judges and magistrates. The fourth is that of the officers who maintain law and order. Then there are common folks, the taxpayers. Next is the class of men who are professionals and merchants, and the last, but not the least, are the poor and the have-nots, who are at the lowest segment of the society. The Merciful God has fixed rights and duties for each one of them, a complete code that is with us.

☞ As far as the soldiers are concerned, they guard and defend the State and its inhabitants. They maintain peace. In fact, they are the real guardians of peace, and they help maintain a sound administration. The upkeep and maintenance of an army depends upon the taxes collected by the State. Out of that, God has fixed a share for them.

☞ The common folks constitute an important class of citizens, but in a Welfare State their well-being cannot be guaranteed without proper functioning of the other classes, including the judges and magistrates, the secretaries, and the officers of various departments who collect revenues, maintain law and order, as well as preserve peace and amity among the various classes of the society.

☞ The prosperity of the society depends upon the traders and industrialists. They act as a medium between the consumers and the suppliers. They know the needs of the society. They provide consumer goods, the essential necessities of life, and operate markets and trading posts.

☞ Then next is the class of the poor, disadvantaged, and the disabled. It is absolutely necessary that they should be looked after and adequately provided for. The Merciful God has described the ways and means of providing for this class. Every member of this class has the right, upon the ruler of the State, to receive help for their basic needs.

Remember that Almighty God will not absolve any ruler from his obligations unless he sincerely tries his best to discharge them. Therefore, invoke God to help you in the discharge of your duties you encounter.

Choosing the Commander-in-Chief of the Army

He should be a person who is most sincere and faithful to God, to the Prophet (s), and to the Imam (spiritual leader). The candidate should be one who is pious, known for his forbearance, clemency, and gentleness, who is neither short-tempered nor does he get angry quickly, who sympathetically evaluates just excuses and accepts apologies; who is kind and compassionate with the weak, but severe against the strong and the powerful; who has no vindictiveness that might lead to (in his subjects) violence or an inferiority complex, or weak-mindedness, or that makes people feel helpless and dejected. To find and select such a person, you should make contacts with honorable and noble families well known for their bravery, courage, generosity, and magnanimity.

When you have found and selected such a person, then keep an eye on him, as a parent watches over the child, so that you discover if there appears any change in his behavior. Treat him kindly. Do not deny deserving promotions or small requests. This will make him trust you, and he will be faithful to you. Do not overlook his minor needs, because small favors often yield good results. Paying careful attention to his major needs is very important.

His Concluding Advice

Imam Ali (p) here enumerates what is required of a ruler. For the sake of brevity, only pointers are given here. For the interested reader, the details are available elsewhere.

- ☞ Do not keep secluded from people for an extended period.
- ☞ Neither be overly generous, nor be stingy.
- ☞ Watch out for your favorites, who may want to take advantage of you.
- ☞ Give due rights to whomever they may belong.
- ☞ Make peace with your enemy at every opportunity available.
- ☞ Honor pledges and agreements made with the enemy.
- ☞ Avoid shedding blood without justification.
- ☞ Avoid conceit and self-admiration.
- ☞ Avoid laying obligation on your subjects for helping them as part of your job.
- ☞ Do not appropriate a share for yourself more than what is due.

His Concluding Remarks

I pray to God invoking His limitless Mercy and His Might, that He incline us towards goodness, and to guide you and me to that which will please Him and will earn pleasure of the people and bring prosperity and honor. May He cause you and me to die as martyrs (in His service). In the end, we all return to Him. I end the message by sending peace and blessings on the Prophet and his purified descendants.

Advice to Governors and Public Officials

Introduction

In this chapter, Imam Ali (p) deals with the responsibilities and methods of administration for government officials under his rule. He places the highest emphasis on honesty, integrity, observing the law, humility,

and charity. Above all, he emphasizes awareness of accountability to God for the actions of an administrator or a high government official.

Mutual Rights of the Ruler²³ and the Subjects:

God, the Glorified, by placing me over your affairs, has given me a right over you, and similarly you have a right over me. A right may be very vast in description, but very precise in its application. A right also carries accountability to the same degree. God, the Glorified, has decreed (as) His right that His subjects should worship Him alone, and has made incumbent upon Himself to reward them abundantly. He created certain rights for some people against others. Some of these rights give rise to other rights.

