

Glimpses of Nahjul-Balagha

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This book is divided into seven parts. The introduction analyses the literary excellence and multi-dimensionality of Nahjul-Balagha, quoting various viewpoints expressed about Imam Ali's eloquence in general and as expressed in the book in particular. The other parts analyse the Nahjul-Balaghah in themes: theology and metaphysics, ibadah and its various levels, justice and righteous government, khilafah, morality, and spirituality. It also covers ethical teachings, in particular the Islamic concept of zuhd (asceticism), and the meaning of the contrast between life in this world and that in the hereafter.

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Part One

In the Name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

The book consists of **several parts**. In the **first**, he discusses the two main characteristics of Nahjul-Balagha, its literary excellence and multi-dimensionality, quoting various viewpoints expressed about Imam Ali's eloquence in general and Nahjul-Balagha in particular. In the **second part**, the author discusses the theological and metaphysical ideas embedded in Nahjul-Balagha, comparing them with parallel viewpoints with which Muslim orators and philosophers are familiar. The **third part** deals with ibada (adoration) and its various levels. The fourth part deals with the Islamic Government and Social

Justice. The **fifth**, which deals with the controversial issue of caliphate (khilafa) and the superior status of Ahl al-Bayt (as), is deleted from this translation. The **sixth and the seventh** parts discuss Nahjul-Balagha's ethical teachings, in particular the Islamic Concept of zuhd (asceticism), the meaning of the life in this world (dunya), so often condemned in Nahjul-Balagha, and the meaning of the contrast between life in this world and that in the Hereafter, which is also a recurring theme.

Introduction

Perhaps it may have happened to you, and if not, you may still visualize it: Someone lives on your street or in your neighborhood for years. You see him at least once a day and habitually nod to him as you pass by. Years pass by in this manner till, one day, you accidentally get an opportunity to sit down with him and become familiar with his ideas, views and feelings, his likes and dislikes. You are amazed at what you have come to know about him. You never imagined or guessed that he might be as you found him and never thought that he was what you later discovered him to be.

After that, every time you see him, his face, somehow, appears to you to be different. Not only this, your entire attitude towards him is altered. His personality assumes a new meaning and a new depth, and you develop respect for him in your heart, as if he were a person other than the one you thought you knew for years. You feel as if you have discovered a new world.

My experience was similar to such an analogy with regard to Nahjul-Balagha. Since the years of my childhood, I was familiar with the title of this book, and I could distinguish it from other books on the shelves in my father's library. Years later, during my studies, first at the theological school of Mashhad, and later at Qum, when I was finishing the last stages of the preliminary education in theology called sutuh, during all those days, I kept hearing the title Nahjul-Balagha more often than that of any other book after the Qur'an. Some of its sermons on piety I had heard so many times that I almost remembered them by heart. Nevertheless, I must admit, like all my colleagues at the theological seminary (hawza ilmiyya), I was quite ignorant of the world of Nahjul-Balagha. We had met as strangers and passed by each other in the manner of strangers. This went on till the summer of 1325 (1946) when, in order to escape the heat of Qum, I went to Isfahan. A trivial incident brought me into contact with a person who took my hand and led me somehow into the world of Nahjul-Balagha.

When this happened, I realized that till then, I knew little about this book. Later, I wished that I would also find someone who would introduce me to the world of the Qur'an. Since then, the image of Nahjul-Balagha was transformed in my eyes. I became fond of it, and gradually my fondness grew into love. It was now a different book from the one which I had known till that moment. I felt as if I had discovered an entirely new world. Shaikh Muhammad 'Abdo, the former mufti of Egypt who edited and published Nahjul-Balagha with a brief commentary, introducing this book to the Egyptians for the first time, says that he had no knowledge of this book till he undertook its study far from home in a distant land.

He was struck with amazement and felt as if he had discovered a precious treasure trove. He,

thereupon, immediately decided to publish and introduce it to the Arab public. The unfamiliarity of a Sunni scholar with Nahjul-Balagha is not surprising; what is surprising is that Nahjul-Balagha should be a stranger and alien in its own homeland, among the Shi'a of Ali (as), and that in the Shi'i theological schools as well, in the same way as Ali (as) himself has remained isolated, a stranger in his own land. Evidently, if the content and ideas of a book, or if the feelings and emotions of a person, do not harmonize with the mentality of a people, that book/person practically remains isolated like a stranger in an alien world, even though the name of such a person/book may be mentioned with great respect and admiration.

We, theology students, must admit our estrangement from Nahjul-Balagha. We have built a mental world of our own which is alien to the world of Nahjul-Balagha. As I write this Preface, I cannot abstain from recalling with sorrow the memory of that great man who introduced me for the first time to the world of Nahjul-Balagha and whose acquaintance I treasure as one of the most precious experiences of my life, something which I would not exchange for anything else. Not a day nor a night passes without my remembering him or mentioning him with gratitude. I daresay that he was a divine scholar (*alim rabbani*) in the true sense of the word, although I dare not claim that I was a learner of the path of deliverance (*muta'allim 'ala sabil al-najat*).¹ I remember that whenever I met him, I was always reminded of the following poetry of [the renown Persian poet] Sadi:

*The devout, the ascetic, and the Sufi,
Are all toddlers on the path;
If there is any mature man,
It is none other than the 'alim rabbani.*

He was a faqih, a philosopher, a man of letters and a physician, all at the same time. He was well versed in fiqh (jurisprudence), philosophy, Arabic and Persian literature as well as in the traditional medicine. And he was considered a specialist of the first order in some of these fields. He was a masterly teacher of al-Qanun, the treatise of ibn Sina (Avicenna) in medicine, which does not find a teacher these days. Many scholars of the theology school attended his lessons. Yet it was not possible for him to confine himself to one single field, and his spirit revolted against any kind of restrictions. Of his lectures, the most that interested him were those on Nahjul-Balagha which threw him into ecstasy. It seemed as if Nahjul-Balagha had opened its wings and he, having mounted them, was taken on a journey through strange worlds beyond our reach.

It was evident that he lived on Nahjul-Balagha; he lived it and breathed with it. His spirit was united with this book; his pulse throbbed and his heart beat in harmony with Nahjul-Balagha. Its sentences were always on his lips and their meanings engraved upon his heart. When he quoted its passages, tears would flow from his eyes, soaking his gray beard. During the lessons, his encounter with and involvement in Nahjul-Balagha would make him totally oblivious of his surroundings. It was a very educative as well as an attractive spectacle. Listening to the language of the heart from someone whose

great heart is full of love and wisdom has altogether a different effect and attraction. He was a living example of the saints of the bygone days. These words of Ali (as) fully apply to him: “Had it not been for the fact that Providence had decreed the years of their life, the passionate yearning for Divine rewards and fear of chastisement would not have permitted their souls to remain in their bodies even for a moment. Their realization of the greatness of the Creator has made everything besides Him insignificant in their eyes.”

This refined man of letters, the speculative philosopher, the great faqih, the adept man of medicine and the excellent master of theology was the late Hajj Mirza Ali Aqa al-Shirazi al-Isfahani, sanctified by Allah, a man of truth and wisdom who had attained deliverance from the finite self and selfhood and had merged with the Infinite Truth.

In spite of his sublime scholarly status and eminent social status, his sense of commitment to the society and burning love for Imam al-Hussain (as) compelled him to deliver sermons from the minbar. His sermons, since they came from the heart, had a deep effect on the hearts of his listeners. Whenever he visited Qum, the scholars of the first rank would persuade him to deliver his sermons from the minbar.² His sermons were charged with a passionate purity and sincerity that rendered them profoundly effective. They were not just words to be heard but a spiritual state to be experienced.

He, however, refrained from leading congregational prayers. One year, during the holy month of Ramadan, after a great deal of persuasion, he accepted to lead the prayers at Madrasat al-Sadr for that month. In spite of the fact that he did not come regularly and refused to stick to any regular schedule, unprecedented crowds of people came to attend the prayers led by him. I heard that such strength declined in the jamaat in the neighborhood mosques and he, too, discontinued.

As far as I know, the people of Isfahan generally knew him in person and liked him. He was also loved at the theology school of Qum. The Ulama of Qum would eagerly set out to see him at the news of his arrival in the city. Like all other restrictions, he also refused to be bound by the conditions set for having admirers and followers. May Allah shower His infinite mercy upon him and lodge him in the company of His awliya on the Day of Resurrection.

Despite all his merits, I do not claim that he was familiar with all the worlds which Nahjul-Balagha embraces or that he had set his foot in all the domains encompassed by it. He had explored only a portion of its realms, and that a portion of Nahjul-Balagha had been incarnated in his personality. The universe of Nahjul-Balagha includes numerous worlds: The world of zuhd (renunciation of worldly pleasures) and taqwa (piety), the world of ibada (worship, devotion) and irfan (mystic knowledge), the world of hikma (wisdom) and philosophy, the world of moral preaching and guidance, the world of eschatology (malahim) and mysteries (mughayyabat), the world of politics and social responsibilities, the world of heroism and bravery, etc. too many worlds to be conquered by any single individual. Hajj Mirza Ali Aqa al-Shirazi had explored only a portion of this great ocean and knew it well.

Nahjul-Balagha And Present Days Islamic Society

The alienation from Nahjul-Balagha was not confined to me or to others like me. It pervaded through the Islamic society. Those who understood this book, their knowledge did not go beyond the translation of its words and the explanatory notes for its sentences. The spirit and the content of the book were hidden from the eyes of everyone. Only lately, it may be said, has the Islamic world begun to explore Nahjul-Balagha. In other words, Nahjul-Balagha has just started its conquest of the Muslim world.

What is surprising is that one part of Nahjul-Balagha, in Shi'ite Iran as well as in Arab countries, was first discovered either by atheists or non-Muslim theists who revealed the greatness of the book to the Muslims. Of course, the purpose of most or all of them was to utilize Nahjul-Balagha of Ali (as) for justifying and confirming their own social views. But the outcome was exactly the opposite of what they had desired. This is so because, for the first time, the Muslims have realized that the views expressed grandiloquently by others have nothing new to offer, and that they cannot surpass what is said in Nahjul-Balagha of Ali (as) or translated into action through the conduct (sira) of Ali (as) and his disciples such as Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr and 'Ammar.

The outcome was that instead of supporting the pretentious views of those who wished to exploit Nahjul-Balagha, Ali (as) and his book defeated their purpose. Nevertheless, it must be accepted that before this had taken place, most of us had little knowledge of Nahjul-Balagha, and it hardly went beyond appreciation of few sermons about the virtues of piety and abstinence.

Nobody had yet recognized the significance of the valuable epistle of Master Ali (as) to Malik al-Ashtar al-Nakhi; nobody had paid any attention to it.

As stated in the first and second chapters of this book, Nahjul-Balagha is a collection of sermons, precepts, epistles and aphorisms of Ali (as) compiled by Sayyid al-Sharif ar-Radi almost a thousand years ago. However, neither the recorded words of Master Ali (as) are confined to those collected by Sayyid ar-Radi, nor was he the only man to compile the sayings of Amir al-Mu'minin (as).

Al-Mas'udi, who lived a hundred years before Sayyid ar-Radi, in the second Volume of his work Muruj al-Dhahab, writes the following: "At present, there are over 480 sermons of Ali (as) in the hands of the people, whereas the total number of sermons included by Sayyid ar-Radi in his collection is only 239.

There are, at present, two kinds of work that must be accomplished with respect to Nahjul-Balagha, so that Ali's thought and views on various important issues expressed in Nahjul-Balagha, which are still relevant and are direly needed by the present-day Islamic society, may be brought to light.

The second kind of work required in relation to Nahjul-Balagha is researching the sources (asnad) and the documents relevant to its contents. Fortunately, we hear that Muslim scholars in various parts of the Islamic world are devoting themselves to undertaking both of these important tasks.

This book is a collection of a series of articles which originally appeared in the journal *Maktab-e-Islam* during from 1351 – 52 (1972–73), now presented to the learned readers in the form of the present book. Formerly, I had delivered five lectures on this topic at the Hussainiyyah Irshad.³ Later, I took up with the idea of writing a series of articles to deal with the subject in greater detail.

From the outset, when I chose to call it "Sayr dar Nahjul– Balagha"(A Journey into Nahjul–Balagha), I was aware that my attempt would not deserve to be called more than a journey, or a short trip. This work, by no means, deserves to be called a research. I neither had the time nor the opportunity to conduct a research, nor did I consider myself fit for undertaking such a task. Moreover, a profound and comprehensive research study of the contents of Nahjul–Balagha, an exploration of the ideology of Ali (as), and, besides, a research about documenting its contents, is the job of a group, not of a single individual.

But, as it is said, that which cannot be attained in its entirety is not to be abandoned entirely⁴. And since humble attempts open the way for great tasks, I embarked upon my journey. Unfortunately, even this journey was not completed. The project that I had prepared for, and which the reader shall find mentioned in the third chapter, remained incomplete because of many preoccupations. I do not know if I will ever get the opportunity to continue my journey through Nahjul–Balagha. But it is my great desire to be able to do so.

A Literary Marvel

Nahjul–Balagha is a magnificent collection of the inimitable sermons, invocations (du'as), wills or pieces of advice, epistles and aphorisms of Amir al–Mu'minin (as), Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as), compiled by Sayyid al–Sharif ar–Radi (may Allah be pleased with him) about one thousand years ago. Time and years have not only failed to diminish the impressive freshness of this work but have, instead, added constantly to its value as new concepts and ideas have emerged therefrom.

Ali (as) was undoubtedly a man of eloquence. He delivered a large number of speeches that became famous. Likewise, numerous sayings containing philosophical wisdom were heard from him. He wrote many letters, especially during the days of his caliphate, which his admirers recorded and preserved with remarkable interest and zeal.

Al–Mas'udi (d. 346/955–6), who lived almost a hundred years before Sayyid ar–Radi (d. 406/1115), in the second Volume of his book titled *Muruj al–Dhahab*, under the heading "Fi dhikr luma' min kalamih, wa akhbarih, wa zuhdih, says the following:

That which has been preserved by people of Ali's sermons, delivered on various occasions, exceeds 480 in number. Ali (as) used to deliver his extempore sermons without any prior preparation. The people recorded⁵ his words and practically derived benefit from them.⁶

The testimony of an informed researcher and scholar like al-Mas'udi bears out the large number of Ali's speeches that were extant during his time. Only 239 of these have been handed down to us in Nahjul-Balagha, whereas their number, as mentioned by al-Mas'udi, was more than 480.

Moreover, al-Mas'udi informs us about the extraordinary dedication and ardor of various groups of people in recording and preserving Ali's words.

Sayyid Al-Radi And Nahjul-Balagha

Sayyid al-Sharif ar-Radi, or Sayyid ar-Radi, as he is commonly called, was an ardent admirer of Ali's speeches. He was a scholar, a poet and a man of cultivated taste. Al-Tha'alibi, his contemporary, says the following about him:

He is the most remarkable man among his contemporary and the noblest amongst the Sayyids of Iraq. Family and descent aside, he is fully adorned and endowed with literary excellence. He is the most remarkable poet among the descendants of Abu Talib, though there are many distinguished poets among them. To say that of all the tribesmen of Quraish no poet could ever surpass him would not be an exaggeration.⁷

It was on account of Sayyid ar-Radi's earnest love for literature in general, and his admiration of Ali's discourses in particular, that his interest was mainly literary in compiling Ali's words. Consequently, he paid a greater attention to those passages which were more prominent from the literary point of view. This was the reason why he named his anthology Nahjul-Balagha⁸ which means the "path of eloquence," giving little importance to mentioning his sources, a point rarely ignored by compilers of hadith (traditions).

Only at times does he casually mention the name of a certain book from which a particular sermon or epistle has been cited. In a book of history or hadith, it is of primary importance that the sources be precisely identified; otherwise, little credence can be given to it. The value of a literary masterpiece, however, lies in its intrinsic beauty, subtlety, elegance and depth.

Meanwhile, it is not possible to assert that Sayyid ar-Radi was entirely oblivious of the historical value and other dimensions of this sacred work, or that his attention was exclusively absorbed by its literary qualities.

Fortunately, after Sayyid ar-Radi, others took up the task of collecting the asnad of Nahjul-Balagha. Perhaps the most comprehensive book in this regard is Nahjul-Saada fi Mustadrak Nahjul-Balagha by Muhammad Baqir al-Mahmudi, a distinguished Shia scholar of Iraq. In this valuable book, all of Ali's extant speeches, sermons, decrees, epistles, supplications and sayings have been collected. It includes Nahjul-Balagha and other discourses which were not incorporated by Sayyid ar-Radi or were unavailable to him.

Apparently, except for some aphorisms, the original sources of all the contents of Nahjul-Balagha have been accounted for.[9](#)

It should be mentioned that Sayyid ar-Radi was not the only man to compile a collection of Ali's utterances; others, too, have compiled various books with different titles in this field. The most famous of them is Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim by al-Amudi on which Muhaqqiq [verifier] Jamal al-Din al-Khunsari has written a commentary in Persian which has been recently printed by the University of Tehran through the efforts of the eminent scholar Mir Jalal al-Din, the al-Urumawi traditionist.

Ali al-Jundi, dean of the faculty of sciences at the Cairo University, in the Introduction to the book titled Ali ibn Abu Talib (as): Shiruh wa Hikam cites a number of these collections some of which have not yet appeared in print and still exist as manuscripts. These are:

- 1) Dustur Ma'alim al-Hikam by al-Qudai, the author of Al-Khutat;
- 2) Nathr al-Laa li; this book has been translated and published by a Russian Orientalist in one bulky Volume.
- 3) Hikam Sayyidina Ali (as): A manuscript of this book exists in the Egyptian library, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya.

Two Distinctive Characteristics

Since the earliest times, two distinct merits have been recognized as distinguishing Ali's discourses: Firstly, literary elegance (fasaha) and eloquence (balagha); secondly, their characteristic multi-dimensional nature. Any of these two qualities suffices for regarding Ali's words as valuable, but the combination of these two qualities (i.e. matchless eloquence, literary elegance and their multi-dimensional nature in that they deal with diverse and occasionally incompatible spheres of life) has made it almost miraculous. For this reason, Ali's speech enjoys a status in-between the speech of the human being and the Word of Allah. Indeed, it has been said of it that it is above the speech of beings and below the Word of the Creator.[10](#)

Literary Beauty And Elegance

This aspect of Nahjul-Balagha requires no introduction. Any reader of a cultivated literary taste, one capable of appreciating linguistic elegance and charm, surely realizes it. Basically, beauty is something perceived and experienced and not described or defined.

Nahjul-Balagha, even after nearly fourteen centuries, has retained the same attractiveness, freshness, charm and beauty for the present-day audience that it provided the people of earlier days. Here, we do not intend to give an elaborate proof of this claim. Nevertheless, as a part of our discourse, we shall briefly describe the marvelous power of the words of Ali (as) in moving hearts and infusing them with the

feeling of wonder.

We shall start with Ali's own times and follow the effect of his discourses through the changes and variations in taste, outlook and mode of thought during different successive ages up to the present day.

The companions of Ali (as), particularly those who had a taste for language and literary grace, greatly admired him as an orator. Abdullah ibn Abbas is one of them. He, as al-Jahiz points out in his *Al-Bayan wal-Tbyin*¹¹, was a powerful orator.

He did not conceal his passion for listening to Ali (as) speak or the enjoyment he derived from it. Once, when Ali (as) was delivering his famous sermon called *al-Shaqshaqiyya*¹², ibn Abbas was also present. While Ali (as) was speaking, an ordinary man from Kufa handed him a piece of paper containing some questions, thus causing Ali (as) to discontinue his speech. Ali (as), after reading the sheet of paper, did not continue his speech in spite of Ibn Abbas urging him to do so.