The greatest of rights that God, the Glorified, has made obligatory are the rights of the ruler over the ruled, and the rights of the ruled over the ruler. The subjects cannot prosper unless the ruler is sound, while the ruler cannot be sound unless the subjects are steadfast. If the subjects fulfill the rights of the ruler and vice versa, then the religion is correctly practiced, and justice is established. This will lead to a stable government and will discourage the foes. However, if mutual rights are not upheld, then it will lead to oppression and mischief in the land. The desires would be aroused, the commands (of religion) would be discarded, diseases of the soul would increase, and greater wrongs would be committed. In such circumstances, the virtuous are humiliated while the vicious are honored. The chastisements from God, the Glorified, will then come upon the people.

You should therefore counsel and cooperate with one another (for the fulfillment of your obligations). This is an obligation on all people from God, regardless of their position, honor, and God-consciousness.

If a man regards God's glory to be supreme, then he should regard everything else to be less significant. God's bounties do not increase without a reciprocal increase in God's right over His subjects.

The worst traits in a ruler are vanity and pride. I abhor high praises accorded to me. God, the Glorified, is more deserving of such praises. Do not praise me for the obligations I discharge, because I fear about those obligations which I have yet to discharge, and do not address me in a manner that (fearsome) despots are addressed. Do not show flattery to me and do not think that I will be offended when a truth about the affairs of state is pointed out. Therefore, do not hesitate in pointing out a matter of justice, because I do not regard myself above committing an error. Certainly you and I are servants of God; there is no lord except Him. He is the owner of our souls. He bestowed upon us prosperity, guidance, and intellect.

(Sermon 215)

About the Qualities of a Ruler

O God, You certainly know that the ruler who is in charge of honor, lives, wealth, law, and order should not be a miser or a greedy individual, for then he would misappropriate wealth; nor should he be

ignorant, for then he would mislead his subjects; nor should he be of rude nature, for he would then estrange his subjects; nor should he be inequitable, preferring one group over another. He should not accept bribes while making decisions, for he would then forfeit rights (of others), nor should he ignore the Prophet's teaching, as he would ruin the faith.

(Sermon 130)

Letter to a High Official

Give up extravagance and be moderate in expenditure (with public funds). Do not let the pleasures of today make you forget tomorrow, the Day of Reckoning (Judgment). Distribute excess monies (beyond the needs of the government) to the poor, so that it may act as a provision for you in the next world. Do you expect God to grant you rewards reserved for courteous, kind, and benevolent people while you actually are proud, vain, haughty, and miserly? Do you hope to receive His Blessings reserved for charitable, generous, and kindhearted persons who always help the poor and the needy, while you indulge in luxuries and prevent any part of your wealth from reaching the disabled, the widows, and the destitute?

Remember, a person receives the reward in the next world according to the actions in this world.

(Letter 21)

Letter to the Judge of a Province

Imam Ali (p) learned that the Chief Justice of a province had purchased a very expensive house for an amount far below market price from an individual (probably) seeking a favor in return. Imam Ali (p) summoned him and warned him that this deal was made with money that was not his. He warned him that this would make him lose a place in Paradise. Had the Chief Justice consulted him, the Imam would have disapproved the deal.

If you had come to me prior to this transaction, I would have drafted such a deed of sale for you that you would not have cared to purchase this property even for a small fraction of the cost. The transfer deed would have been worded like this:

“A humble and powerless creature has purchased this house from another mortal being. Its boundaries are as follows: On one side, it is bounded by calamities and disasters; on the other side, there is disappointment and grief; on the third side it is bounded by excessive desires leading to failure; and on the fourth side, it has the allurements of Satan. The door of this house opens towards this fourth side.

“A man leading his life under the merciless grip of desire has purchased this house from another person who is being relentlessly pursued by death. For the purchase price, he has exchanged the glory of an honorably contented and respectable way of living, with the detestable life of submitting to every form of humiliation for profits and pleasures.

“His fate now lies in the hands of Him (Almighty God) Who sends the bodies of kings into dust and overthrows their empires, and Who has brought to an end the dominions of ancient Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the kings of Yemen. He destroyed the wealth, power, and glory of all those individuals who had amassed excessive wealth, built mansions, furnished them luxuriously, and surrounded them with beautiful gardens. The owner of such properties will have to account for on the Day of Judgment, the day on which evildoers will suffer for their wicked ways.”