Ibn Abbas later expressed his deep regret on that occasion, saying,

“Never in my life was I ever so sorry for interrupting a speech as I was for interrupting this sermon.¹³

Referring to a certain letter that Ali (as) had written to Ibn Abbas, the latter used to say, “Except for the speech of the Holy Prophet (S), I did not derive so much benefit from any utterance as I did from this one.”¹⁴

Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan, Ali's most contumacious enemy, also acknowledged the Imam's extraordinary eloquence. When Muhqin ibn Abu Muhqin forsook Ali (as) and joined Muawiyah, in order to please Muawiyah, whose heart surged with ill-will and bitterness towards Ali (as), he told him, I have left the dumbest of men and come to you. The flagrancy of this kind of flattery was so obvious that Muawiyah himself reproached him saying: “Woe unto you! Do you really call Ali (as) the dumbest of men?! Quraish knew nothing about eloquence before him. It was he who taught them the art of eloquence.”

Effect Of Ali's Oratory

Those who heard Ali (as) speaking from the minbar were very much affected by his words. His sermons made hearts tremble and drew tears from the eyes. Even today, who can hear or read Ali's sermons without a tremor passing through his heart?

Sayyid ar-Radi, after narrating Ali's famous sermon *al-Gharra*¹⁵, says the following: “As Ali (as) delivered his sermon, tears flowed from the eyes of the listeners and hearts quivered with emotion.

Hamman ibn Shurayh, one of Ali's companions, was a man with a heart full of love for Allah and a soul burning with spiritual fire. At one time, he requested Ali (as) to describe the qualities of the pious and the

God-fearing.

Ali (as), on the one hand, did not want to turn down his request and, on the other, he was concerned that Hamman might not be able to bear what Ali (as) would say. He, therefore, evaded this request, giving only a perfunctory description of piety and the pious. Hamman was not only dissatisfied with this, his eagerness was heightened, so he beseeched Ali (as) to speak with greater elaboration. Ali (as) commenced his famous sermon and began to describe the characteristics of the truly pious.

He enumerated about one hundred and five¹⁶ qualities of such human beings and went on to describe more. But as Ali's words flowed in fiery sequence, Hamman was carried away to the very extremes of ecstasy. His heart throbbed terribly and his spirit was driven to the furthest limits of emotion.

It advanced in eagerness like a restless bird trying to break out of its cage. Suddenly, there was a terrible cry and the audience turned around to find out that it came from no other man than Hamman himself.

Approaching him, they found out that his soul had already left its earthly abode to embrace an everlasting life. When this happened, Ali's remark, which carried both praise and regret, was: "I feared this would happen. Strange, yet this is how effective admonition affects sensitive hearts."¹⁷ This is an example of the kind of influence which Ali's sermons had over the minds and the hearts of his contemporaries.

Views Of Ancient And Modern Scholars

After the Holy Prophet (S), Ali (as) alone has the distinction of being one whose speeches and sayings were recorded and preserved by the people with particular care.

Ibn Abul-Hadid quotes 'Abdul-Hamid al-Katib, the great master of Arabic prose¹⁸ who lived during the early part of the second Hijri century, as saying, "I learned by heart seventy sermons of Ali (as), and from that time onwards, my mind always overflowed [with inspiration]."

Ali al-Jundi also relates that when 'Abdul-Hamid was asked about what had helped him most in attaining literary excellence, he replied, "Memorizing the discourses of the "bald one".¹⁹

Throughout the Islamic history, the name of 'Abdul-Rahman ibn Nubatah is proverbial for oratory among Arabs. He acknowledges that his intellectual and artistic attainments are indebted to Ali (as). Ibn Abul-Hadid quotes him as saying: "I committed to memory about a hundred discourses of Ali (as); since then, this has served me as an inexhaustible treasure [of inspiration]."

Al-Jahiz was a celebrated literary genius of the early third century of the Hijra, and his book *Al-Bayan wal-Tabyin* is regarded as one of the four main classics of Arabic literature²⁰. Often, in his book, he expresses his great wonder and immense admiration for Ali's discourses. From his remarks, it is evident

that a large number of Ali's sermons were commonly known to the people of his day.

In the first Volume of his *Al-Bayan wal-Tabyin*²¹, after mentioning that some people praise precision in speech or prefer silence and disapprove profusion, al-Jahiz writes the following: "The profusion of speech that has been regarded with disapproval is futile talk, not so what is fruitful and illuminating; otherwise, Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) and 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas were men of prolific speech.

In the same Volume of his work, he quotes this famous sentence of Ali (as)²²: "The value of a man lies in what he has mastered."²³

Al Jahiz then devotes half a page to expressing his admiration for this sentence and writes further:

"If our book did not contain anything but this sentence, it would suffice it. The best speech is one the little of which makes you dispense with much of it, one in which the meanings are not concealed within words but stand out."

Then he remarks saying, "It appears as if Allah the Almighty has enveloped it with His glory and covered it with the light of wisdom proportionate to the piety and taqwa of its speaker."

Al-Jahiz, in the same work, where he discusses the oratory of Sa'sa'ah ibn Suhan al-'Abdi²⁴, says the following: "No greater proof of his excellence as an orator is required than the fact that Ali (as) occasionally came to him and asked him to deliver a speech.

Sayyid ar-Radi's following remarks in appreciation and praise of the speech of Imam Ali (as) are famous: Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as) was the reservoir and fountain head of eloquence which derived its principles from his speeches and revealed its secrets through him. Every orator of mark tried to imitate him and every preacher learned from him the art of eloquence.

Nevertheless, others lagged far behind him while he excelled them all. His speech (alone) bears the imprint of Divine Wisdom and the fragrance of the Prophet's eloquence.

Ibn Abul-Hadid is a Mutazilite scholar of the 7th Hijri/13th A.D. century. He was a masterly writer and an adept poet, and, as we know, a man who adored Ali's discourses. Accordingly, he expressed his profound admiration for Ali (as) repeatedly throughout his book.

In the Introduction to his famous commentary on *Nahjul-Balagha*, he writes the following: "Truly have Ali's discourse been regarded as inferior only to that of the Creator and superior to that of all creatures. All people have learned the arts of oration and writing from him. Suffices to say that people have not recorded even one-tenth of one-twentieth of the speech of any other companion of the Prophet (S), of what they recorded and preserved of Ali's discourses, although there were many eloquent persons among them."

Again, it is sufficient that a man such as al-Jahiz has so much praise for Ali (as) in his book *Al-Bayan*

wa al-Tabyin.

Ibn Abul-Hadid, in the fourth Volume of his commentary, says the following about Imam Ali's letter to Abdullah ibn Abbas (written after the fall of Egypt to Muawiyah's forces and the martyrdom of Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, a letter in which Ali [x] breaks the news of this disaster to Abdullah, who was then in Basra)[25](#):

“Look how eloquence has given its reins into the hands of this man and is docile to his every signal! Observe the wonderful order of words coming one after the other to bow in his presence, or gushing like a spring that flows effortlessly out of the ground.

Praise be to Allah! An Arab youth grows up in a town like Mecca, one who has never met any sage or philosopher, yet his discourses have surpassed those of Plato and Aristotle in eloquence and profundity. He has no discourse with men of wisdom, yet he has surpassed Socrates.

He has not grown up among warriors and heroes but amongst traders and merchants, for the people of Mecca were not a warrior nation but traders, yet he emerges as the greatest of all warriors of supreme courage who have ever walked on the face of earth.” Al-Khalili ibn Ahmed [al-Farahidi, the renowned linguist] was asked once: “Of Ali (as), Bastam, and ‘Anbasah, who was the most courageous?” Replied he, “Bastam and ‘Anbasah should be compared with other men; Ali (as) was superior to human beings. He came from Quraish who were not the foremost in eloquence, for the most eloquent among Arabs were Banu Jurham, although they were not famous for wisdom or wit. Yet Ali (as) surpassed even Sahban ibn Wa'il and Qays ibn Sadah in eloquence.”

Modern Perspectives

During the fourteen centuries that have passed since Ali's times, the world has seen innumerable changes in language, culture and taste. One may be led to think that Ali's discourses, although they might have invoked the adoration of the ancient ones, may not suit the modern taste. But one would be surprised to learn that such is not the case at all. From the point of view of literary form and content, Ali's discourses have the rare quality of transcending the limits imposed by time and place. That Ali's discourses are universal in their appeal to men of all times we shall discuss later. Here, after quoting the views of classical writers, we shall quote the relevant views expressed by our contemporaries.

The late Shaikh Muhammad Abdo, formerly Mufti of Egypt, is a man who came to know Nahjul-Balagha by accident. This preliminary acquaintance grew into a passionate love for the sacred book, leading him into writing a commentary on it. It also prompted him to undertake making it popular among the Arab youths.

In the Preface to his commentary, he says the following: “Among all those who speak the Arabic language, there is not a single man who does not believe that Ali's discourses, after the Qur'an and the

ahdith of the Prophet (S), are the most noble, the most eloquent, the most profound and the most comprehensive.”

Ali al-Jundi, once Dean of the Faculty of Sciences at the Cairo University, in his book titled *Ali ibn Abu Talib: Shi'ruhu wa Hikamuh*, writing about Ali's prose saying the following: “A certain musical rhythm which moves the innermost depths of the soul is characteristic of these discourses. The phrases are so rhymed that it can be called poetic prose.

He then quotes Qudamah ibn Jafar as saying: “Some have shown mastery in short sayings and others in long discourses, but Ali (as) has surpassed all others in both of these, even as he has surpassed them in other merits as well.”

Taha Hussain, the renown Egyptian writer, in his book *Ali wa Banuh* (Ali [as] and His Sons), recounts the story of a particular man during the Battle of al-Jamal. The man is in doubt as to which of the two sides is on the right track.

He says to himself, “How is it possible that such personalities like Talhah and az-Subayr should be at fault? He informs Ali (as) of his dilemma and asks him whether it is possible that such great personalities and men of established repute should be in error.”

Ali (as) answered him in the following: “You are seriously mistaken and have reversed the measure! Truth and falsehood are not measured by the worth of individuals. First, find out what is true and what is false, then you will see who stands by the truth and who is with falsehood.”

What Ali (as) means is: “You have reversed your measuring criteria. Truth and falsehood are not measured by the nobility of birth or by how base and lowly one's birth is. Instead of regarding truth and falsehood as the measure of nobility and meanness, you prejudice persons by your own pre-conceived notions of nobility and meanness. Reverse your approach. First of all, find out the truth itself, then you will be able to recognize who are truthful. Find out what falsehood is, then you will identify those who are wrong. It is not significant which person stands by the truth and which one sides with falsehood.”

After quoting Ali's above-mentioned reply, Taha Hussain says the following: “Next to the Revealed Word of Allah, I have never seen a more glorious and admirably expressed view than this reply of Ali (as).”

Shakib Arsalan, nicknamed “Amir al-Bayan”(the master of clear speech), is another celebrated writer. Once in a gathering held in his honor in Egypt, a speaker mounted the rostrum and, in the course of his speech, remarked saying, “There are two individuals in the history of Islam each one of whom can truly be called Amir al-Bayan: one is Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) and the other is Shakib [Arsalan]. It was then that Shakib Arsalan (1871-1946) felt very irritated. He left his seat and walked to the rostrum. Deploring the comparison which his friend had just made between Ali (as) and himself, he said: “What comparison can there be between Ali (as) and me?! I am not worth to be compared even to the strap of Ali's sandals![26](#)

In the Introduction to the book titled Imam Ali (as) by George Jurdaq, a Lebanese Christian writer, Michael Naimah, also a Lebanese Christian writer, says the following: “Ali (as) was not only a champion on the battlefield but also a hero in all other fields: in the sincerity of heart, in the purity of conscience, in the spell-binding magic of speech, in true humanitarianism, in the fineness and warmth of faith, in the height of tranquility, in the readiness to help the oppressed and the wronged, and in total submission to the truth wherever it may be and whichever form it assumes. He was a hero in all these fields.”

I do not intend to quote more from the writings of those who paid tributes to Ali (as), for the above-quoted remarks are sufficient to prove my point. One who praises Ali (as) extols his own merit for:

He who admires the Sun’s brilliance extols himself:

My two eyes are bright and my vision is not clouded.

I conclude my discourse with Ali’s own statement about himself. One day, one of his companions attempted to deliver a speech. He could not; he found himself tongue-tied. Ali (as) said to him: “You should know that the tongue is a part of man and under the command of his mind. If the mind lacks stimulation and refuses to budge, his tongue will not assist him. However, if the mind is ready, his speech will not give him a respite. Indeed, we (Ahl al-Bayt) are the masters of (the domain of) speech. In us are sunk its roots and over us are hung its branches.”[27](#)

Al Jahiz, in the al-Bayan wa al-tabyin, relates from ‘Abdullah ibn al-Hassan ibn Ali (as) that Ali (as) once said: “We (Ahl al-Bayt) are superior to others in five qualities: eloquence, good looks, forgiveness, courage, and popularity with women!”[28](#)

Now, we shall take up another characteristic of Ali’s discourses which, in fact, is the main theme of this book, that is, multi- dimensionality.

Nahjul-Balagha Among Literary Classics

Most nations possess certain literary works which are regarded as “masterpieces” or “classics”. Here, we shall limit our discussion to the classics of Arabic and Persian literature whose merits are more or less perceptible by us, leaving the other classics of the ancient world, of Greece and Rome and so on, and the masterpieces of the modern age from Italy, England, France and other countries to be discussed and evaluated by those who are familiar with them and are qualified to discuss them.

Of course, an accurate judgement about the classics of Arabic and Persian is possible only for scholars who have specialized in classical literature. But it is an accepted fact that everyone of these masterpieces is great only in a particular aspect, not in each and every aspect. To be more precise, every one of the authors of these classics displayed his mastery only in a single, specific field to which his ingenuity was confined. Occasionally, if one left his special field to tread other grounds, he failed miserably.

In Persian, there are numerous masterpieces in mystical ghazal, general ghazal, qasidah, epic, spiritual and mystical allegorical poetry, etc. But, as we know, none of the world renown Persian poets has succeeded in creating masterpieces in all these literary forms.

Hafiz is famous for mystical ghazal, Sadi for anecdotes and general ghazal, Firdawsi for epic, Rumi for his allegorical and spiritual poetry, Khayyam for his philosophic pessimism and Nizami for something else.

For this reason, it is not possible to compare them with one another or prefer one over the other. All that can be said is that each one of them is foremost in his own field. If occasionally one of these poetic geniuses left his special field to try another literary form, a visible decline in quality was readily perceptible. The same is true of Arab poets of the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods.

There is an anecdote in Nahjul-Balagha that once Ali (as) was asked this question: "Who is the foremost among Arab poets? Ali (as) replied: "To be sure, all poets did not tread one and the same path so that you may tell who is the leader and who is the follower. But if one were forced to choose one of them, I would say that the foremost among them was al-Malik al-Dilleel (the nickname of 'Imri'ul-Qays)." [29](#)

In his commentary, Ibn Abul-Hadid cites with asnad (authentic sources/references/transmitters) an anecdote under the above-mentioned comment. Here is what he writes the following: "During the holy month of Ramadan, it was Ali's custom to invite people to dinner. The guests were offered meat, but Ali (as) himself abstained from eating the food which was prepared for the guests.

After the dinner, Ali (as) would address them and impart moral instruction to them. One night, as they sat for dinner, a discussion commenced about the poets of the past. After the dinner, Ali (as), in the course of his discourse, said: "The faith is the criterion of your deeds; taqwa is your shield and protector; good manners are your adornment, and forbearance is the fortress of your honor. Then, turning to Abul-Aswad al-Du'ali, who was present there then and who had moments ago taken part in the discussion about poets, said, "Let us see, who in your opinion is the most meritorious of poets?"

Abul-Aswad recited a verse of Abu Dawud al-Ayadi, remarking that in his opinion, Abu Dawud was the greatest poet. "You are mistaken; such is not the case," Ali (as) told him, whereupon the guests, seeing Ali (as) taking an interest in their discussion, pressed him to express his opinion as to whom he considered to be the best among poets. Ali (as) said to them, "It is not right to give a judgement in this matter for, to be certain, the pursuits of the poets are not confined to a single field so that we may point out the forerunner among them. Yet, if one were forced to choose one of them, then it may be said that the best of them is one who composes not according to the period's inclinations, nor out of fear and inhibition, [but he who gives free rein to his imagination and poetic inspiration]." Asked about whom this description would fit, Ali (as) replied, "Al-Malik al-Dilleel, Imri'ul-Qays."

It is said that when someone inquired about who the most eminent poet of the Jahiliyyah (the pre-Islamic period) was, Yunus ibn Habib al-Dabbi (d. 798 A.D.), the famous grammarian, answered as

follows: “The greatest of poets is Imri’ul-Qays when he mounts his steed [i.e. when he composes epic poetry motivated by the feelings of courage and bravery and the passions roused on the battlefield], al-Nabighah al-Thubyanī [the genius belonging to Banu Thubyan] when he flees in fear [i.e. when he expresses himself on the psychological effects of danger and fright], al-Zuhayr ibn Abu Sulma when he takes delight [in something], and al-Asha [the one who could not see very well], when he is in a merry and joyful mood. Yunus meant to say that every one of these poets had a special talent in his own field, one in which his works are considered as masterpieces. Each of them was foremost in his own speciality beyond which his talent and genius did not extend.

Ali’s Versatility

One of the outstanding characteristics of Imam Ali’s sayings, which have come down to us in the form of Nahjul-Balagha, is that such sayings are not confined to any particular field alone. Ali (as), in his own words, has not trodden one single path only but has covered diverse grounds which occasionally are quite antithetical.

Nahjul-Balagha is a masterpiece but not of the kind which excels in one single field such as the epic, the ghazal, the sermon, the praise, the satire or the love poetry. Rather, it covers multifarious fields as shall be elaborated on. In fact, works which are masterpieces in a particular field do, indeed, exist; nevertheless, their number is not great, and they are countable. The number of works which cover numerous subjects but are not masterpieces is quite large. But the characteristic that a work be simultaneously a masterpiece without restricting itself to any one particular subject is an exclusive merit of Nahjul-Balagha. With the exception of the Holy Qur’an, which is altogether a different subject to be dealt with independently, what masterpiece is comparable to Nahjul-Balagha’s versatility?

Speech is the spirit’s envoy, and the words of a man relate to the sphere in which his spirit dwells. Naturally, a speech which pertains to multiple spheres is characteristic of a spirit which is too creative to be confined to a single sphere. Since the spirit of Ali (as) is not limited to a particular domain but encompasses various spheres and he, in the terminology of Islamic mystics, is al-Insan al-Kamil (a perfect man), al-kawn al-jami’ (the complete microcosm) and jami’ kullal-hadarat³⁰ (the possessor of all higher virtues), so his speech is not limited to any one particular sphere.

Accordingly, as we should say, in terms current nowadays, that Ali’s merit lies in the multi-dimensional nature of his speech, that it is different from one-dimensional works. The all-embracing nature of Ali’s spirit and his speech is not a recent discovery. It is a feature which has invoked a sense of wonder since at least one thousand years. It was this quality that had attracted the attention of Sayyid ar-Radi a thousand years ago, and he fell in love with Ali’s speeches and writings.

He writes saying, “Of Ali’s wonderful qualities, which exclusively belong to him, none sharing them with him, is that when one reflects upon his discourses regarding abstinence (zuhd), and his exhortations concerning spiritual awareness, for a while one totally forgets that the speaker of these words was a

person of the highest social and political caliber, one who ruled over vast regions during his time, and his word was an order for all. Even for a moment, the thought does not enter the reader's mind that the speaker of these words might have been inclined to anything except piety and seclusion, anything except devotion and worship, having selected a quiet corner of his house or a cave in some mountain valley where he heard no voice except his own and knew nobody except himself, being totally oblivious of the world and its hustle and bustle.

It is unbelievable that those sublime discourses on asceticism, detachment and abstinence and those spiritual exhortations came from somebody who pierced the enemy's ranks and went fighting to the very heart of their forces, with a sword in his hand, poised to sever the enemy heads, and who threw many a mighty warrior down from his steed, causing him to roll into blood and dust. Blood drips from the edge of his sword and yet he is the most pious of saints and the most devoted of sages."

Sayyid ar-Radi adds saying, "Frequently, I discuss this matter with friends, and it equally invokes their sense of wonder."

Shaikh Muhammad 'Abdo, too, was profoundly moved by this aspect of Nahjul-Balagha, and it made him marvel at its swiftly changing scenes which take the reader on a journey through different worlds. He makes a note of it in the Introduction to his commentary of Nahjul- Balagha.

Aside from his speech, in general, Ali (as) had a spirit that was universal, all-embracing, and multi-dimensional, and he has always been eulogized for this quality. He is a just ruler, a devotee who remains awake all night long worshipping Allah; he weeps in the niche of prayer (mihrab) and smiles on the battlefield. He is a tough warrior and a soft-hearted and kind guardian. He is a philosopher of profound insight and an able general. He is a teacher, a preacher, a judge, a jurist, a peasant and a writer. He is a perfect man whose great soul envelops all spheres of the human spirit.

Safi al-Din al-Hilli (1277-1349 A.D.) says the following about him:

Opposites have come together in thy attributes,

And for that thou has no rivals.

A devout, a ruler, a man of forbearance, and a courageous one,

A lethal warrior, an ascetic, a pauper yet generous to others,

Traits which never gathered in one man and the like of which none ever possessed;

A gentleness and charm to abash the morning breeze, A valor and might to melt sturdy rocks;

Poetry cannot describe the glory of thy soul,

Your multi-faceted personality is above the comprehension of all critics.

Apart from what has been said, an interesting point is that in spite of the fact that Ali's discourses are about spiritual and moral issues, in them his literary charm and eloquence have attained their peak. Ali (as) has not dealt with popular poetic themes such as love, wine and vainglory, which are fertile subjects for literary expression in prose and poetry.

Moreover, he did not aim at displaying his skills in the art of oratory.

Speech for him was a means and not an end in itself. Neither did he intend to create an object of art nor did he wish to be known as an author of a literary masterpiece. Above all, his words have a universality which transcends the limits of time and place. His addressee is the human being within every person; accordingly, his message does not know any frontier although, generally, time and place impose limits on the outlook of a speaker and confine his personality.

The main aspect of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is that its subjects and themes are altogether at variance with those current during the time of its revelation. It marks the beginning of a new era in literature and deals with another world and a different sphere. The beauty and charm of its style and its literary excellence are truly miraculous. In these aspects, too, as is the case with its other features, Nahjul-Balagha comes closer to the Qur'an. In truth, it is the offspring of the Holy Qur'an.

Themes Of Nahjul-Balagha

The variety of topics and themes discussed in Nahjul-Balagha unfolds a wide spectrum of problems that give color and hue to these heavenly discourses. The author of this dissertation has no pretension to possess the ability to do the book full justice and analyze it in depth. I just intend to give a brief account of the variety of its themes, and it is my firm belief that others will come in the future who shall be able to do justice to this masterpiece of human power of speech.

A Glance At The Varied Problems Covered By Nahjul-Balagha

The various topics covered in Nahjul-Balagha, everyone of which is worthy of discussion, may be outlined as follows:

- Theological and metaphysical issues;
- Mystic path and worship;
- Government and social justice;
- Ahl al-Bayt (as) and the issue of caliphate;
- Wisdom and admonition; the world and worldliness;
- Heroism and bravery
- Predictions, predictions, and eschatology;
- Prayers and invocations;

- Critiques of the contemporary society;
- Social philosophy;
- Islam and the Qur'an;
- Morality and self-discipline;
- Personalities... and a host of other topics.

Obviously, as the titles of the various chapters of the present book indicate, the writer of this Introduction does not make any claim that the topics cited above are all that can be found in Nahjul-Balagha. Neither does he claim that he has done an exhaustive study of these topics, nor has he any pretension to being considered competent for undertaking such a task. That which is offered in these chapters is no more than a glimpse.

Perhaps, in the future, with Divine assistance, after deriving a greater benefit from this inexhaustible treasure, the writer may be able to undertake a more comprehensive study. Or perhaps others may be blessed with the opportunity to accomplish such an undertaking. Allah is wise and, indeed, His assistance and help is the best.

[1.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, sermon 193.

[2.](#) Minbar is a raised platform with steps, the Islamic pulpit. Traditionally, the function of speaking at mourning gatherings, the majalis, has been performed in Iran by the mullahs, or ruhaniyyun, as they are called there.

[3.](#) Hussainiyyeh Irshad is a building in Tehran founded by the late Dr. Ali Shariati- Tr.

[4.](#) This is in reference to an Arabic maxim: That which cannot be attained in entirety is not to be abandoned completely.

[5.](#) Here, it is not clear whether al-Mas'udi means that Ali's sermons were recorded in writing, in books, or if he implies that people preserved them by memorizing them, or if he means both.

[6.](#) al-Mas'udi, Muruj al-Dhahab, (Beirut, 1983), Vol. 2, p. 431.

[7.](#) al-Thaalibi as quoted by Muhammad `Abdo in Sharh Nahjul-Balagha, Introduction, p. 9.

[8.](#) Nahj means an open way, a road, a course, a method, a path, or a manner; balaghah means eloquence, they are of good style and communication, rhetoric, etc.

[9.](#) Here, the author adds that "Till now, four Volumes of this book have been published."

[10.](#) The arabic is: fawqa kamil makhluq wa duna kalam ul Khaliq.

[11.](#) al-Jahiz, Al-Bayan wal-tabyin, Vol. I p. 230.

[12.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab, No. 3.

[13.](#) Ibid.

[14.](#) Ibid. Rasa'il, No. 22.

[15.](#) Ibid. Rasa'il, No. 83.

[16.](#) According to my own counting, if I have not made a mistake.

[17.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab, No. 193.

[18.](#) Abdul-Hamid was a scribe (katib) at the court of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan ibn Muhammad. Of Persian origin, he was the teacher of the famous Ibn al-Muqaffa. It was said of him, The era of writing began with Abdul-Hamid and ended with Ibn al-Amid. Ibn al-Amid was a minister to the Buwayhids.

[19.](#) Asla means someone whose frontal status, portion of the head, is bald. Abdul-Hamid, while admitting the greatness of Imam Ali (as), mentions him in a detracting manner due to his attachment to the Umayyad court.

[20.](#) The other three being: Adab al-kitab of Ibn Qutaybah, Al-Kamil, of al-Mubarrad, and al-Nawadir of Abu Ali (as) al-

Qali: quoted from the introduction to Al-Bayan wal-Tabyin by ibn Khaldun in his Muqaddamah.

[21.](#) Al-Bayan wa al-tabyin, Vol. I p. 202.

[22.](#) Ibid. Vol. I, p. 83.

[23.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Hikam, No. 81. See also Sayyid ar-Radi's comment on this aphorism.

[24.](#) Sa'sa'ah ibn Suhan al-Abdi was one of the eminent companions of Imam Ali (as). When, after the death of the third caliph, Ali (as) became the caliph. It was Sa'sa'ah who said to him: You [by assuming the caliphate] have given it beauty, while caliphate has not added luster to your personality. You have raised its worth, and it has not raised your station. It stands in a greater need of you than you need it.

[25.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Rasaa'il, No. 35.

[26.](#) This anecdote was related by Muhammad Jawad Maghniyyah, a contemporary Lebanese scholar, at the occasion of a reception party given in his honor in the holy city of Mashhad.

[27.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab, No. 230.

[28.](#) al-Jahiz, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 99.

[29.](#) A poetic form much popular in classical Arabic and Persian poetry. Ghazal is also another poetic form.

[30.](#) Imri'ul-Qays (500-540 AD) is the famous poet of the pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyyah), the author of the first Muallaqat; Al-Malik al-Dillili is his nickname.

Part Two

Theology And Metaphysics Of Nahjul-Balagha

One of the basic issues dealt with in Nahjul-Balagha relates to theological and metaphysical problems. All in all, there are about forty places where the sermons, letters, and aphorisms discuss these issues. Some of these pertain to the aphorisms, but more often the discussion is longer, covering sometimes several pages.

The passages on Tawhid (Divine Unity) in Nahjul-Balagha can perhaps be considered to be the most wonderful discussions of the book. Without any exaggeration, when we take into account the conditions in which they were delivered, they can almost be said to be miraculous.

The discussions of this theme in Nahjul-Balagha are of a varied nature. Some of them constitute studies of the scheme of creation bearing witness to Divine creativity and wisdom. Here, Ali (as) speaks about the whole system of the heavens and the earth, or occasionally discusses the wonderful features of some specific creature like the bat, the peacock or the ant, and the role of the Divine design and purpose in their creation.

To give an example of this kind of discussion, we may quote a passage regarding the ant:

Have you observed the tiny creatures that He has created? How He has made them strong and perfected their constitution and shaped their organs of hearing and sight, and how He has styled their bones and skin? Observe the ant with its tiny body and delicate form. It is so small that its features can

hardly be discerned by the eye and so insignificant that it does not enter our thoughts. See how it roams about upon the ground and arduously collects its livelihood. It carries the grain to its hole and deposits it in its store. It collects during the summer for the winter and, when winter arrives, it foresees the time to reemerge. Its livelihood is guaranteed and designed according to its built. The Benefactor and the Provider does not forget or forsake it. He does not deprive it, even though it should be in hard and dry stones and rocks. You will be amazed at the delicate intricacy of its wonderful constitution if you investigate the structure of its alimentary canals, its belly, and its eyes and ears which are in its head. (Sermon 185)

However, most of the discussions about Tawhid in Nahjul-Balagha are rational and philosophical. The rare sublimity of Nahjul-Balagha becomes manifest in these discourses. In these philosophical and rational discourses of Nahjul-Balagha on Tawhid, what constitutes the focus of all arguments is the infinite, absolute and self-sufficing nature of the Divine Essence. In these passages, Ali (as) attains the heights of eloquence, and none, neither before him nor after him, has come close to him in this aspect.

Another issue dealt with is that of the absolute simplicity (al-basatat al-mutlaqa) of the Divine Essence and negation of every kind of multiplicity, divisibility in the Godhead and refutation of separability of the Divine Attributes from the Divine Essence. This theme occurs repeatedly in Nahjul-Balagha.

Also discussed is a series of other profound problems which had never been touched before him. They are: "Allah being the First while also being the Last; His being simultaneously the Manifest and the Hidden; His precedence over time and number, i.e. His pre-eternity is not temporal and His Unity is not numerical; His Supremacy, Authority, and Self-sufficiency; His Creativeness; that attendance to one affair does not prevent Him from attending to other affairs; the identity of Divine Word and Act, the limited capacity of human reason to comprehend His reality, that gnosis (ma'rifa) is a kind of manifestation (tajalli) of Him upon the intellects, which is different from mental conception or cognition, the negation of such categories and qualities such as corporeality, motion, rest, change, place, time, similitude, antithesis, partnership, possession of organs or parts, limitation and number, and a series of other issues which we shall, by the will of Allah, mention later and give examples of every one of them.

Even a thinker who is well-versed in the beliefs and views of ancient and modern philosophers would be struck with wonder upon seeing the wide range and scope of the problems propounded in this wonderful book.

An elaborate discussion of the issues raised and dealt with in Nahjul-Balagha would itself require a voluminous book and cannot be covered in one or two articles. Unavoidably, we shall be brief; but before we commence our brief survey, we are compelled to mention certain points as an introduction to our discussion.

A Bitter Reality

We, Shia Muslims, must admit that we have been unjust with regard to our duty to the man whom we, more than others, take pride in following or, at the very least, we must admit falling short in our duty towards him. In substance, any kind of failure in fulfilling our responsibility is an act of injustice on our own part. We did not want to realize the significance of Ali (as), or we had been unable to do so.

All our energy and labor have been devoted to proclaiming the Prophet's statements about Ali (as) and to denouncing those who ignored them, but we failed to pay attention to the intellectual side of Imam Ali's personality. Sadi, the poet, says the following:

The reality of musk lies in its scent,
Not in the perfumer's advice.

Applying Sadi's words to our attitude regarding Imam Ali's personality, we did not realize that this musk, recommended by the Divine Perfumer, itself carried its own pleasant aroma and, before everything else, we should have tried to know its scent and become familiar with it. That is, we should have familiarized ourselves and others with its inner fragrance. The counsel of the Divine Perfumer was meant to acquaint the people with its pleasant redolence, not for the purpose that they may believe that it is musk then devote all their energies to convince others by arguing with them, without bothering to acquaint themselves with its real fragrance.

Had Nahjul-Balagha belonged to some other people, would they have treated it the way we treated this great book? the country of Iran is the center of Shiism and the language of its people is Persian. You have only to examine the translations and commentaries on Nahjul-Balagha to make a judgement about what our accomplishments amounts to.

To take a more general case, the Shii sources of hadith (tradition) and the texts of dua' (supplications) are incomparable with the texts of non-Shii works in the same field. This is also true of Divine teachings and other subjects. The problems and issues discussed in works like al-Kulayni's Al-Kafi, or Shaikh al-Saduq's Al-Tawhid, or al-Ihtijaj of al-Tibrisi are nowhere to be found among the works of non-Shiis. It can be said that if occasionally similar issues are dealt with in non-Shii books, the material is unmistakably spurious, for it is not only opposed to the prophetic teachings but also contradicts the Qur'anic principles. There is a strong smell of anthropomorphism which hangs around them. Recently, Hashim Ma'ruf al-Hassani, in his book Dirasat fi Al-Kafi lil-Kulayni wal-Sahih li Bukhari, which is an original but a brief comparative study of the Sahah of al-Bukhari and of al-Kulayni's Al-Kafi, has dealt with the traditions related to the problems of theology.

Shii Rationalism

The discussion of theological problems and their analysis by the Shi'i Imams, of which Nahjul-Balagha is the earliest example, was the main cause of the emergence of rationalistic approach and philosophic outlook in the Shi'i intellectual world since Islam's earliest days. This cannot be labelled as an innovation (bida) in Islam; rather, its basis was laid down by the Qur'an itself.

It was in accordance with the approach of the Qur'an and for the purpose of its interpretation that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as) expounded such issues. If anybody can be reproached in this matter, it is those who did not adopt this method and abandoned the means to follow it.

History shows that from the earliest Islamic era, the Shia, more than any other sect, were interested in these problems. Among Ahl al-Sunna, the Mutazilites, who were nearer to the Shia, did possess similar inclinations. But, as we know, the general view predominant among Ahl al-Sunna did not welcome it and, as a result, the Mutazilite sect became extinct about the end of the 3rd Hijri/9th A.D. century.

Ahmed Amin, the Egyptian writer, confirms this view in the first Volume of his Zuhur al-Islam. Having discussed the philosophic movement in Egypt during the reign of the Fatimids, who were followers of a Shia sect, he writes the following: "Philosophy is more akin to Shiism than it is to Sunni Islam, and we witness the truth of this in the era of the Fatimide rule [in Egypt] and in that of the Buwayhids [in Iran]. Even during the later centuries Persia, a Shiite country, has paid more attention to philosophy than any other Islamic country. In our own times, Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi, who had Shiite inclinations and had studied philosophy in Iran, created a philosophic movement in Egypt when he arrived here.

Curiously, Ahmed Amin, in his explanation of why the Shia showed more inclination towards philosophy, commits an error, willfully or otherwise. According to him, "The reason for greater inclination on the part of the Shia towards rational and philosophical discussions is to be found in their esotericism and their flair for tawil.¹

They were compelled to seek the assistance of philosophy for defense of their esotericism. That is why the Fatimide Egypt and Buwayhid Iran, and Iran during the Safawid and Qajar (Czarist) periods, were more disposed towards philosophy than the rest of the Islamic world."

This is sheer nonsense on the part of Ahmed Amin. It was the Imams of the Shia School of Yought who, for the first time, introduced the philosophical approach, and it was they who introduced the most profound and intricate concepts with regard to theological problems in their arguments, polemics, sermons, ahadith and prayers, of which Nahjul-Balagha is one example.

Even with regard to the prophetic traditions, the Shia sources are far more sublime and profound than the traditions contained in the non-Shii sources. This characteristic is not confined to philosophy alone but is also true of kalam, fiqh, and usul al-fiqh, in which the Shia enjoy a status of distinction. All this

owes its origin to one and the same source: emphasis on rationalism.

Some others have tried to trace the origin of this difference [between the Shii and the Sunni mind-sets] in the concept of a Shiite nation. According to them, since the Persians are Shiite and the Shia are Persian and, since the Persians are a people with a philosophical temperament, fond of the intricacies of speculation and pure thought, with the help of their rich and strong philosophical tradition, they succeeded in raising the level of Shia thought, giving it an Islamic hue.

Bertrand Russell, in *A History of Western Philosophy*, expresses a similar view based on the above-mentioned argument. With his habitual or inherent impoliteness, he puts forth this opinion. However, Russell lacks the capacity of vindicating his claim, since he was totally unfamiliar with Islamic philosophy and basically knew nothing about it. He was not qualified to express any informed opinion about the origins of the Shia thought and its sources.

Our rejoinder to the upholders of this view is: First of all, not all Shias were/are Persian, nor all Persians were Shia. Were not Muhammad ibn Yaqub al-Kulayni, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Hussain ibn Babawayh al-Qummi and Muhammad ibn Ab Talib al-Mazandarani Persian?!

Were not Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud al-Sijistani and Muslim ibn Hajjaj al-Nishaburi Persian, too?! Was not Sayyid ar-Radi, the compiler of *Nahjul-Balagha*, of a Persian origin?! Were not the Fatimids of Egypt of Persian descent?

Why was philosophical thought revived in Egypt with the inception of the Fatimide rule, and why did it decline with their fall? And why was it revived later, after a long interval, only through the influence of an Iranian Shia?

The truth is that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (as) were the only real dynamic force behind this trend of thinking and this kind of approach. All scholars of Ahl al-Sunna admit that among the Prophet's Companions only Ali (as) was a man of philosophic wisdom, the man who had an altogether distinct rational approach. Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) is quoted as having thus remarked: "Ali's status among the companions of Muhammad (S) was that of the 'rational' in the midst of the 'corporeal'."

Obviously, the intellectual approach of the followers of an Imam such as Ali (as) should be expected to be radically different from that of those who followed others. Moreover, Ahmed Amin and others have been susceptible to another similar misunderstanding. They express doubts with regard to the authenticity of ascription of such philosophic statements [as exist in *Nahjul-Balagha*] to Ali (as).

They say that the Arabs were not familiar with such issues, arguments and elaborate analyses like the ones found in *Nahjul-Balagha* prior to becoming acquainted with the Greek philosophy, and evidently, according to them, these discourses should have been composed by some later scholars familiar with the Greek philosophy then were attributed to Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as).

We also accept that the Arabs were not familiar with such ideas and notions. Not only the Arabs, the non-Arabs, too, were not acquainted with them, nor were those notions familiar to the Greeks and Greek philosophy. Ahmed Amin first brings down Ali (as) to the level of such Arabs like Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan, then he postulates his minor and major premises, building his conclusion on their premises: "The Arabs were unfamiliar with philosophical notions; Ali (as) was an Arab; therefore, Ali (as) was also unfamiliar with such philosophical notions.