(Letter 3)

Instructions to a Newly Appointed Young Governor of Egypt

Treat people with respect and be kind and considerate. Meet them cheerfully. Be fair, just, and impartial in your dealings, so that the influential persons may not dare take undue advantage of your leniency, and the ordinary folks and the poor may not feel ignored.

O creature of God! Remember that the Almighty Lord is going to take an account of each of your sins, be they major or minor, committed openly or secretly. If He punishes you, it will be His justice, and if He forgives you, it will be because of His Great Mercy and Forgiveness.

Remember, the pious passed away from this world after having led a respectable and fruitful life, and they are going to be rewarded in the next world. While leaving the world, they carried provisions that would be of use in the next world.

Fear death; it is inevitable and near. Be prepared to meet it. Verily, it will come as the most important and the greatest event of your life; it will bring blessings and rewards (of the Hereafter) for you, or it will bring in its wake punishment, suffering, and eternal damnation. There will be no chance of redemption (after death). It is for you to decide whether to proceed towards perpetual peace and blessings, or towards damnation. Remember that life is actually driving you towards death. Death is as if it is wound around your neck, and life is as if it is being unwound with each breath.

Hell is an abode where the prayers and pleadings of those thrown there will not be accepted (because they died unrepentant).

Fear (disconnecting from) God, as well as have hope in His Justice, Mercy, and Love. Hold these two beliefs (i.e., hope and fear) equally. An individual entertains and cherishes the love, reverence, and veneration of God in proportion to His fear and awe that develops in his mind.

Remember, I have entrusted you with the command of the most important section of my army, which is the Egyptian army. Do not allow your whims and passions to overcome your judgment. Keep on guarding and defending your religion and the State given under your trust. Be careful, for in order to gain the pleasure of a person, you should not incur the Wrath of God upon you for even a single moment.

Remember that the Pleasure of God is better than the pleasure of all His subjects (combined), and most

beneficial for you. Nothing can take the place of His good pleasure. Offer your (obligatory) prayers on time, do not rush through them, and never delay in offering them. Remember that the God-consciousness and nobility of your actions are judged by the sincerity and punctuality of your (obligatory) prayers.

Remember that a true Imam and leader cannot be equated with the one who leads humanity towards wickedness, vice, and Hellfire. Nor can they be equal: A follower of the Prophet (s), and his sworn enemy.

(Letter 27)

Letter to the Governor of Basra in Iraq

I have received information that a person of Basra invited you to a dinner and you immediately accepted the invitation. I have also heard that very sumptuous meals were served there. The finest varieties of viands were placed before you in large plates, and you enjoyed them. I am sorry to hear the news. I never expected that you would accept the invitation of a person who invites big officers and rich people, but from whose doors the poor, the destitute, and the hungry are rudely turned away.

Look carefully into the things that you eat. If there is even a trace of their being obtained unlawfully, then throw them away. Eat only those things about which you are certain that they are obtained by honest means. Every follower of religion has a leader from whom to learn the canons of the religion and the ways of leading a pious life.

Happy is the person who performed his duty to God and to people, who bore adversities patiently, and, when sleep overpowered him, he used his hand as a pillow and lay on mere earth along with those whom fear of the Day of Judgment has often kept awake. He does not find much time to sleep; his lips are busy glorifying God, and his sins have been absolved because of repentance. He is a noble person and he will secure salvation. Therefore, be God-conscious and be content with the bread that you get with lawful means, so that you may be saved from punishment on the Day of Judgment.

(Letter 45)

Letter to a Companion

This world is like a serpent; it is soft (pleasant) to touch, yet lethal in its bite. Therefore, try to avoid those things of this world that please and allure you, because this world will be with you for a very short period (only). Do not let your mind be fully occupied in mundane affairs, because you know that you will soon leave this world.

Be most wary and cautious of this world, because when it pleases you the most and you are happy with it and feel secure, it will suddenly forsake you.

(Letter 68)

Letter to a High Government Official

Never forsake the ordinances and advice contained in the Qur'an. Accept the rulings therein regarding the lawful and the prohibited. Take lessons from history, for history often repeats itself.