One should ask him whether the Arabs of the Jahiliyya were familiar with the ideas and the concepts propounded in the Holy Qur'an. Had not Ali (as) been brought up and trained by the Messenger of Allah himself? Did not the Prophet (S) introduce Ali (as) to his companions as the most learned and knowledgeable among them? Why should we deny the high spiritual status of someone who enriched his inner self by drawing on the bounteous wealth of Islam in order to protect the prestige of some of the Prophet's companions who could never rise above the ordinary level?

Ahmed Amin says that prior to being acquainted with the Greek philosophy, the people of Arabia were not familiar with the ideas and concepts found in Nahjul-Balagha. The answer to this is that the Arabs did not become acquainted with the ideas and notions propounded in Nahjul-Balagha even after centuries of familiarity with the Greek philosophy.

Not only the Arabs, even the non-Arab Muslims, were not acquainted with these ideas for the simple reason that there is no trace of them whatsoever in the Greek philosophy itself! These ideas are exclusively specific to the Islamic philosophy. Muslim philosophers gradually picked these ideas up from the basic Islamic sources, incorporating them in their thought under the guidance of revelation.

Philosophical Notions Concerning Metaphysics

As stated above, Nahjul-Balagha adopts two kinds of approach to the problems of theology. The first kind of approach calls attention to the sensible world and its phenomena as a mirror reflecting the Knowledge and Perfection of the Creator.

The second approach involves purely rationalistic and philosophical reflections. The latter approach accounts for the greater part of the theological discussions of Nahjul-Balagha.

Moreover, it is the only approach adopted with regard to the discussion of the Divine Essence and Attributes.

As we know, the value of such discussions and the legitimacy of such reflections have always been questioned by those who consider them improper from the viewpoint of reason or canon, or both. In our own times, a certain group claims that this kind of analysis and inference does not agree with the spirit of Islam and that the Muslims were initiated into such kind of speculations under the influence of the Greek philosophy and not as a result of any inspiration or guidance effused from the Qur'an.

They say that had the Muslims adhered closely to the Qur'anic teachings, they would not have entangled themselves with these tortuous webs. For the same reason, they view with suspicion the authenticity of such speculations found in Nahjul-Balagha and their attribution to Imam Ali (as).

During the second and third centuries, a group of people opposed such kind of discussions, questioning their legitimacy and raising doctrinal objections thereto. They insisted that it is obligatory on Muslims to be satisfied with the literal and commonly understood meaning of the words of the Qur'an. They regarded every kind of inquiry into the meaning of the Qur'an as an innovation (bid'a) in religion.

For instance, if someone inquired about the meaning of the Qur'anic verse "***The all-Compassionate seated Himself upon the Throne***"(Qur'an, 20: 5), he was confronted by the displeasure of those who regarded such questions as not only improper but distasteful. He would be told: "The exact meaning is unknown and questioning is heresy."²

During the 3rd A.H./ 9th A.D. century, this group, which later came to be called Asharite, overwhelmed the Mutazilites who considered such speculations to be within the bounds of legitimacy. This victory of the Ash'arites delivered a severe blow to the intellectual life of Islam.

The Akhbaris, who followed a Shii school which flourished during the period between the 10th A.H./16th A.D. And the 14th A.H./20th A.D. centuries, particularly during the 10th A.H./16th A.D. And 11th A.H./17th A.D. centuries, followed the Asha'ris in their ideologies and convictions. They raised doctrinal objections against ratiocination. Now we shall proceed to discuss the objections raised from a rationalist point of view.

As a result of the triumph of the empirical and experimental method over the deductive approach in Europe, especially in the physical sciences, the view began to prevail that rational speculation was unreliable not only in the physical sciences but also in all scientific disciplines and that the only reliable method was that of empirical philosophy. The result was that the problems of theology were viewed with doubt and suspicion because they lay beyond the domain of experimental and empirical observation.

The past victories of the Asharites, on one hand, and the amazing triumphs of the empirical method, which followed one another in quick succession, on the other hand, drove some non-Shiite Muslim writers to the extremes of excitement. The outcome was the eclectic opinion that from the religious (Shari) as well as the rational point of view, the use of the deductive method even in problems of theology should be discarded.

From the Shari viewpoint, they made the claim that according to the outlook of the Qur'an, the only valid theological approach was the empirical and experimental method and the study of the natural phenomena and the system of creation; the rest, they declared, is no more than an exercise in futility. They pointed out that in scores of its verses, the Qur'an in most unequivocal terms has invited mankind to study the phenomena of nature; it considers the keys to the secrets of the origin and the workings of the universe to be concealed within nature itself.

In this way, they echoed, in their writings and speeches, the ideas expressed by the European proponents of empirical philosophy.

In Farid al-Wajdi's book *Ala atlal al-madhab al-maddi* (On the Ruins of Materialism), and in Sayyid Abul-Hassan al-Nadawi's *Matha khasira al-alam bi-inhitat al-Muslimin* ("What the World Lost Through the Decline of Muslims"), as well as the writers belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) such as Sayyid Qutb and others, have all supported this view, vehemently attacking the opposite viewpoint.

Al-Nadawi, in his above-mentioned book, says the following: "The prophets informed men about the existence of Allah and His Attributes and acquainted them with the origin and the beginning of life on the planet as well as the ultimate destiny of man, putting this free information at their disposal.

They relieved mankind of the need to understand and discuss these problems the basics of which lie beyond our reach (because these problems belong to the sphere of the supra-sensible, and our knowledge and experience is limited to the physical and the sensible, the tangible).

But men did not value this blessing; therefore, they entangled themselves in debates and speculations about these problems, striding into the dark regions of the hidden and the unknowable.³

The same author, in another chapter of the same book, where he discusses the causes of the decline of Muslims, under the heading 'The Neglect of Useful Sciences, criticizes the Muslim Ulema' in these words: "The Muslim scholars and thinkers did not give as much importance to practical and experimental sciences as they gave to debating about metaphysics, which they had learned from the Greek philosophy.

The Greek metaphysics and theology is nothing more than the Greeks' polytheistic mythology presented in a philosophical outfit and is no more than a series of meaningless conjectures expressed in an absurd jargon. Allah has exempted the Muslims from such a debate, speculation and analysis regarding these matters which are not much different from the analytic pursuits of the Alchemists. But out of ingratitude for this great blessing, the Muslims wasted their energy and genius in problems of this sort.⁴

Without any doubt, the views of the likes of Farid al-Wajdi and of al-Nadawi should be regarded as a sort of return to Asharism, though dressed in contemporary style akin to the language of empirical philosophy.

Here, we cannot enter into a philosophical discussion about the value of philosophic reflection. In the chapters titled *The Value of Information* and *The Origin of Multiplicity in Perception* in the book titled *The Principles and Method of Realism*, we have discussed the matter in sufficient details. Here, we shall confine ourselves to the Qur'anic aspect of this problem and investigate whether the Holy Qur'an considers the study of nature to be the only valid method of inquiry into theological problems, or whether it allows for another approach besides the one mentioned above.

However, it is essential to point out that the disagreement between the Asharites and the non-Asharites is not about the legitimacy of the use of the Book and the Sunnah as sources in the problems of theology; rather, the disagreement concerns the manner of their utilization.

According to the Asharites, their application should not exceed mute acceptance. According to them, we assign the various Attributes like Unity, Omniscience, Omnipotence and the rest to Allah because they have been ascribed to Him by the Sharia; otherwise, we would not know whether or not Allah is as such because the basic principles and essentials dealing with Allah are beyond our reach.

Therefore, according to them, we are forced to accept Allah as such, but we cannot know or understand that Allah is as such. The role of the religious texts is that they prescribe for us the way we ought to think and believe so that we may follow it in our ideology and convictions.

According to the contestants of this view, these issues, as is the case with any other rational concept or idea, are amenable to human understanding, that is, there exist certain principles and essentials which, if properly known, enable man to understand them. The role of the religious texts lies in their capacity to inspire, motivate, and guide the human intellect by putting understandable principles and essentials at its disposal.

Basically, servitude in intellectual matters is absurd. It is like ordering one to think in a certain fashion, and asking him to derive certain prescribed conclusions. It is like ordering someone to see a thing in a certain fashion then asking him the following: "How do you see it? Is it big or small? Is it black or white?!" Servitude in thinking does not mean anything other than absence of thinking and acceptance without reflection.

In short, the question is not whether it is possible for man to go beyond the teachings of the Revelation. Allah be our refuge, there is nothing that lies beyond them because that which has reached us through Revelation and through the Household of Revelation (i.e. Ahl al-Bayt [a.s]) is the utmost limit of perfection concerning the knowledge of the Divine.

Here, our debate centers upon the capacity of the human thought and reason, whether or not it can, when supplied with the basic principles and essentials, undertake an intellectual journey through the world of theological problems⁵ or not.

As to the invitation of the Qur'an to study and inquire about the phenomena of creation and its emphasis on nature as a means for attaining the knowledge of Allah and the super-natural, it should be said that it is, indubitably, a basic principle of the Qur'anic teachings. It is with extraordinary insistence that the Holy Qur'an asks the human beings to inquire into the nature of the earth, the sky, the plants and animals, and man himself, urging them to study them scientifically.

It is also indubitable that the Muslims did not take enough worthy strides in this direction. Perhaps the real reason behind it was the Greek philosophy, which was deductive and based on pure speculation.

They used this approach even in the field of the physical sciences.

Nevertheless, as the history of science bears testimony, the Muslim scientists did not altogether abandon the experimental method in their studies as did the Greeks. The Muslims, not the Europeans, as is commonly thought, were the pioneers of the experimental method. The Europeans followed on the tracks first laid by the Muslims.

The Value Of Studying The Natural Phenomena

Aside from all of this, the question worthy of consideration is whether the Qur'an, besides its emphasis on the study of the creating of earth, water and air, allows other ways of approaching the issue, or if it closes all other doors. The question is whether the Qur'an, even as it invites people to study the signs of Allah (ayat), also welcomes other modes of intellectual endeavor.

Basically, what is the value of inquiry into the works of creation (an inquiry which the Qur'an urges us, explicitly or implicitly, to undertake), from the viewpoint of initiating us into the awareness and consciousness which this heavenly Book aims to cultivate?

The truth is that the measure of assistance provided by the study of the works of the creation in understanding the problems explicitly pointed out by the Holy Qur'an is quite restricted. The Holy Qur'an has propounded certain problems of theology which are by no means understandable through the study of the created world or nature.

The value of study of the system of creation is limited only to the extent to which it proves that the world is governed by a Power which knows, designs, plans, and administers it. The world is a mirror, open to empirical experiment, only to the extent that it points towards something that lies beyond nature and discloses the existence of a Mighty Hand which runs nature's cosmic wheels.

But the Holy Qur'an is not content that man should only know that a Mighty, Knowing, and Wise Power administers this universe. This may perhaps be true of other heavenly scriptures, but is by no means true of the Holy Qur'an, which is the final and ultimate heavenly message and has a great deal to say about Allah and the reality transcending nature.

Purely Rationalistic Problems

The most basic problem to which the mere study of the world of creation fails to provide an answer is the necessity of existence and uncreated nature of the Power which transcends natural phenomena. The world is a mirror in the sense that it indicates the existence of a Mighty Hand and a Wise Power, but it does not tell us anything more about its nature.

It does not tell us whether that Power is subservient to something else or not, or if it is self-subsisting. And if it is subject to something else, what is that? the objective of the Holy Qur'an is not only that we

should know that a Mighty Hand administers the world, but that we may know that that Administrator is Allah and that Allah is the indefinable: “There is nothing like Him, the One whose Essence encompasses all perfection or, in other words, that Allah signifies Absolute Perfection and is the referent of “His is the loftiest likeness.” How can the study of nature give us an understanding of such notions and concepts?

The second problem is that of the Unity of Allah (Tawhid). The Holy Qur’an has stated this issue in a logical form and used a syllogistic argument to explain it. The method of argument which it has employed in this regard is called “exclusive syllogism” or burhan al-tamannu’.

Occasionally, it eliminates the possibility of multiplicity in the efficient cause as in the following verse³⁶: ***“If there had been (multiple) gods in them (i.e. in the earth and the heavens) other than Allah, they would surely go to ruin”***(21: 22).

At other times, it argues by eliminating the possibility of multiplicity in the final cause: ***“Allah has not taken to Himself any son, nor is there any god besides Him, for then each god would have taken off that he created and some of them would have risen up over others”***(23: 91).

The Holy Qur’an never suggests that the study of the system of creation can lead us to the knowledge of the Unity of the Godhead so as to imply that the essential knowledge of the transcendental Creator be considered attainable from that source. Moreover, such a suggestion would not have been correct.

The Holy Qur’an alludes to various problems as indicated by the following examples:

Nothing is like Him. (42: 11)

And Allah’s is the loftiest likeness. (16: 60)

To Him belong the most Beautiful Names. (20: 8)

And His is the loftiest likeness in the heavens and the earth. (30: 27) He is Allah, there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable, the All-faithful, the All-preserver, the Almighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime. (59: 23)

And to Allah belong the East and the West; whither so ever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. (2: 115)

And He is Allah in the heavens and the earth; He knows your secrets, and what you publish. (6: 3)

He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; He has knowledge of everything. (57: 3)

He is the Living, the Everlasting. (2: 255)

Allah, is the Everlasting, [Who] has not begotten, and has not been begotten and equal to Him is

not any one. (112: 2-4)

Why does the Holy Qur'an raise such issues? Is it for the sake of propounding mysterious matters incomprehensible to man who, according to al-Nadawi, lacks the knowledge of its essential principles, then asking him to accept them without comprehending their meaning? Or does the Holy Qur'an actually want him to know Allah through the attributes and descriptions that have come in it?

And, if this is true, what reliable approach does it recommend? How is it possible to acquire this knowledge through the study of the natural phenomena? The study of the creation teaches us that Allah has knowledge of all things; that is, all things that He has made were created knowingly and wisely. But the Holy Qur'an expects us not only to know this but also stresses that:

Indeed, Allah has the knowledge of everything. (2: 231)

And not so much as the weight of an atom in earth or heaven escapes from your Lord, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but in a Manifest Book. (10: 61)

Say: If the sea were ink for the Words of my Master, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Master are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it. (18: 109)

This means that Allah's knowledge is infinite and so is His power. How and wherefore is it possible through perception and observation of the world of creation to reach the conclusion that the Creator's Knowledge and Power are infinite? The Holy Qur'an, similarly, propounds numerous other problems of the kind.

For instance, it mentions al-lawh al-mahfuz (the Protected Tablet), lawh al-mahw wa al-ithbat (The Tablet of Expunction and Affirmation), jabr and ikhtiyar (determinism and free will), wahi (revelation) and ilham (intuition), etc.; none of which are susceptible to inquiry through the empirical study of the world of creation.

It must be admitted that the Holy Qur'an, definitely, has raised these problems in the form of a series of lessons and has emphasized their importance through advice and exhortation. The following verses of the Holy Qur'an may be quoted in this regard:

What?! Do they not meditate on the Qur'an? Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts? (47: 24)

(This is) a Scripture that We have revealed unto thee, full of blessing, that they may ponder on its revelations, and that men of understanding may reflect. (38: 29)

Inevitably, we are forced to accept that the Holy Qur'an assumes the existence of a reliable method for understanding the meaning of these facts which have not been revealed as a series of obscure incomprehensible things out of the reach of the human intellect.

The scope of problems propounded by the Holy Qur'an in the sphere of metaphysics is far greater than what can be resolved or answered through the study of physical creation. This is the reason why the Muslims have pursued these problems, at times through spiritual and gnostic efforts, and at other times through speculative and rational approach.

I wonder whether those who claim that the Holy Qur'an considers the study of nature as the sole, sufficient means for the solution of metaphysical problems, can give a satisfactory answer with regard to the various problems propounded by it, a characteristic which is specifically relevant to this great heavenly Book.

Ali's sole source of inspiration in his exposition of the problems mentioned in the previous chapters is the Holy Qur'an, and the sole motive behind his discourses is exegetical. Perhaps, had it not been for Ali (as), the rationalistic and speculative aspects of the Holy Qur'an would have forever remained without an interpretation.

After these brief introductory remarks on the value of these issues, we shall go on to cite some relevant examples from Nahjul- Balagha.

The Divine Essence And Attributes

In this section, we shall cite some examples of Nahjul-Balagha's treatment of the problems of theology relevant to the Divine Essence and Attributes. Later, we shall make a brief comparative study of the issue in various schools then conclude our discussion on this aspect of Nahjul- Balagha.

However, before proceeding further, I solicit the reader's pardon on account of the discussion in the last three sections becoming a bit technical and philosophical, something which is not very welcome for those who are not used to it. But what is the remedy?

Discussing a book such as Nahjul-Balagha does entail such ups and downs. For this reason, we shall limit ourselves to giving only a few examples from the book on this subject and refrain from any elaborate discussion. This is so because if we were to comment on every sentence in Nahjul-Balagha, the result will be, as is said,

My Mathnawi requires seventy mounds of paper.

The Divine Essence

Does Nahjul-Balagha have anything to say about the Divine Essence and how to define it? The answer is: Yes, and a lot. However, much of the discussion revolves around the point that the Divine Essence is the Absolute and Infinite Being, without a quiddity.

His Essence accepts neither limits nor boundaries, as is the case with other beings, static or

changeable, which are limited and finite. A changeable being is one which constantly transcends its former limits and assumes new ones. But such is not the Divine Essence. Quiddity, which may qualify and confine Him within limits of finitude, is not applicable to Him.

None of the aspects of beings are devoid of His Presence, and no kind of imperfection is applicable to Him except the absence of any imperfection whatsoever: The only thing “missing” in Him is absence of defect or inadequacy of any kind. The sole kind of negation applicable to Him is the negation of all negations. The only kind of non-being attributable to Him is the negation of any kind of imperfection in relation to Him.

He is free from all shades of non-being which characterize creatures and effects. He is free from finitude, multiplicity, divisibility and need. The only territory that He does not enter is that of nothingness and non-existence. He is with everything, but not in anything, and nothing is with Him. He is not within things, though not out of them. He is over and above every kind of condition, state, similarity and likeness. This is so because these qualities relate to limited, and they determinate beings characterized by quiddity:

“He is with everything but not in the sense of [physical] nearness. He is different from everything but not in the sense of separation” (Sermon 1).

“He is not inside things in the sense of physical [pervasion or] penetration and is not outside them in the sense of [physical] exclusion [for exclusion entails a kind of finitude].”(Sermon 186)

“He is distinct from things because He overpowers them, and the things are distinct from Him because of their subjection to Him.”(Sermon 152)

That is to say, His distinctness from things lies in the fact that He has authority and control over them, all of them. However, His power, authority and sovereignty, unlike those of the creatures, are not accompanied with simultaneous weakness, subjugation and subjection.

His distinction and separateness from things lie in the fact that things are totally subject to His power and authority, and that which is subject and subordinate can never be like the one who subjugates and commands control over it. His separateness from things does not lie in physical separation but is on account of the distinction which lies between the Provider and the provided, the Perfect and the imperfect, the Powerful and the weak.

These kinds of ideas are replete in Ali's discourses. All the problems which shall be discussed later are based on the principle that the Divine Essence is Absolute and Infinite, and the concepts of limit, form and condition do not apply to it.

Divine Unity: Ontological, Not A Numerical Concept

Another feature of Tawhid (monotheism) as propounded by Nahjul-Balagha is that the Divine Unity is not numerical but is something else. Numerical unity means the oneness of something which has the possibility of recurrence or multiplicity.

It is always possible to imagine that the quiddity and form of an existent is realizable in another individual being. In such cases, the unity of an individual possessing that quiddity is numerical oneness and stands as the antithesis of duplicity or multiplicity.

It is one means that there is unique, none, nobody, nothing is like it. Inevitably, this kind of unity entails the quality of being restricted in number, which is a defect because one is less in number as compared to two or more of its kind.

But if a being is such that the assumption of a recurrence with regard to it is impossible, since it is infinite and unlimited, and if we assume another like it exists, it will follow that it is the same as the first being, or that it is something which is not similar to it and, therefore, it cannot be called a second instance of it.

In such a case, unity is not numerical. That is, this kind of unity is not one opposed to duplicity or multiplicity. And when it is said, "It is one, it does not mean that there are no two, three or more of its kind, but it means that a second to it is inconceivable."

This notion can further be clarified through an example. We know that the astronomers and physicists are not in agreement about the dimensions of the universe, whether it is limited in size or infinite.

Some scientists have favored the idea of an unlimited and infinite universe; others claim that the universe is limited in dimensions so that if we travel in any direction, we shall reach a point beyond which there is no space. The other issue is whether the universe in which we live is the only universe in existence, or if there are other universes existing besides it.

Evidently, the assumption of another physical world beyond our own is a corollary to the assumption that our universe is not infinite. Only in this case is it possible to assume the existence of, say, two physical universes each of which is limited and has finite dimensions. But if we assume that our universe is infinite, it is not possible to entertain the assumption of another universe existing beyond it. Whatever we were to assume would be identical with this universe or a part of it.

The assumption of another being similar to the Being of the One God, such as the assumption of another physical universe besides an infinite material universe, amounts to assuming the impossible, for the Being of Allah is absolute: "Absolute Selfhood and Absolute Reality."

The notion that the Divine Unity is not a numerical concept, and that qualifying it by a number is synonymous with imposing limits on the Divine Essence, is repeatedly discussed by Nahjul-Balagha:

“He is the One, but not in a numerical sense.”(Sermon 152)

“He is not confined by limits, nor is He counted by numbers.”(Sermon 186)

“He who points to Him admits for Him limitations, and he who admits limitations for Him has numbered Him.”(Sermon 1)

“He who qualifies Him limits Him. He who limits Him numbers Him. He who numbers Him denies His pre-eternity.”(Sermon 152)

“Everything associated with unity is deficient except Him.”(Sermon 65)

How beautiful, profound, and full of meaning is the last statement! It says that everything except the Divine Essence is limited if it is one. That is, everything for which another of its same kind is conceivable is a limited being and an addition of another individual would increase its number. But this is not true of the Unity of the Divine Essence, for Allah’s Unity lies in His greatness and infinity for which a peer, a second, an equal or a match is not conceivable.

This concept, that the Divine Unity is not a numerical notion, is exclusively an Islamic concept, original and profound, unprecedented in any other school of thought. Even the Muslim philosophers only gradually realized its profundity through contemplating on the spirit of the original Islamic texts, in particular the discourses of Ali (as), ultimately formally incorporating it in the Islamic metaphysical philosophy. There is no trace of this profound concept in the writings of the early Islamic philosophers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna). Only the later philosophers ushered this concept into their philosophic thinking calling it Really True Unity, in their terminology.

Allah, The First And The Last; The Manifest And The Hidden

One of many issues discussed in Nahjul-Balagha is that Allah is the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Manifest. Of course, like other notions, this, too, has been deduced from the Holy Qur’an, although here we are not going to quote the verses of the Holy Qur’an. Allah is the First, but His precedence is not temporal so as to be in contradiction with His being the Last. He is the Manifest, but not in the sense of being physically visible or perceptible by the senses; His Manifestness does not contradict His Hiddenness. In fact, His being the First is identical to His being the Last; similarly, His being Manifest and Hidden are identical; they are not two different things:

“Praise be to Allah, for whom one condition does not precede another, so that He may be the First before being the Last or may be Manifest before being Hidden.”(Sermon 65)

“Time is not His accomplice, nor does He need the assistance of tools and agents His Being transcends time. His Existence transcends nothingness and His pre-eternity transcends all beginning.”(Sermon 186)

The Divine Essence's transcendence over time, nothingness, beginning, and end is one of the most profound concepts of al-hikma philosophy. Allah's pre-eternity does not mean that Allah has always existed. Certainly Allah has always existed but the Divine pre-eternity (azaliyya) is something greater in meaning than "existence at all times" because, "existing at all times" assumes existence in time; but Allah's Being has not only been at all times, It precedes time itself.

This is the meaning of the Divine pre-eternity. This shows that His precedence is something other than temporal precedence. Praise be to Allah Whose creation bears testimony to His Existence; temporality (huduth) of whose creation is the testimony of His "pre-eternity" the similarity and likeness among whose creation proves that He is unique. The senses do not perceive Him and nothing can conceal Him (Sermon 152).

That is to say, Allah is both Hidden and Manifest. By Himself, He is Manifest but is Hidden from, undetectable by, the human senses. His Hiddenness from the senses is due to man's own limitations, not because of Him.

It needs no proof that existence is synonymous with manifestation; the more powerful the existence of a being, the more manifest it will be. Conversely, the weaker its being is and the more intermingled with non-being, the less manifest it is to itself and to others.

For everything, there are two modes of being: its being-in-itself (wujud fi nafsih), and its being-for-others (wujud fi ghayrih). The being of everything for us depends upon the structure of our senses and on certain special conditions. Accordingly, the manifestation of a thing, a being, is also of two kinds: its manifestation-in-itself (zuhur fi nafsih) and its manifestation-for-others (wujud fi ghayrih).

Our senses, on account of their limitations, are able to perceive only a limited number of finite objects possessing the characteristics of similarity and opposition. The senses can perceive colors, shapes, sounds, etc. which are limited temporally and specifically; that is, their existence is confined within a particular time and place. Now, if there existed a uniform light, always and everywhere, it would not be perceptible. A continuous monotonous sound heard always, constantly, and everywhere, it would not be audible.

The Being of Allah, the Absolute Being and the Absolute Reality, is not confined to any particular time or place and is hidden from our senses. But Allah in Himself is absolutely manifest; the perfection of His manifestness, which follows from the perfection of His Being, is itself the cause of His hiddenness from our senses. The two aspects of His manifestness and hiddenness are one and the same in His Essence. He is hidden because He is perfectly manifest, and this perfect manifestness conceals Him:

"You are hidden on account of Your perfect brilliance; You Art the Manifest, the Hidden in Your manifestness. The veil on Your face is also Your; so manifest You are, Your manifestness conceals Thee from the world's eyes."

An Appraisal

An appraisal, however brief, of the approach of Nahjul-Balagha and its comparison with that of other schools of thought is essential for discovering the true worth of its views on the problems of theology. We shall confine ourselves to the brief, though not quite sufficient, examples quoted in the foregoing pages and proceed to evaluate them.

The subject of the Divine Essence and Attributes is one which has been discussed a lot by the ancient and modern philosophers, mystics and Sufis of the East and of the West. But, in general, their method and approach is totally different from that of Nahjul-Balagha whose approach is highly original and unprecedented. Only in the Holy Qur'an can a precedent for Nahjul-Balagha be found. Apart from the Holy Qur'an, we do not find any other source that provides some ground for the discourses of Nahjul-Balagha.

As pointed out earlier, some scholars because of their failure to trace back to some earlier source the notions elaborated in Nahjul-Balagha have questioned the authenticity of ascription of these discourses to Ali (as). They have suggested that these discourses appeared in a later period, after the appearance of the Mu'tazilites and the assimilation of the Greek ideology, heedless of the following saying: "The mean earth with the sublime heaven does not compare!"

How ignorant it is to compare the Mu'tazilite and the Greek ideologies with the teachings of Nahjul-Balagha!

Nahjul-Balagha And The Notions Of Kalam

While ascribing all the Attributes of perfection to Allah, the Exalted One, Nahjul-Balagha negates any separation of these Attributes from His Essence and does not consider them as an appendage of the Divine Essence. On the other hand, the Ash'arites, as we know, consider the Divine Attributes to be additional to the Essence, so the Mutazilites negate all Attributes.

An Asharite Believes In The Separation Of The Attributes From The Essence

A Mutazilite speaks of subservience [of the Attributes to the Essence]. This has led some people to imagine that the discourses found in Nahjul-Balagha on this topic are fabrications of a later period under the influence of Mutazilite views whereas anyone with some insight can readily perceive that the Attributes negated by Nahjul-Balagha with respect to the Divine Essence are qualities of imperfection and limitation:

The Divine Essence, being infinite and limitless, necessitates identity of the Attributes with the Essence,

not negation of the Attributes as professed by the Mutazilites. Had the Mutazilites reached such a notion, they would never have negated the Divine Attributes, considering them subservient to the Essence.

The same is true of the views on the creating or temporality (huduth) of the Holy Qur'an in sermon 184. One may imagine that these passages of Nahjul-Balagha relate to the latter heated controversies among the Islamic theologians (mutakallimun) regarding the eternity (qidam) or temporality (huduth) of the Holy Qur'an and which might have been added to Nahjul-Balagha during the latter centuries.

However, a little reflection will reveal that the discourses of Nahjul-Balagha relevant to this issue have nothing to do with the debate on the Holy Qur'an being either created or uncreated, which was a meaningless controversy, but relevant to the creative command (amr takwini), and to the Will of the Almighty. Ali (as) says that Allah's Will and Command represent the Divine Acts and, therefore, so are ahadith posterior to the Essence, for if the Command and the Will were co-eternal and identical with His Essence, they will have, necessarily, to be considered His associates and equals. Ali (as) says the following:

“When He decrees the creation of a thing, He says to it, and it assumes existence; but not through an audible voice which strikes the ear or a cry that can be heard. Indeed the speech of Allah, glory be to Him, is but His created Act, which did not exist before [it came into existence]. Had it (The Divine speech) been itself eternal, it would be another god besides Him.”(Sermon 186)

In addition, there are other musnad traditions on this subject related from Ali (as), only some of which have been collected in Nahjul-Balagha, and can be traced back to his time. On this basis, there is no room for doubting their genuineness.

If any superficial resemblance is observed between the statements made by Ali (as) and some views held by the Mu'tazilites, the probability to be allowed in this connection is that some of his ideas were adopted by the Mu'tazilites.

The controversies of the Muslim theologians (mutakallimun), both the Shia and the Sunni, the Asharites as well as the Mutazilites, generally revolved around the doctrine of rational basis of ethical judgement concerning good and evil (al-husn wa al-qubh al-“aqliyyan). This doctrine, nothing but a practical principle operating in the human society, is considered by the mutakallimun to be also applicable to the Divine sphere and govern the laws of creation; but we find no trace of it in Nahjul-Balagha. Similarly, there is no sign of it in the Holy Qur'an. Had the ideas and beliefs of the mutakallimun found their way into Nahjul-Balagha, first of all, the traces of this doctrine should have been found in that book.

Nahjul-Balagha And Philosophical Concepts

Some others, having come across certain words such as “existence” (wujud), “non-existence”(adam), “temporality” (huduth) and “pre-eternity”(qidam) and so on in Nahjul-Balagha, have been led to assume

that these terms entered the Muslim intellectual world under the influence of the Greek philosophy and were inserted, intentionally or unintentionally, into the discourses of Ali (as).

Had those who advocate this view gone deeper into the meanings of these words, they would not have heeded such a hypothesis. The method and approach adopted in the arguments of Nahjul-Balagha are completely different from these of the philosophers who lived before Sayyid al-Radi or during his time, or even those born many centuries after the compilation of Nahjul-Balagha.

Presently, we shall not discuss the metaphysics of the Greek or of the Alexandrians (the neo-Platonic) philosophy but shall confine ourselves to the metaphysical views propounded by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

Undoubtedly, Muslim philosophers introduced new challenges into philosophy under the influence of Islamic teachings which had not existed before, and in addition to them, introducing radically original ways of demonstration and inference to explain and argue their points with regard to some other problems.

Nevertheless, what we learn from Nahjul-Balagha is obviously different from this approach. My teacher, allama Tabataba'i, in the preface to his discourse on the traditions of Islamic scholarship, writes the following: "These statements help resolve a number of problems of theological philosophy. Apart from the fact that Muslims were not acquainted with these notions, and they were incomprehensible to the Arabs, basically there is no trace of them in the writings and statements of pre-Islamic philosophers whose books were translated into Arabic and, similarly, they do not appear in the works of Muslim philosophers, Arab or Persian. These problems remained obscure and unintelligible, and every commentator discussed them according to his own conjecture until the eleventh century of the Hijra (17th century A.D.).

Only then were they properly understood for the first time, that is, the problem of the True Unity (al-wahda al-haqqa) of the Necessary Being (wajib al-wujud) (a non-numerical unity); the problem that the proof of the existence of the Necessary Being is identical with the proof of His Unity (since the Necessary Being is Absolute Existence, His Being implies His Unity); the problem that the Necessary Existent is the One known-in-His-Essence (ma'lum bil dhat); the Necessary Being is known directly without the need of an intermediary, and that the reality of everything else is known through the Necessary Being, not vice versa."⁶

The arguments of early Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, such as the discussions on the Divine Essence and Attributes like Unity, Simplicity (basata), Self-Sufficiency, Knowledge, Power, Will, Providence, and so on, revolve around the conception of the necessity of existence (wujub al-wujud), from which all of them are derived, and the necessity of existence itself is indirectly deduced.

In this fashion, it is demonstrated that the existence of all possible existent beings (mumkinat) cannot be

explained without assuming the existence of the Necessary Being. Although the argument used for proving the truth of this argument cannot be called a demonstration of the impossible (burhan khulf), in view of its indirect mode of inference, it resembles burhan khulf and, hence, it fails to provide a completely satisfactory demonstration, for it does not explain the necessity of the existence of the Necessary Being. Ibn Sina, in his Al- 'Isharat, claims that he has succeeded in discovering the "Why?" (lima) of it and, hence, chooses to call his argument Aburhan al-siddiqin (burhan limmi, i.e. causal proof). However, the latter philosophers considered his exposition of "the Why?"(lima) as insufficient.

In Nahjul-Balagha, the necessity of existence is never used to explain the existence of possible beings (mumkinat). That on which this book relies for this purpose is the real criterion of the necessity of existence, that is, the absolute reality and the pure being of the Divine Essence.

Allama Tabataba'i, in the above-mentioned work, while explaining one hadith by Ali (as), found in Al-Tawhid of Shaikh al-Saduq, says the following: "The basis of our discussion rests upon the principle that the Divine Being is a reality that does not accept any limits or restrictions whatsoever. Because Allah, the Most Exalted, is the Absolute Reality from Whom the existence of all other beings is derived within the on to logical limits and characteristics peculiar to themselves, and their existence depends on that of this Absolute Being."⁷

In Nahjul-Balagha, the very basis of all discussions revolving on the Divine Essence rests on the status that Allah is the Absolute and Infinite Being Who transcends all limits and finitude. No point of space time, or anything at all is devoid of Him.

He is with everything, in everything, yet nothing is with Him or in Him. Since He is the Absolute and the Infinite, He transcends time, number, limit and proximity (all kinds of quiddities). That is, time and space, number and limit are applicable to a lower stage, i.e. The stage of the Divine actions and of creation. Everything is from Him and returns to Him. He is the First of the first and the Last of the last. He precedes everything and succeeds everything.

This is the idea that forms the axis of all discourses of Nahjul- Balagha and of which there is no trace in the works of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazali, and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

As pointed out by allama Tabatabai, these profound discussions of theology proper (ilahiyyat bil-mana al-akhas) are based on a series of inter-related problems which have been posited in metaphysics (al-umur al-ammah).⁸ An elaborate discussion of those theological problems and their relevant issues mentioned above is outside the scope of our present discussion.

There are two reasons for rejecting the claims that the theological discussions of Nahjul-Balagha were inventions of later writers familiar with philosophical notions. Firstly, the kinds of problems discussed in Nahjul-Balagha were not at all raised by any philosopher till the time of Sayyid ar-Radi, compiler of Nahjul-Balagha.

That the Unity of the Necessary Being is not of the numerical kind and that the Divine Essence precedes

number, that the existence of the Necessary Being implies Its Unity; the simple reality of the Necessary Being; His immanence and other such notions were not known to philosophy during or before Sayyid ar-Radis times. Secondly, the axes of arguments presented in this book are altogether different from the axes of philosophical discussions which have been prevalent throughout history until the present day.

[Nahjul-Balagha And Western Philosophic Thought](#)

Nahjul-Balagha has played a great role in the history of Eastern Philosophy. Mulla Sadra, who brought a revolution in theological thought (al-hikmat al-ilahiyya), was under the profound influence of Ali's discourses. His method of argument with regard to the problems of Tawhid is the method of inferring the Essence from the Essence, and also deducing the Attributes and Acts from the Essence, and all these arguments are based on the belief that there exists the Necessary Being only. These arguments are based on radically different general principles which are elaborated in his system of metaphysics.

Eastern theological thought (al-hikmat al-“ilahiyya) attained fruition and strength from the sources of Islamic teachings and was firmly established on inviolable foundations. However, theological philosophy in the West remained deprived of such a source of inspiration.

The widespread philosophical malaise of inclination towards materialism in the West has many causes whose discussion is outside the scope of our discourse. But we believe that the major cause of this phenomenon is the weakness and insufficiency of theological conceptions of Western religious thought.

[9](#)

Anyone interested in making a comparative study of the approaches pointed out in these chapters should first study the arguments advanced by Western philosophers such as Anselm, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant and others for proving the existence of Allah and their discussions about acceptance or rejection of various arguments, then he should compare them with the burhan al-siddiqin argument advanced by Mulla Sadra under the inspiration of Ali's words. He would see for himself the wide chasm that separates one from the other.

1. The term tawil has been defined in various different ways. Generally speaking, when used in the opposition to tafsir (which is applied to the explanation of the literal and explicit meanings of the Qur'anic texts), it is applied to the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses which goes beyond their literal meaning. According to Imamiyya Shia, no one except the Prophet (S) and the twelve Imams is entitled to draw tawil of the Qur'anic verses.

To illustrate what is meant by ta'wil, consider these examples: (1) According to Shi'a ahadith, verse 2: 158, A Where ever you maybe, Allah will bring you all together, pertains to the 313 companions of Imam al-Mahdi (as) whom Allah will gather in a certain place [around the Kaba] from various parts of the earth in a single night. (2) According to another hadith, verse 67: 30, "Say: What think you? If your water (in the wells) should have vanished into the earth, who would then bring you running water?" pertains to the ghayba (occultation) of Imam al-Mahdi (as). Such interpretations, which obviously go beyond the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses, are called ta'wil.

2. Allama S.M.H Tabatabai, Usul e falsafah wa rawish e riyalism (The Principles and Method of Philosophy of Realism), Introduction to Vol. 1.

3. Muhammad Sulayman Nadawi, Matha khasara al-alam bi inhitat al- Muslimin, Vol. 4, p. 97.

[4.](#) Ibid. p. 135.

[5.](#) Allama Tabatabai, Op. Cit

[6.](#) Maktab-e-tashayyu No. 2, p. 120.

[7.](#) Ibid. p. 126.

[8.](#) Ibid. p. 157.

[9.](#) See Murtada Mutahhari, Ilal-e-garayesh beh maddigari (The cause of inclination towards Materialism) under the chapter: Naresa iha you mafahi me faisafil (The inadequacies of [Western] Philosophical Ideologies).