This whole world is eventually going to end and every individual has to leave it (at the appointed time). Be particularly careful not to swear by God Almighty, unless you are taking an oath for a true and lawful affair. Always remember death (be prepared for it), but never wish for it.

Abstain from an act done secretly that will make you feel ashamed if done openly. Refrain from a deed for which you will have regret and have to make an apology or an excuse. Do not allow your good reputation to be sullied. Do not accept rumors (unverified) as facts, for such a practice will be sufficient for you to be regarded by others as a liar. Do not develop the habit of contradicting and falsifying others on every occasion, because it is a disgusting habit.

Control your temper, and even if you have power to retaliate, (it is better to) forgive and forget.¹ When in anger, try to be forbearing and tolerant. Despite being in possession of wealth and authority, be forgiving, merciful, and compassionate. These qualities will help you to achieve salvation. Be sincerely thankful for all the blessings that the Merciful God has granted you. Pray for the continuance of the blessings; do not abuse and squander them.

Always look at the conditions of people who are less well off than you, because observing their lives will make you more content with your lot in life and make you more thankful to God (for your blessings).

Do not travel on Fridays without offering Friday prayers, unless there is a state of war or you have no other alternative.

Take care that such a calamity may not overtake you that while you are ignoring religious obligations and (heedless of duties to) God, and running after vanities of the world, death (suddenly) overtakes you.

Be afraid of your anger, because out of all the weapons of Satan, inciting anger (in a person) is his strongest (weapon).

(Letter 69)

Letter to a Corrupt Official

I have received reliable information that you do not check and control your excessive desires, that you do not attach any importance to your life after death, that you want to adorn and beautify your life at the cost of your salvation, and that you are forsaking your religion in order to benefit your relatives. Men of your disposition are not to be trusted with financial affairs, or to be appointed to important posts of the State. Therefore, as soon as you receive this letter, come back to see me.

(Letter 71)

Instructions to the Governor of a Province with Disloyal People

Treat people kindly, receive them in audience, and do not be harsh in issuing and enforcing orders. Do not lose your temper, because this allows Satan to find his way into your mind. Always keep this in mind: that the thing that takes you near to God will move you away from Hell, and the thing that drives you away from God will drive you towards Hell.

(Letter 76)

Instruction to an Official Dealing with Dissenters

While arguing, never quote statements from the Qur'an, because the passages of this Book require careful study and deliberation, as they could be paraphrased in various ways and their meanings could be construed differently. Therefore, argue with them in the light of the traditions of the Prophet (s), and then they will find no way to misrepresent the truth.

(Letter 77)

His Instructions to Army Officers

Introduction

The Prophet Muhammad (s) had to fight many defensive battles during his ministry. He prohibited wars of aggression or initiating hostilities. Imam Ali (p), as the head of state, strictly enforced the teachings of the Prophet (s). Furthermore, his orders to the commanders and soldiers show the highest degree of humane treatment and respect to the captured enemy, the wounded, women, and children. Such exemplary standards of conducting war are vastly different from what we observe around the world in modern wars that lead to mayhem, ruthlessness, and killing of civilians.

Instruction to Soldiers before a Battle

You do not initiate the fighting, but let the enemy begin it, because, by the Grace of God, you are on the side of truth and justice. Let them begin their hostilities and then you are at liberty to fight. Their willingness to start the fighting will be another proof of your sincere belief in obeying God.

If God favors you with success and inflicts defeat on the enemy, then do not attack those who have surrendered, do not injure the disabled and weak, do not assault the wounded, do not treat women rudely even if they use harsh and insulting words against your commander and officers, because they get excited easily and frightened quickly. During the days of the Prophet (s), we had strict orders not to touch, molest, or insult women even though they were unbelievers.

(Letter 14)

[A Circular to the Chiefs of His Army](#)

This letter is from the servant of God, Ali bin Abu Talib, to the chiefs of his army and generals of his cantonments.

My duty towards you is that, except for the classified information regarding war-related matters, I should not keep any information about the affairs of the State hidden from you. Except questions related to religious matters, I should take you in my confidence and seek your advice in all other affairs. I should safeguard your interests and rights to the best of my ability, I should see that you are well protected and well looked after, and I should treat all of you equally without any favoritism.