Part Three

Suluk And Ibada

Ibada, or service, of the One God and the negation of everything else, as an object of service and worship, is one of the essential teachings of God-sent Messengers, a feature never absent from the teachings of any prophet. As we know, in the sacred religion of Islam, too, worship occupies a prominent status, with the only difference that worship in Islam is not regarded as a series of devotional rituals separate from everyday life and as pertaining solely to another world. Worship in Islam is located in the context of life and is an unalienable part of the Islamic philosophy of life.

Aside from the fact that some of the Islamic acts of worship are performed collectively, Islam has structured them in such a fashion that their performance automatically ensures the performance of other duties of life as well. For instance, salat is a complete expression of man's servitude and surrender to Allah. It has been specified in such a manner that even a man who desires to pray in a lonely corner is forced to observe certain things of moral and social relevance, such as cleanliness, respect for the rights of others, observance of punctuality, possession of a sense of direction, control over one's emotions, and expression of good-will and benevolence towards other righteous servants of Allah!.

From the Islamic point of view, every good and beneficial action, if performed with a pure, God-seeking intention, is viewed as an act of worship. Hence, learning, acquisition of knowledge and livelihood and social services, if performed for Allah's sake, are acts of worship. Nevertheless, Islam also specifies a system of rituals and formal acts of worship such as salat, sawm (fasting) etc. each having a specific philosophy for performing it.

The Levels Of Worship

Men have varying attitudes towards worship. Not all of them view it in the same light. For some, worship is a kind of deal, a barter and an exchange of labor performed for wages. Like an ordinary worker who spends his time and labor for the benefit of an employer and expects a daily wage in return, the devotee also endeavors for the sake of the Divine reward, which, however, he would receive in the Hereafter.

Like the laborer, for whom his labor bears fruit in the form of his wages and who would not work except for a wage, the benefit of the devotee's worship, according to the outlook of this particular group of devotees, lies in the wages and rewards which shall be granted to the devotees in the form of the things and the means of comfort in the other world.

However, every employer pays wages in return for the benefit which he derives from his employees, but what benefit can the Master of the heavens derive from the labours of a weak and feeble servant of His? Moreover, if we assume that the Great Employer does remunerate His servants in the form of the blessings and rewards of the Hereafter, then why does He not reward them without any effort and consumption of labour and energy? These are questions which never occur to this class of the pious.

From their viewpoint, the essence of worship lies in certain visible bodily movements and oscillations of the tongue. This is one attitude towards worship. Unrefined and vulgar it may be, it is, in the words of Ibn Sina, as he puts it in the ninth chapter of his book titled *Al-Isharat*, the attitude of the unenlightened and God-ignorant is acceptable only by the plebeians.

Another approach towards worship is that of the enlightened. Here, the aforementioned problems of worker and employer, labour and wage, have no relevance. How can they be relevant when worship is viewed by them as the ladder to attain nearness to Allah, as the means of human sublimity, edification and upliftment of the soul and its flight to the invisible sphere of spiritual greatness, an invigorating exercise of one's spiritual faculties and a triumph of the spirit over the corporeal? It is the highest expression of the gratitude and love of the human being towards his Creator, his declaration of love for the Most Perfect and the Absolutely Beautiful One and, finally, his wayfaring towards Allah!

According to this approach, worship has a form and a soul, an appearance and an inner meaning. That which is expressed by the tongue and the movements of other parts of the body, is the form, the outer mold, and the appearance of worship.

Its soul and meaning is something else. The soul of worship is inextricably connected with the significance attached to worship by the devotee, his attitude towards it, his inner motive that drives him to it, the ultimate satisfaction and benefit he derives from it, and the extent to which he covers the Divine path in his journey towards Allah.

[The Approach Of Nahjul-Balagha](#)

What is the approach and the attitude adopted by Nahjul-Balagha towards worship? Nahjul-Balagha takes an enlightened view of worship or, rather, it is, after the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (S), the main source of inspiration towards the enlightened approach to worship in the Islamic tradition.

As we know, of the most sublime and imaginative themes of Islamic literature, both Arabic and Persian,

is the relationship between the ardent love of the devotee for the Divine Essence expressed in delicate and elegant passages in the form of sermons, prayers, allegories, parables, both in prose and in verse.

When we compare them with the pre-Islamic notions prevalent in the regions which subsequently constituted the domains of Islam, it is surprising to observe the gigantic leap that was taken by Islam in bestowing depth, scope, sweetness, and delicacy to human thought. Islam transformed a people who worshipped idols, images, fire, or degraded the Eternal God to the level of a human A Father, and whose flight of imagination prompted them to identify the “Father” with the “Son”, or who officially considered the Ahura Mazda to be a material form whose statues they erected in every place, into a people whose intellect could grasp and evolve the most abstract of concepts, the most sophisticated of ideas, the most elegant of thoughts and the most sublime of notions.

How was the human intellect so radically transformed? What revolutionized those people’s logic, elevated their thoughts, refined their emotions and sublimated their values? How did it all happen? the al- Mu’allaqat al-sab’a and Nahjul-Balagha stand only one generation apart from each other.

Both of those generations of Arabs were proverbial in eloquence and literary genius. As to the content, they stand as far apart as the earth and the sky. The former sing of the beauty of the beloved one, the pleasures of love, of gallantry, of horses, spears, the nightly assaults and compose praise and lampoon; the latter contains the most sublime of the ideologies of man.

In order to elucidate the approach of Ali (as) towards worship, we now shall proceed to cite few examples from Nahjul-Balagha, beginning with a statement about the differences in various approaches of people towards worship.

[The Worship Of Freemen](#)

“Some people worship Allah out of their desire for rewards; this is the worship of traders. Another group worships Allah out of fear; this is the worship of slaves. Yet another group worships Allah out of gratitude; this is the worship of freemen.”[1](#)

“Even if Allah had not warned those disobedient to Him of chastisement, it was obligatory by way of gratefulness for His favors that He should not be disobeyed.”[2](#)

“Lord! I have not worshipped You out of fear of Your Hell nor out of greed for Your Paradise; but I found Thee worthy of being worshipped, so I worshipped Thee.”[3](#)

[Remembering Allah](#)

The roots of all spiritual, moral and social aspects of worship lie in one thing: The remembrance of Allah and the obliviousness towards everything else. In one of its verses, the Holy Qur’an refers to the educative and the invigorating effect of worship and says the following:

“Salat protects from unseemly acts.” (29: 45)

“Adhere to salat so that you may remain in My remembrance. (20: 14)”

This is a reminder of the fact that the person who prays remembers Allah and lives by the knowledge that He is always observing and watching him. He does not forget that he himself is His servant.

The remembrance of Allah, which is the aim of worship, is the burnishing of the heart and the object of its purification. It prepares the heart for the reflection of the Divine Light in it. Speaking of the remembrance of Allah and of the meaning of worship, Ali (as) says the following:

“Certainly Allah, the Glorified One, has made His remembrance the burnishing of the hearts which makes them hear after deafness, see after blindness and which makes them submissive after unruliness. In all periods and times when there were no prophets, there were individuals to whom He spoke in whispers through their conscience and intellect.”⁴

These sentences speak of the wonderful effect of the Divine remembrance on the heart, to the extent of making it capable of receiving the Divine inspiration and bringing it in intimate communion with Allah.

The Levels Of Devotion

In the same sermon are explained the various spiritual states and levels attained by the worshippers in the course of their devotional pursuit. Ali (as) describes such men in these words:

“The angels have surrounded them and peace is showered upon them. The doors of heaven are opened for them and the abodes of bliss, of which He had informed them, have been prepared for them. He is pleased with their struggle and admires their station. When they call upon Him, they breathe the fragrance of His forgiveness and mercy.”⁵

Nights Of The Devout

From the point of view of Nahjul-Balagha, the world of worship is another world altogether. Its delights are not comparable with any pleasures of the three-dimensional corporeal world. The world of worship effuses movement, progress and journey, a journey which is quite unlike physical travel to new lands. It is a spiritual journey to the “nameless” city.

It does not distinguish night from day because it is always drenched in light. In it, there is no trace of darkness or pain, for it is purity, sincerity, and delight all over. Happy is the man, in the view of Nahjul-Balagha, who sets his foot into this world and is refreshed by its invigorating breeze. Such a man, then, no longer cares whether he lays his head on a silk pillow or on a stone:

“Blessed is he who carries out his duties towards his Master and endures the hardships they entail. He

allows himself no sleep at night until it overwhelms him. Then he lies down with the palm of his hand under his head as his pillow. He is among those whom the thought of the Day of Judgement keeps awake at nights, whose bed remains vacant, whose lips hum in Allah's remembrance and whose sins have been erased by their prolonged earnest supplication for forgiveness These are the 'Party of Allah'; '... surely [members of] Allah's Party are the ones who prosper!'⁶

The nights of the men of Allah are like shiny days, Gloomy nights do not exist for the enlightened.

The Profile Of The Pious

In the last section we discussed the viewpoint of Nahjul-Balagha with respect to worship. We found that Nahjul-Balagha does not regard worship as a series of cut-and-dried, lifeless rituals. The bodily movements constitute the apparent motion of worship while its soul and meaning are something else.

Only when endowed with meaning and spirit is the worship worthy of its name. Real worship means the transcending of the three-dimensional world into the spiritual sphere, which is a world of perpetual delight and sublimation for the soul and the source of vigour and strength for the heart which has its own pleasures.

There are many references to the characteristics of the pious and the devout in Nahjul-Balagha. Often, Nahjul-Balagha sketches the profiles of the pious and the devout and describes their characteristic fear of Allah, their devotion and delight in worship, their constant sorrow and grief over sins.

It describes their frequent recitation of the Holy Qur'an, their occasional ecstatic experiences and states which they achieve in the course of their worshipful endeavors and struggle against their corporeal self. At times, it discusses the role of worship in lifting the human soul from the pall of sins and black deeds and often points out to the effect of worship in curing moral and psychological ailments. At other times, it speaks about the unadulterated, unsurpassable and pure delights and ecstasies of the followers of the spiritual path, the sincere worshippers of Allah.

Night Vigils

"During the night, they are on their feet reciting the verses of the Holy Qur'an one after the other, tarrying to deliberate about their meanings and thereby instilling gnostic pathos into their souls and by means of it seek remedy for their spiritual ailments. What they hear from the Holy Qur'an seems to them as if they are witnessing it with their own eyes. If they come across a verse arousing eagerness (for Paradise), they lean towards it eagerly, their souls clinging to it avidly, as if they are approaching their ultimate goal. And when they come across a verse that instills fear, their hearts' ear is turned in attention to it as if they themselves hear the cracking sound of the flames of Hell Fire.

Their backs are bent in reverence and their foreheads, palms, knees and toes rest on the ground as they

beseech Allah for salvation. But when the day dawns, they are kind, patient, scholarly, pious and righteous.”[7](#)

The Spiritual Experience

“He has revived his intellect and slain his self until his body became lean and its bulkiness shrunk, and stubbornness turned into tenderness (of heart). Then an glory, like a thunderbolt, descended upon his heart, illuminating the path before him, opening all the doors and leading him straight into the gateway of Peace.

Now his feet, carrying his body, are firmly rooted in the status of safety (on the Sirat) and comfort because he kept his heart busy with good deeds and won the good pleasure of his God.”[8](#)

As we observe, this passage speaks of another kind of life, the life of intellect. It speaks of struggle against the carnal self (al-nafs al-ammara bil su’) and its destruction; it speaks of exercises of the spirit and the body, about lightening which, as a result of such an exercise, illuminates the being of the follower and brightens his spiritual world; it speaks of the stages and targets that the devotee’s earnest soul reaches on its way until it attains the last and the highest stage of man’s spiritual journey. The Holy Qur’an says the following:

O man! You are labouring unto your Lord laboriously, and thou shalt encounter Him. (84: 6)

Ali (as), in the passage cited above, speaks about the inner peace, contentment and tranquility of the soul which a man’s restless, disturbed and anxious heart ultimately attains:

Indeed, the hearts are at rest in Allah’s remembrance. (13: 28)

In sermon 228, Ali (as) describes the significance attached by this class of devotees to spiritual life—the life of the heart: “They see that the worldly people attach great importance to the death of their bodies, but they themselves attach much greater importance to the death of hearts of the living”(Sermon 230).[9](#)

Ali (as) describes the ecstatic eagerness of the earnest souls which impels them to move onwards on the path of spiritual perfection in these words: “They lived in the society and participated in its affairs with their bodies, while their souls rested in the higher spiritual spheres.”[10](#)

“Had there been no preordained time of death for each of them, their spirits would not have remained in their bodies even for the twinkling of an eye because of their eagerness for the Divine reward and their fear of chastisement.”[11](#)

“He did everything only for the sake of Allah, so Allah also made him His own.”[12](#)

The esoteric knowledge and emanated insight, revealed to the heart of the follower of the spiritual path as a result of self-education and self-refinement, is described in these words:

“The knowledge that bursts upon them and surrounds them is endowed with absolute certainty, and their soul attains the highest degree of conviction. They easily bear what the easy-going regard as harsh and unbearable. They endear what makes the ignorant recoil with horror.”[13](#)

The Purging Of Sins

From the point of view of Islamic teachings, every sin leaves a black stain and the effects of distortion in the human heart which, in turn, weakens a person’s aptitude for good and righteous deeds.

Consequently, it further causes him to deviate and commit other sins and foul deeds as well. On the other hand, worship, prayer and remembrance of Allah develop a human being’s religious consciousness, strengthen his aptitude for virtuous deeds and diminish his proneness to sinning. This means that worship and remembrance of Allah efface the bad effects of sins, replacing them with fondness for virtue and goodness.

In Nahjul-Balagha, there is a sermon which deals with salat, zakat and the delivering of the trust back to its owner. Having emphasized the importance of salat, Ali (as) further says the following: “Certainly, prayer removes sins like autumn strips leaves off from trees, and it liberates you from the rope (of sins which is) tied around your neck. The Prophet (S) likened it to a refreshing stream at one’s door in which one takes a purifying bath five times during the day and the night. Will, after so much cleansing, any dirt remain on him?”[14](#)

Moral Remedy

In sermon 196, after making a reference to evil conduct, such as disobedience, oppression, injustice and arrogance, Ali (as) says the following: “It is on account of these perils that Allah has encouraged His believing servants to perform salat and to pay zakat, to fast during the days when fast is obligatory; these acts of worship provide their limbs with peace and rest, casting fear in their eyes, softening their spirits, cultivating a sense of humility in their hearts and purging them from pride.”

Intimacy And Ecstasy

“Lord! You, of all beloved ones, are the most attached to Your lovers and the most ready to trust those who place their trust in You. You see, You look into their secrets and know that which lies in their conscience and are aware of the extent of their inner vision. Consequently, their secrets are open to You and their hearts look up to You in eager apprehension. In loneliness, Your remembrance is their friend and consolation. In distress Your help is their protection.”[15](#)

There are some people devoted to remembrance of Allah Who have chosen it in place of all worldly goods.[16](#)

In sermon 148, Ali (as) alludes to the coming times of the Promised al-Mahdi (as), may Allah hasten his appearance, and at the end of his discourse describes the courage, wisdom, insight and attributes of the Imam (as) and his supporters. Then a group of people will be made ready by Allah like the swords sharpened by the blacksmith. Their sight would be brightened by revelations the inner meaning of the Holy Qur'an would be familiar to their ears and they would be given to drink the cup of wisdom every morning and evening. [17](#)

[1.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Hikam, No. 237.

[2.](#) Ibid. Hikam, No. 290.

[3.](#) Reference is not indicated. Tr.

[4.](#) Reference is not indicated. Tr.

[5.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 222.

[6.](#) Ibid. p. 343.

[7.](#) Ibid. Rasa'il, No. 45.

[8.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 193.

[9.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 220.

[10.](#) Ibid. Hikam, No. 147.

[11.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 193.

[12.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 87.

[13.](#) Ibid. Hikam, No. 147.

[14.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 199.

[15.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 227.

[16.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 222.

[17.](#) Ibid. Khutab No. 150.

Part Four

Government And Justice: Nahjul-Balagha On State

One of the frequently discussed issues in Nahjul-Balagha is government and justice. To anyone who goes through the book, it is evident to what extent Ali (as) is sensitive to the issues related to government and justice. He considers them to be of paramount importance.

For those who lack an understanding of Islam but have knowledge of the teachings of other religions, it is astonishing why a religious personality should devote himself to this sort of problem. Don't such problems relate to the world and worldly life?! Shouldn't a sage keep aloof from the matters of the world and society? They thus wonder.

On the other hand, such a thing is not at all surprising for one acquainted with the teachings of Islam and the details of Ali's life, i.e. That Ali (as) was brought up from childhood by the Holy Prophet (S) of Islam, that the Prophet (S), having taken him from his father as a child, had reared him in his home under his

own care, that the Prophet (S) had trained Ali (as) and instructed him in his own characteristic way, teaching him the secrets of Islam. Ali's spirit had assimilated within itself the doctrines of Islam and the code of its laws.

Therefore, it is not unusual that Ali (as) should have been as such; rather, it would have been astonishing if he was not as such, as we find him to be. Does not the Holy Qur'an declare:

“Indeed, We sent Our messengers with the clear signs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that men might uphold justice”(57: 25)?

In this verse, the establishment of justice has been declared as the objective of the mission of all the prophets. The sanctity of justice is so stressed that it is considered the aim of all prophetic missions. Hence, how were it possible that someone like Ali (as), whose duty was to expound the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and explain the doctrines and laws of Islam, might have ignored this issue or, at least, accorded it a secondary importance?

Those who neglect these issues in their teachings or imagine that these problems are only of marginal significance, and that the central issues are those of ritual purity and impurity (taharah and najasah), it is essential that they should re-examine their own beliefs and views.

The Importance Of Politics

The first thing which must be examined is the significance and value attached to the issue of government and justice by Nahjul-Balagha. Indeed, what is essentially the importance of these problems in Islam? A thorough discussion of this question is obviously outside the scope of this book, but by way of a casual reference, however, it seems inevitable to lightly touch upon.

The Holy Qur'an, in the verse where it commands the Prophet (S) to inform the people that Ali (as) would succeed him as the leader of the Muslims and the Prophet's khalifah, declares the following with extraordinary insistence:

“O Messenger! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, for if you do not do so, you will not have delivered His Message at all!”(5: 67).

Is there any other issue in Islam to which this much importance is attached? What other issue is of such a significance that, if not communicated to the people, it would amount to the failure of the prophetic mission itself?

During the battle of Uhud, when the Muslims were defeated and the rumor spread that the Holy Prophet (S) had been killed, a group of Muslims fled from the battlefield. Referring to this incident, the Holy Qur'an says the following:

“Muhammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?”(3: 144)

‘Allama Tabataba’i, in an article titled Wilayat wa-hakumat, derives the following conclusion from the above verse:

“If the Messenger (k) is killed in battle, it should not in any way stall, even temporarily, your struggle. Immediately afterwards, you should place yourselves under the banner of the successor to the Prophet (S) and continue your endeavor. In other words, if, supposedly, the Prophet (S) is killed or if he dies, the social system and military organization of the Muslims should not disintegrate.

There is one hadith wherein the Prophet (S) said, “If (as few as) three persons go on a journey, they must appoint one from among themselves as their leader. From this, one may infer to what extent the Prophet (S) regarded as harmful the disorder and absence of authority that could resolve social conflicts and serve as a unifying bond among individuals.

Nahjul-Balagha deals with numerous problems concerning the State and social justice, a few of which, Allah willing, we shall discuss here.

The first problem to be discussed here is that of the necessity and value of a State. Ali (as) has repeatedly stressed the need for a powerful government and, in his own time, battled against the views propagated by the Kharijites who, in the beginning, denied the need for a State, considering the Holy Qur’an as sufficient.

The slogan of the Kharijites, as is known, was: “The right of judgement (or authority to rule) belongs exclusively to Allah (la hukm illa li-Allah), a phrase adopted from the Holy Qur’an. Its Qur’anic meaning is that the prerogative of legislation belongs to Allah or those whom Allah has permitted to legislate.” But the Kharijites interpreted it differently.

According to Ali (as), they had imparted a false sense to a true statement. The essence of their view was that no human being has any right to rule others; sovereignty belongs exclusively to Allah. Ali’s argument was:

Yes, I also say la hukm illa li-Allah, in the sense that the right of legislation belongs solely to Allah. But their claim that the prerogative to govern and to lead also belongs to Allah is not reasonable. After all, the laws of Allah need to be implemented by human beings. Men cannot do without a ruler, good or evil. [1](#)

It is under the protection of a State that the believers strive for Allah’s sake, and the unbelievers derive material benefit from their worldly endeavors, and men attain the fruits of their labor. It is through the authority of the State that taxes are collected, aggressors are repelled, the security of highways is maintained, and the weak reclaim their rights (through the courts of law) from the strong. (This process

continues) until the good citizens are happy and secure from the evils of miscreants (Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab 40).

Ali (as), like other godly men and spiritual leaders, despises temporal power and political office for being lowly and degrading when it serves as an instrument of gratification of lust for power and political ambition. He looks down upon it with extreme contempt when it is desired as an end-in-itself and aspired as an ideal of life.

He considers such kind of power to be devoid of any value, considering it to be more detestable than “a pig’s bone in a leper’s hand.” But the same power and leadership, if used as a means for the establishment and execution of social justice and service to society, is regarded by him as a thing of paramount sanctity, something for which he is willing to fight any opportunist and political adventurer seeking to grab power and illegitimate wealth. In its defense, he does not hesitate to draw his sword against plunderers and usurpers.

During the days of Ali’s caliphate, ‘Abdullah ibn Abbas once went to see him. He found Ali (as) mending his old shoes with his own hand. Turning to Ibn Abbas, Ali (as) asked him, “How much do you think this shoe is worth?” “Nothing, replied Ibn Abbas.” Ali (as) said, “Yet the same shoe is of more value to me than authority over you [folks] if it were not to me a means for establishing justice, recovering the rights of the deprived and wiping out evil practices”(Khutab 33).

In sermon 216, we come across a general discussion about human rights and duties. Here, Ali (as) states that every right always involves two parties. Of the various Divine duties, the ones which Allah has ordained are duties of people towards people; they are framed in such a way that each right necessitates a duty towards others; each right which benefits an individual or a group holds the individual or group responsible to fulfill some duty towards others. Every duty becomes binding when the other party also fulfills his duty. He says the following further regarding this issue:

“But the most important of the reciprocal rights that Allah has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the subjects and the rights of the subjects over the ruler. It is a mutual and reciprocal obligation decreed by Allah for them. He has made it the basis of the strength of their society and of their religion.

Consequently, the subjects cannot prosper unless the rulers are righteous. The rulers cannot be righteous unless the subjects are firm and steadfast. If the subjects fulfill their duties toward the ruler and the ruler his duty to them, righteousness prevails among them. Only then are the objectives of the religion realized, the pillars of justice become stable and wholesome traditions become established. In this way, better conditions of life and social environment emerge. People become eager to safeguard the integrity of the State and thus frustrate the plots of its enemies”(Khutab 126).

Justice: “Supreme Value”

The first outcome of the sacred teachings of Islam was the influence exercised on the minds and ideologies of its adherents. Not only did Islam introduce new teachings regarding the world, man and his society, but also changed the ways of thinking. The importance of the latter achievement is not less than the former.

Every teacher imparts new knowledge to his pupils, and every school of thought provides new information to its adherents. But the teachers and schools of thought who furnish their followers with a new logic and revolutionize their ways of thinking altogether are few.

But how do the ways of thinking change and one logic replaces another? This requires some elucidation.

Man, by virtue of being a rational creature, thinks rationally about scientific and social issues. His arguments, intentionally or unintentionally, are based on certain principles and axioms. All his conclusions are drawn from and judgements are based on them. The difference in ways of thinking originates precisely in these first principles or axioms. This is used as the ground for inferences and conclusions.

Here, it is crucial what premises and axioms form the foundation for inference, and here lies the cause of all disparity in inferences and conclusions. In every age, there is a close similarity between the ways of thinking of those familiar with the intellectual spirit of the age on scientific issues.

However, the difference is conspicuous between the intellectual spirits of different ages. But with regard to social problems, such a similarity and consensus is not found even among persons who are contemporaries. There is a secret behind this. To elaborate on it would take us outside the scope of the present discussion.

Man, in his confrontation with social and moral problems, is inevitably led to adopt some sort of value-orientation. In his assessments, he arrives at a certain hierarchy of values in which he arranges all issues. This order or hierarchy of values plays a significant role in the adoption of the kind of basic premises and axioms which he utilizes. It makes him think differently from others who have differently evaluated the issues and have arrived at a different hierarchy of values.

This is what leads to a disparity among the ways of thinking. Take, for example, the question of feminine chastity, which is a matter of social significance. Do all people prescribe a similar system of evaluation with regard to this issue? Certainly not.

There is a great amount of disparity between views. For some, its significance is near zero and it plays no part in their thinking. For some, the matter is of utmost value. The latter regard life as worthless in an environment where feminine chastity is regarded as unimportant.

When we say that Islam has revolutionized the ways of thinking, what is meant is that it has drastically altered their system and hierarchy of values. It has elevated values like taqwa (God-fearing), which had no value at all in the past, to a very high status and attached an unprecedented importance to it. On the other hand, it deflated the value of such factors as lineage, race and the like which in the pre-Islamic days were of predominant significance, bringing their worth to zero. Justice is one of the values revived by Islam and is given an extraordinary status.

It is true that Islam has recommended justice and stressed its implementation, but what is very significant is that it elevates its value in the society. It is better to leave the elaboration of this point to Ali (as) himself and see what Nahjul-Balagha says. A man of intelligence and understanding put the following question to Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as): "Which is superior, justice or generosity?" (Hikam 437).

Here, the question is about two human qualities. Man has always detested oppression and injustice and has also held in high regard acts of kindness and benevolence performed without the hope of reward or a return.

Apparently, the answer to the above question seems both obvious and easy: generosity is superior to justice, for what is justice except observance of the rights of others and avoiding violating them? But a generous man willingly foregoes his own right in preference of another person over himself.

The just man does not transgress the rights of others; he safeguards their rights from being violated. But the generous man sacrifices his own right for another's sake. Therefore, generosity must be superior to justice.

In truth, the above reasoning appears to be quite valid when we estimate their worth from the viewpoint of individual morality and generosity, more so than that of justice. This seems to be a sign of human perfection and the nobleness of the human soul.

But Ali's reply is contrary to the above answer. Ali (as) gives two reasons for the superiority of justice over generosity. Firstly, he says the following: "Justice puts things in their proper place and generosity diverts them from their (natural) direction.

The meaning of justice is that the natural deservedness of everybody must be taken into consideration; everyone should be given his due worth according to his work, ability and qualifications. Society is comparable to a machine whose every part has a proper place and function.

It is true that generosity is a quality of great worth from the point of view that a generous man donates to another what legitimately belongs to him, but we must note that it is an unnatural occurrence.

It may be compared to a body one of whose organs is malfunctioning while its other healthy organs and parts temporarily redirect their activity to the recovery of the suffering organ. From the social point of view, it would be far more preferable if the society did not possess such sick members at all, so that the

healthy organs and members may completely devote their activities and energies to the general growth and perfection of the society, instead of being absorbed with helping and assisting a particular member.

To return to Ali's reply, the other reason he gives for preferring justice to generosity is this:

Justice is the general caretaker, whereas generosity is a particular reliever. That is, justice is like a general law which is applicable to the management of all the affairs of the society. Its benefit is universal and all-embracing; it is the highway which serves all and everyone. But generosity is something exceptional and limited, which cannot be always relied upon. Basically, if generosity were to become a general rule, it would no longer be regarded as such.

Deriving his conclusion, Ali (as) says the following: "Consequently, justice is the nobler of the two and possesses the greater merit. This way of thinking about man and human problems is one based on a specific value system rooted in the idea of the fundamental importance of the society. In this system of values, social principles and criteria precede the norms of individual morality. The former is a principle, whereas the latter is only a ramification. The former is a trunk, while the latter is a branch of it. The former is the foundation of the structure, whereas the latter is an embellishment.

From Ali's viewpoint, it is the principle of justice that is of crucial significance in preserving the balance of society, and winning the goodwill of the public. Its practice can ensure the health of the society and bring peace to its soul.

Oppression, injustice and discrimination cannot bring peace and happiness even to the tyrant or to the one in whose interest the injustice is perpetrated. Justice is like a public highway which has room for all and through which everyone may pass without impediment. But injustice and oppression constitute a blind alley which does not lead even the oppressor to his desired destination.

As is known, during his caliphate, Othman ibn Affan put a portion of the public property of the Muslims at the disposal of his kinsmen and friends. After the death of Othman, Ali (as) assumed power.

Ali (as) was advised by some people to overlook whatever injustice had occurred in the past and to do nothing about it, to confine his efforts to what would befall from then on during his own caliphate. But to this his reply was: "A long standing right does not become invalid [because of the passage of time]!"

Then he exclaimed: "By Allah! Even if I find that by such misappropriated money women have been married or bondmaids bought, I would reclaim it and have it returned to the public treasury. There is a wide scope and room in the dispensation of justice. [Justice is vast enough to include and envelop everyone;] he who [being of a diseased temperament] finds restriction and hardship in justice should know that the path of injustice and oppression is harder and even more restricted"(Khutab, No. 15).

Justice, according to this concept, is a barrier and a limit to be observed, respected and believed in by everyone. All should be content to remain within its limits. But if its limits are broken and violated, and if

both belief in it and respect for it are lost while human greed and lust, being insatiable by nature, would not stop at any limit, the further man advances on this interminable journey of greed and lust, the greater becomes his dissatisfaction.

Indifference To Injustice

Ali (as) regards justice to be a duty and a Divine trust. To him, it is a Divine sanctity. He does not expect a Muslim who is aware and informed about the teachings of Islam to be an idle spectator at the scenes of injustice and discrimination.

In his sermon called al-Shaqshaqiyya, after relating the pathetic political episodes of the past, Ali (as) proceeds to advance his reasons for accepting the caliphate. He mentions how, after the assassination of "Othman, the people thronged around him urging him to agree to lead the Muslims.

But Ali (as), after the unfortunate events of the past and being aware of the extent of deterioration in the then prevailing situation, was not disposed to accept that grave responsibility. Nevertheless, he saw that if he should reject the caliphate, the face of truth would become still more clouded, and it might be alleged that he was not interested in this matter from the very beginning, that he gave no importance to such affairs.

Moreover, in view of the fact that Islam does not consider it permissible for anyone to remain an idle spectator in a society divided into two classes of oppressed and oppressors, one suffering the pangs of hunger and the other well-fed and uneasy with the discomforts of over-eating, there was no alternative for Ali (as) but to shoulder this heavy responsibility. He himself explains this in the aforementioned sermon:

"By the One Who split the grain and created living things [do I swear]! Had it not been for the presence of the pressing crowd, were it not for the establishment of (Allah's) testimony upon me through the existence of supporters, and had it not been for the pledge of Allah with the learned, to the effect that they should not connive with the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the reins of the caliphate on its own shoulders and would have made the last one drink from the same cup that I made the first one to drink (i.e. I would have taken the same stance towards the caliphate as at the time of the first caliph). You would have seen then that in my view the world of yours is not worth more than a goat's sneeze"(Khutab, No. 3).

Justice Should Not Be Compromised

Favoritism, nepotism, partiality and shutting up of mouths by big morsels, have always been the essential tools of politicians. Now a man had assumed power and captained the ship of the caliphate who profoundly detested these things. In fact, his main objective was to struggle and fight against this kind of politics.

Naturally, with the very inception of Ali's reign, the politicians with their hopes and expectations were disappointed. Their disappointment soon grew into subversive conspiracies against Ali's government, creating for him many a headache. Well-meaning friends, with sincere goodwill, advised Ali (as) to adopt a greater flexibility in his policies for the sake of higher interests. Their advice was:

“Extricate yourself from the ruses of these demagogues, as is said, “sewing the dog's mouth with a big morsel.” These are influential persons. Some of them are from among the elite sahaba of the dawn of Islam. Presently, your real enemy is Mu'awiyah who is in control of a rich and fertile province, Syria. The wisdom lies in setting aside, for the time being, the matter of equality and justice. What harm is there in it?

Ali (as) replied to them saying, “Do you really ask me to seek support through injustice [to my subjects and to sacrifice justice for the sake of political gain]?! By Allah! I will not do it as long as the world lasts and one star follows another in the sky [i.e. I will not do it as long as the order of the universe exists]. Even if it were my own property, I would distribute it with justice. And why not, since it is the property of Allah and I am His trustee?”(Khutba 126).

This is an example of how highly Ali (as) valued justice and what status it held in his opinion.

People's Rights

The needs of a human being are not confined to food, clothing and housing. It may be possible to keep an animal happy by satisfying all its physical needs. But in the case of man, spiritual and psychological factors are as important as physical ones. Different governments following a similar course in providing for the material welfare of the public might achieve differing results because one of them fulfils the psychological needs of the society while the other does not.

One of the pivotal factors which contribute to the securing of the goodwill of the masses is the way a government views them, if it regards them as its slaves, or as its masters and guardians, if it considers the people as possessing legitimate rights and itself only as their trustee, agent and representative.

In the first case, whatever service a government may perform for the people is not more than a kind of the master's care of his beast. In the second case, every service performed is equivalent to the discharging of duty by a right trustee. A State's acknowledgment of the authentic rights of the people and avoidance of any kind of action that implies negation of their right of sovereignty, are the primary conditions for securing their trust and goodwill.

The Church And The Right Of Sovereignty

At the dawn of the modern age, there was a movement against religion in Europe which also affected, more or less, other regions outside Christendom. This movement was inclined towards materialism.

When we examine the causes and roots of this movement, we discover that one of them was the inadequacy of the teachings of the Church from the viewpoint of political rights.

The Church authorities, in addition to some European philosophers, developed an artificial relationship with and an association between belief in Allah on the one hand and stripping the people of their political rights by despotic regimes on the other.

Naturally, this led to the assumption of some necessary relationship between democracy on the one hand and atheism on the other. It came to be believed that either we should choose the belief in Allah and accept the right of sovereignty bestowed by Him upon certain individuals, who have; otherwise, no superiority over others, or deny the existence of Allah so as to establish our right as masters of our own political destiny.

From the point of view of religious psychology, one of the causes of the decline of the influence of religion was the contradiction between religion and a natural social need, contrived by religious authorities, especially at a time when that need expressed itself strongly at the level of public consciousness.

Right at a time when despotism and repression had reached their peak in European political life and the people were thirstily cherishing the ideas of liberty and people's sovereignty, the Church and its supporters made an assertion that the people had only duties and responsibilities towards the State and had no rights. This was sufficient to turn the lovers of liberty and democracy against religion, against God in general and the Church in particular.

This mode of thought, in the West as well as in the East, was deeply rooted from ancient times. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the *Social Contract*, writes the following: "We are told by Philo, the Emperor Caligula argued, concluding, reasonably enough on this same analogy, that kings were gods or alternately that the people were animals."

During the Middle Ages, this outlook was revived again. Since it assumed the status of religious faith, it induced a rebellion against religion itself. Rousseau, in the same book, writes the following: "Grotius denies that all human government is established for is the benefit of the governed, and he cites the example of slavery.

His characteristic method of reasoning is always to offer fact as a proof of right. It is possible to imagine a more logical method, but not one more favorable to tyrants. According to Grotius, therefore, it is doubtful whether humanity belongs to a hundred men, or whether these hundred men belong to humanity, though he seems throughout his book to lean to the first of these views, which is also that of Hobbes. These authors show us the human race as divided into herds of cattle, each with a master who presents it only in order to devour its members.²

Rousseau, who calls such a right "the right of might"(right equals force), replies to this logic in this

fashion: “Obey those in power. If this means yielding to force, the precept is sound but superfluous; it has never, I suggest, been violated. All power comes from God, I agree; but so does every disease and no one forbids us from summoning a physician. If I am held up by a robber at the edge of a forest, force compels me to hand over my purse. But if I could somehow contrive to keep the purse from him, would I still be obliged in conscience to surrender it? After all, the pistol in the robber’s hand is undoubtedly a power.”³

Although he does not incline to Allah in his totalitarian logic, the basis of the philosophic status of Hobbes, whose views have been referred to above, regarding political rights is that the sovereign represents and personifies the will of the people, and he actually translates the will of the people itself into his actions.

However, when we closely examine his reasoning, we find that he has been influenced by the ideas of the Church. Hobbes claims that the individual liberty does not clash with the unlimited power of the sovereign. He writes the following: “Nevertheless, we are not to understand that by such liberty, the sovereign power of life and death is either abolished or limited.

For it has been already shown that nothing the sovereign representative can do to a subject, on whatever pretense, can properly be called injustice or injury because every subject is the author of every act the sovereign does, so that he never wants right to anything; otherwise, than as he himself is the subject of Allah and is bound thereby to obscure the laws of nature.

And, therefore, it may and does often happen in commonwealths that a subject may be put to death by the command of the sovereign power and yet neither do the other wrong as when Jephtha caused his daughter to be sacrificed; in which, and the like cases, he that so dies, had the liberty to do the action for which he is nevertheless without injury put to death.

And the same hold also in a sovereign prince that puts to death an innocent subject. For though the action be against the law of nature as being contrary to equity, as was the killing of Uriah by David, yet it was not an injury to Uriah but to God.”⁴

As can be noticed, in this philosophy, the responsibility to Allah is assumed to negate the responsibility towards the people. Acknowledgment of duty to Allah is considered sufficient in order that the people may have no rights. Justice, here, is what the sovereign does and oppression and injustice have no meaning.

In other words, duty to Allah is assumed to annul the duty to man, and the right of Allah overrides the rights of men. Indubitably, Hobbes, though apparently a free thinker independent of the ideology of the Church, had ecclesiastical ideas not penetrated into his mind, would not have developed such a theory. Precisely that which is totally absent from such philosophies is the idea that faith and belief in Allah should be considered conducive to the establishment of justice and the realization of human rights.

The truth is that, firstly, the belief in Allah is the foundation of the idea of justice and inalienable human rights; it is only through the acceptance of the existence of Allah that it is possible to affirm innate human rights and uphold true justice as two realities independent of any premise and convention; secondly, it is the best guarantee for their execution in practice.

Nahjul-Balagha: The Approach

The approach of Nahjul-Balagha to justice and human rights rests on the above-mentioned foundations. In sermon 216, from which we have quoted before, Ali (as) says the following:

“Allah has, by entrusting me with your affairs, given me a right over you and awarded you a similar right over me. The issue of rights, as a subject of discourse, is inexhaustible but is the most restricted of things when it comes to practice. A right does not accrue in favor of any person unless it accrues against him also, and it does not accrue against him unless that it also accrues in his favor.”

As can be noticed from the above passage, Allah is central to Ali’s statement about justice, rights, and duties. But Ali’s stand is opposed to the aforementioned view according to which Allah has bestowed rights on only a handful of individuals solely responsible to Him, and has deprived the rest of people of these rights, making them responsible not only to Him but also to those who have been granted by Him the unlimited privilege to rule others. As a result, the ideas of justice and injustice with regard to the relationship between the ruler and the ruled become meaningless.