Your obedience to me is that you follow my orders, (strive to) be good, and courageously face difficulties to attain the right path. If you cannot maintain this standard of fidelity, then you will lose the straight path, the path of virtue, and you will lose position in my eyes. I will order punishment for you in that case. You should make sure that your subordinate officers act accordingly, and you should give them the similar facilities and privileges as are given to you, so that your affairs also run smoothly.

(Letter 50)

[Instructions to the Commander of a Force Heading to the Battlefield](#)

(I advise you to) be God-conscious at all times, be it day or night. Be cautious of the alluring and cruel world and never trust it. Check your desire of acquiring excessive things of the world (booty); otherwise, your desires will surely lead you towards loss. (I advise you) to control anger and do not lose your temper.

(Letter 56)

[His Fiscal Policies, Instructions to Tax Collectors](#)

[Introduction](#)

Imam Ali (p) laid down strict rules for handling public funds. The highest degree of honesty and integrity was expected from his officials and tax collectors. Tax collectors were required to show civility, generosity, and fairness in dealing with the taxpayers.

[Warning against Misappropriation of Public Funds, Even When Faced with Poverty](#)

By God, I would rather pass a night in wakefulness on thorns, or be driven in chains as a prisoner, than meet God and His Messenger on the Day of Judgment as an oppressor over any person or a usurper of any worldly wealth. How can I oppress anyone for (the sake of) the life that is proceeding towards the end (death), and will be buried under the earth and remain there for a long period?

(Sermon 222)

More about Public Funds

This money (in the public treasury) is not for me or for you, but it is the collective property of the people.

(Sermon 230)

Admonition to the Commissioner of a Province

I swear by God that if I find you misappropriating the wealth (from the public treasury), I will punish you in such a way that you will end up poor. Besides, there will be the burden of sin on your shoulders, you will be disgraced and humiliated, and you will lose your position and prestige.

(Letter 20)

Excerpts from a Letter to Tax Collectors

I instruct you to be God-conscious in all affairs and on all occasions, even where there is none to witness your actions and deeds, or to guide your activities. Do not feign God-consciousness and then disobey God's ordinances. One whose deeds agree with his words and who is as honest in secret as in public, he is the person who has faithfully discharged his duty laid down upon him by the Lord. He has honestly handled the things entrusted to him, and he is sincere in seeking God's favors and blessings.

I instruct you not to oppress the people (the taxpayers), do not deal with them harshly, and do not ill-treat them. As a result, they will (fully) cooperate with you and will help you in your task.

(Letter 26)

His Directive to Tax Collectors

Do not give up being God-conscious, and (know that) He has no partner. Do not bring grief to people (by your actions), and do not make them dislike you. Do not overtax them.

When you reach a group of people (tribe or village) to assess taxes, do not stay in their houses. Go to them maintaining your dignity and prestige, and when you are in their midst, wish them peace and blessings of God and show them due respect. Inform them that the Caliph has sent you to collect from them their dues (religious tax). Ask them whether they possess enough means to pay the dues. If someone tells you that he does not possess enough wealth to make him liable to pay taxes, then do not bother him, and accept his plea. If someone tells you he is in a position to pay the tax, collect the tax in cash or kind (as the case may be). Do not frighten or make him nervous, and do not deal with him harshly.

While assessing tax on cattle and other livestock, do not tyrannize the owner or frighten the animals. Once the animals have been secured, assign them to an honest person to deliver them to the state authority. Entrust them to a person who is trustworthy and who is of a kind nature, so that he may not

mistreat the animals or starve or tire out the animals during the transit.

Instruct him not to separate a she-camel from its young, not to milk it so much that nothing is left for its young one, and not to drive them harshly or overburden them with excessive load. He should always give them enough rest at watering places. They should not be driven through deserts as much as possible, and should follow green lands and regions with plenty of wooded areas. Thus, every care should be taken so that they reach their destination in healthy and robust condition. Verily, the collection of the dues (ordained by God) in the way that I have explained to you is a deed of God-consciousness and a religious duty that will carry its reward before the Lord.

(Letter 25)

1. “We have prescribed for them (in retaliation) therein, a life for a life, an eye for an eye...but whoever remits it (foregoes by way of charity), it shall be an expiation (atonement) for his/her sins” (Qur’an 5:45).

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