In the same sermon, Ali (as) says the following:

“No individual, no matter how eminent and high his station in religion maybe, is not above needing cooperation of the people in discharging his obligations and the responsibilities placed upon him by Allah. Again, no man, however humble and insignificant in the eyes of others, is too low to be ignored for the purpose of his cooperation and his providing assistance.”

In the same sermon, Ali (as) asks the people not to address him in the way despots are addressed:

“Do not address me in the manner despots are addressed [i.e. Do not address me by the titles used to flatter despots and tyrants]. In your attitude towards me, do not entertain the kind of considerations that are adopted in the presence of unpredictable tyrants. Do not treat me with affected and obsequious manners. Do not imagine that your candor would displease me or that I expect you to treat me with veneration. One who finds it disagreeable to face true and just criticism would find it more detestable to act upon it. Therefore, do not deny me a word of truth or a just advice.”

Rulers Are People’s Trustees, Not Masters

In the last chapter, we said that a dangerous and misleading view became current in the thought of some modern European thinkers interlinking in an unnatural fashion the belief in Allah on the one hand

and the negation of peoples' rights on the other. This correlation played a significant role in inducing a group to incline towards materialism.

Duty and responsibility to Allah was assumed to necessarily negate the duty and responsibility to the people. The Divine obligations completely displaced human obligations. The belief and faith in Allah (Who, according to the Islamic teachings, created the universe on the principles of truth and justice) was considered to be in conflict with and contradict the belief in innate and natural human rights, instead of being regarded as their basis. Naturally, belief in the right of people's sovereignty was equated with atheism.

From the Islamic point of view, the case is actually the reverse. In Nahjul-Balagha, which is the subject of our discussion, the main topics are: tawhid and "irfan; throughout, the talk is about Allah Whose Name occurs repeatedly everywhere in its pages.

Nevertheless, it not only does not neglect to discuss the rights of the people and their privileges vis-a-vis the ruler, in fact regarding the ruler as the trustee and protector of their rights, but also lays great emphasis on this point. According to the logic of this noble book, the imam/ruler is the protector and trustee of the rights of the people and is held accountable by them.

If one is asked as to which of them exists for the other, it is the ruler who exists for the people, not vice versa. Sa'di has a similar idea on his mind when he says the following: "It is not the sheep who are to serve the shepherd; it is the shepherd who is there for their service.

The word raiyyah (lit. herd), despite the fact that it gradually acquired an abominable meaning in the Persian language, has an original meaning which is essentially good and humanitarian. The word rai for the ruler and raiyyah for the masses first appears in the speech of the Prophet (S) and is literally used thereafter by Ali (as).

This word is derived from the root raa, which carries the sense of "protection" and "safeguarding." The word raiyyah is applied to the people for the reason that the ruler is responsible for protecting their lives, property, rights, and liberties.

A tradition related from the Holy Prophet (S) throws full light on the meaning of this statement:

"Truly, everyone of you is a rai responsible for his raiyyah. The ruler is the rai of his people and is responsible for them; the woman is the rai of her husband's house and is responsible for it; the slave is the rai of his master's property and is responsible for it; indeed, each of you is a rai and is responsible [for those under his charge/care]."⁵

In the preceding pages, we cited some examples from Nahjul- Balagha which illustrate Ali's outlook regarding the rights of the people. Here we shall give sample quotes from other sources, beginning with the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

“Allah commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners, and that when you judge between the people, judge with justice.” (4: 58)

Commenting on this verse, al-Tibrisi, in his exegesis *Majma al-Bayan*, remarks thus: “There are several opinions regarding the meaning of this verse. Firstly, that it is about trusts in general, including the Divine and the non-Divine, the material and the non-material trusts; secondly, that it is addressed to the rulers, and that Allah, by making the returning of the trusts [to their rightful owners] an obligation, is commanding such rulers to observe the rights of the people.

Then he further adds the following:

“This is corroborated by the verse immediately following it: O believers, obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. “(4: 59)

According to this verse, people are bound to obey the commands of Allah, His Messenger and those in authority (*wulat al-amr*). While the preceding verse mentions the rights of the people, this one reiterates the complementary rights of those in authority.

It has been related from the Imams that one of these two verses is ours (i.e. it establishes our rights in relation to you), and the other is yours (i.e. it outlines your rights in relation to us). Imam al-Baqir (as) said that the *salat*, *zakat*, *sawm*, and *hajj* are some of the trusts (mentioned in 4: 58). One of the trusts (*amanat*) is that the *wulat al-amr* have been commanded to justly distribute the *ghanaim*, *sadaqt* and whatever belongs to the people.

In the exegesis *Al-Mizan*, in the part of the commentary upon this verse which deals with tradition, the author relates a tradition from *Al-Durr al-Manthur* from Ali (as) that he said, “It is incumbent on the imam to rule according to the decrees revealed by Allah and to carry out the responsibilities with which he has been entrusted.

When he does that, it is incumbent upon the people to pay attention to the Divine command (about obeying the *wali al-amr*), to obey him and to respond to his call.

As noted earlier, the Holy Qur’an considers the ruler, the head of the State, as a trustee and a guardian; it regards just government as a fulfillment of a trust entrusted to the ruler. The approach of the Imams (as), in particular that of Amir al-Mu’minin Ali (as), corresponds with the view which can be inferred from the Holy Qur’an.

Now that we know the Holy Qur’an’s view of this matter, we may go on to examine the statements of *Nahjul-Balagha* dealing with this issue. More than anything else, we must study Ali’s letters (epistles) to his governors, especially those which were meant to be official circulars.

It is in these letters that we would find glimpses of the teachings of Islam regarding the functions of the ruler and his duties towards the people as well as their rights. Ali (as), in his letter to the governor of

Azerbaijan, reminds him of his duties towards the people in these words: “Beware lest you should consider this assignment as a bait [for acquiring personal gain]; rather, it is a trust lying on your neck. You have been charged with care-taking [of the people] by your superior [obligation towards them].

It is not for you to betray your duties with respect to the people (ra’iyyah)” (Epistle 5).

In another letter written as a circular to tax collectors, after a few words of advice and admonition, Ali (as) says the following:

“Fulfill the demands of justice in your relationship with the people and be patient in matters regarding their needs because you are treasurers of the people (ra’iyyah), representatives of the community (umma), and envoys of your imams”(Epistle 51).

In the famous epistle to Malik al-Ashtar, which contains elaborate instructions about various aspects of government, he writes the following:

“Awaken your heart to kindness and mercy for the people (ra’iyyah) and love and tenderness for them. Never, never should you ever act with them like a predatory beast which seeks to be satiated by devouring them, for the people fall into two categories: They are either your brethren in faith or your kindred in creation. Do not ever say, ‘I have been given authority’ or ‘My command should be obeyed’ because it corrupts the heart, consumes one’s faith, and invites calamities.”

In another letter sent as a circular to his army commanders, he says the following: “It is an obligation that an official should not behave differently with the people (ra’iyyah) on account of distinction which he receives or material advantage that he may achieve. Instead, these favors from Allah should bring him nearer to Allah’s creatures and increase his compassion towards his brethren.”(Epistle 50)

Ali (as) shows an amazing sensitivity to justice, compassion towards the people and a great respect for them and their rights which, as reflected in his letters, is an exemplary and unique attitude towards this issue.

There is another epistle in Nahjul-Balagha which consists of instructions to the collectors of zakat, and is entitled: “To the officials assigned to the job of collecting zakat.” The title indicates that it was not addressed to any particular official but sent either as a general instruction in writing or delivered as a routine oral instruction.

Sayyid ar-Radi has included it in the section of Epistles, or letters, with the clarification that he is placing this letter here to show to what extent Ali (as) was meticulous in matters pertaining to justice and the rights of the people, being attentive not only to main points but also to minute details.

Here are Ali’s instructions:

“Set out with the fear of Allah, Who is One and has no partner. Do not intimidate any Muslim. Do not

trespass upon his land so as to displease him. Do not take from him more than Allah's share in his property. When you approach a tribe, at first come down at their watering place, stay there instead of entering their houses.

Approach them with calm dignity and salute them when you stand among them, grudge not a proper greeting to them. Then say to them, "O servants of Allah! The Wali and Khalifah of Allah has sent me to you to collect from you Allah's share in your property. Is there anything of His share in your property? If there is, return it to His Wali. If someone says 'NO, do not repeat the demand. If someone answers in the affirmative, go with him without frightening, threatening, or compelling him.

Take whatever gold and silver he gives you. If he has cattle or camels, do not approach them save with his permission because the major part belongs to him. When you arrive (into the cattle enclosure), do not enter upon them in a bossy and rude manner." (Epistle 25, also see 26, 27 and 46)

The passages quoted above are sufficient to throw light on Ali's attitude as a ruler toward the people under his rule.

- [1.](#) That is so in the absence of a righteous government, an unjust government, one which is expected to at least preserves law and order in the society, something which is, of course, better than chaos and the rule of jungle.
- [2.](#) Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Social Contract (trns. by Maurice Granston), Penguin Books, 1978, p. 51.
- [3.](#) Ibid. p. 53.
- [4.](#) Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, the Liberal Arts Press, New York, 1958, p. 173.
- [5.](#) Bukhari, Kitab al-Nikah, Vol. 8.

Part Five

Moral Lectures And Aphorisms: Inimitable Moral Teaching

Moral and spiritual teachings constitute the greater part of Nahjul-Balagha, making up almost half of the book. More than anything else, the fame of Nahjul-Balagha is due to the sermons, exhortations and aphorisms on ethical and moral subjects.

Aside from the moral teachings of the Holy Qur'an and a number of the sermons and sayings of the Holy Prophet (S), which are to be considered the source and antecedent of Nahjul-Balagha, the teachings of Nahjul-Balagha are without a match in the Arabic and Persian languages.

For more than a thousand years, these sermons have played an influential role serving as a matchless source of inspiration, yet retaining their original power to quicken the heartbeat, to sublimate emotions, and to bring tears to the eyes. It seems that as long as there remains any trace of humanity in the world, these sermons shall continue to exercise their original power and influence.

Comparison

The literature of Arabic and Persian is replete with works containing spiritual and moral teachings of the highest sublimity and elegance, though mainly in the form of poetry. There is, for example, the famous qasida by Abul-Fath al-Busti (360–400/971–1010) which begins with the verse saying:

Worldly profit and achievement is loss,
And the gain unmarked by the seal of pure goodness...

There is also the eulogizing qasida by Abul-Hassan al-Tihami, which he wrote on the early death of his youthful son; it begins with these lines:

The law of fate governs the destiny of creation,
And this world is not a place to settle in.

Every one of these works is an everlasting masterpiece of its kind and shines like a star on the horizons of the Arabic literature of the Islamic era, never to lose its freshness and charm. In Persian, the Gulistan and the Bustan of Sa'di and his qasa'id serve as unusually attractive and effective means of moral advice and are masterpieces of their own kind. To give some examples, here are some famous verses of the Gulistan which start with:

Every breath is a fraction of life gone,
And when I see, not much of it does remain.

Or in another qasida where he says the following:

O people! The world is not a place for leisure and repose;
To a wise man, it is not worth the effort to possess.

Or, at another place, he says the following:

The world on water and life on wind do rest;
Salute the brave ones who to them do not tie their hearts.

... And he also says the following:

Time and fortune are subject to endless change;
The wise man doesn't attach his heart to the world.

Sa'di's Bustan is full of profound and glowing spiritual pieces of advice and, perhaps, it is at its best in the ninth chapter on Penitence and the Right Way. The same is true of some portions of the Mathnawi of Rumi and works of all other Persian poets from whom we shall not further quote any examples.

In Islamic literature, including the Arabic and the Persian, there exist excellent examples of spiritual counsels and aphorisms. This Islamic literary genre is not confined to these two languages but is also found in Turkish, Urdu and other languages. A characteristic spirit pervades all of them. Anyone familiar with the Holy Qur'an, the sayings of the Holy Prophet (S), of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as), of the other Imams, and of

Muslim saints of the first rank can observe a characteristic spirit pervading all Persian literature containing spiritual counsel which represents the spirit of Islam embodied in the Persian language and embellished with its charm and sweetness.

If an expert, or a group of experts, in Arabic and Persian literature acquainted with the works in all other languages that reflect the spirit of Islam were to collect the masterpieces in the field of spiritual counsel, the extraordinary richness and maturity of the Islamic culture in this field will be revealed.

It is strange that as far as the works on spiritual counsel are concerned, the Persian genius has mostly expressed itself in poetry; there is no such work of eminence in prose. All that exists of it in prose is in the form of short sayings, like the prose writings of the Gulistan, a part of which consists of spiritual counsels and is in itself a masterpiece, or the sayings ascribed to Khawajah 'Abdullah al-Ansari.

Of course, my own knowledge is inadequate, but as far as I know, there does not exist in Persian prose any remarkable work, except for short sayings, not even a passage, which is long enough to be counted as a short discourse, especially a discourse which was originally delivered extempore and later collected and recorded in writing.

There are discourses which have been related from Rumi or Sa'di meant as oral moral advice to their followers; they also by no means possess the brilliance and charm of the poetic works of those masters and definitely are not worth being compared with the discourses of Nahjul- Balagha.

The same can be said about the writings which have reached us in the form of a treatise or letter, such as the Nasihat al-Muluk by Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, the Taziyaneh-ye suluk by Ahmed al-Ghazali, the latter being an elaborate epistle addressed to his follower and pupil A'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani.

Spiritual Counsel And Wisdom

Moral counsel, according to the Holy Qur'an, is one of the three ways of invitation towards Allah (hikma, mawiza, al-jidal al-hasan, i.e. wisdom, good admonition, and honorable debate, as mentioned in 16: 125).

The difference between hikma (wisdom, philosophy) and mawiza (spiritual and moral advice and admonition) lies in the fact that hikma is for instruction and imparting knowledge, while mawiza is meant for reminding. Hikma is struggle against ignorance and maw'iza is struggle against negligence and

indifference. Hikma deals with the intellect and mawiza appeals to the heart. Hikma educates, while mawiza prepares the intellect for the employment of its reserves. Hikma is a lamp and maw'iza is an eye-opener.

Hikma is for ratiocination, while mawiza is for self- n awakening. Hikma is the language of the intellect, while mawiza is the message for the spirit. Accordingly, the personality of the speaker plays an essential role in mawiza, which is not the case with hikma. In hikma, two minds communicate in an impersonal manner. But in mawiza, the situation is like the passage of an electric charge that flows from the speaker, who is at a higher potential, to the listener.

For this reason, it has been said of mawiza that: "If it comes forth from the soul, then it necessarily alights upon the heart. Otherwise, it does not go beyond the listener's ears. It is about the quality of mawiza that it is said: "The speech which originates from the heart enters another heart, and the words which originate from the tongue do not go beyond the ears."

It is true that the words that come from the heart, being the message of the soul, invade other hearts; but if they do not convey the message of the soul, they are no more than empty literary devices which do not go beyond the listener's ear-drum.

Mawiza And Khitaba (Exhortation And Oratory)

Mawiza also differs from khitaba (oratory, rhetoric). Although oratory also deals with emotions, it seeks to stir and agitate them. Maw'iza, on the other hand, is intended to pacify emotions, and it seeks to bring them under control. Oratory is effective when emotions are inert and stagnant; mawiza is required when lusts and passions become unmanageable.

Oratory stirs the passion for power and glory, the feelings of honor, heroism, chivalry, manliness, patriotism, nobility, righteousness, virtue and service; it is followed by movement and excitement. But mawiza checks inappropriate passion and excitement. Rhetoric and oratory snatch control from the hands of calculating reason, handing it over to tempestuous passions. But mawiza appeases the tempests of passions and prepares the ground for calculation and foresight. Oratory draws one to the outside while mawiza makes him turn to his inner self.

Rhetoric and counsel are both necessary and essential, and Nahjul-Balagha makes use of both of them. The main thing is to judge the right time for the use of each of them. The impassioned speeches of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) were delivered at a time when it was necessary to stir up passions and to build up a tempest to destroy an unjust and oppressive structure, such as at the time of the Battle of Siffin when Ali (as) delivered a fiery speech before the engagement with Muawiyah's forces.

Muawiyah's forces, arriving ahead of Ali's army, had taken control of the river bank and stopped the supply of water to Ali's camp. At first, Ali (as) strived to abstain from resorting to force, desiring the

problem to be solved through negotiation. But Muawiyah, who had some other designs, considering occupation of the river bank a victory for himself, refused every offer of negotiation. When things became difficult for Ali's men, it was time when he should stir the emotions of his soldiers through a fiery speech, creating a tempest that would rout the enemy. This is how Ali (as) addressed his companions:

They are eager that you should make them taste the flavor of battle. So you have two alternatives before you: either submit to disgrace and ignominy, or quench your swords' thirst with their blood and quench your own thirst with water. It is death to survive through defeat, while true life is to die for the sake of victory. Muawiyah is leading a handful of deluded insurgents and has deceived them by keeping them in the dark about the truth, with the result that their throats are the targets of your deadly arrows. [1](#)

These words flared their emotions, provoked their sense of honor and made the blood surge in their veins. It was not yet sunset before Ali's companions had seized the river bank, throwing back Muawiyah's forces.

However, Ali's mawaa'iz were delivered in different circumstances. During the days of the first three caliphs, particularly during "Othman's rule, immeasurable amounts of wealth and booty, won through consecutive victories, flowed into Muslim hands.

Due to the absence of any careful programs for correct utilization of that wealth, particularly due to the aristocratic, or rather tribal, rule during the reign of "Othman, moral corruption, worldliness, and love of comfort and luxury found their ways into the Muslim society. Tribal rivalries were revived, and racial prejudice between Arabs and non-Arabs was added to it. In that clamor for worldliness and mounting prejudices, rivalries, and greed for greater share of the war booty, the only cry of protest charged with spiritual exhortation was that of Ali (as).

God willing, we shall discuss in the coming chapters the various themes dealt with in Ali's mawaiz, such as taqwa (piety), worldliness, zuhd (asceticism), desires, the dread of death, the dreads of the Day of Judgement, the need to take lesson from the history of past nations and peoples... etc.

[Nahjul-Balagha's Recurring Themes](#)

Out of the 241 fragments collected under the title Khutab by Sayyid ar-Radi (though not all of them are Khutab or sermons), about 86 can be classified as mawaiz or at least contain a series of spiritual pieces of advice. Some of them, however, are elaborate and lengthy, like khutba 176 which opens with the sentence Avail yourselves of the Divine expositions, the khutba named al-Qasia (which is the longest sermon in Nahjul-Balagha), and the khutba 93 (called khutbat al-muttaqin, the "sermon of the pious").

Out of some seventy-nine passages classified as epistles, letters (which not all of them are), about twenty-five, either completely or partially, consist of spiritual and moral teachings. Some of them are quite lengthy and elaborate, such as letter 31, which constitutes of Ali's advice to his son Imam al-

Hassan al-Mujtaba (as), and the lengthiest of all, except the famous directive sent to Malik al-Ashtar. Another is letter 45, the well-known epistle of Ali (as) to Othman ibn Hunayf, his governor over Basra.

The Themes In Spiritual Pieces Of Advice

Various themes are found in the spiritual pieces of advice of Nahjul-Balagha: taqwa (piety); tawakkul (trust in Allah); sabr (patience, fortitude); zuhd(asceticism); the renunciation of worldly pleasures and luxuries, the renunciation of inordinate desires and far-fetched hopes; the condemnation of injustice and prejudice, emphasis on mercy, love, helping of the oppressed and sympathy toward the weak; emphasis on the qualities of fortitude, courage, and strength; emphasis on unity and solidarity and condemnation of disunity; the invitation to take lesson from history; the invitation to thought, meditation, remembrance, and self-criticism; the reminders about the brevity of life and the swiftness of its pace; the remembrance of death; the hardships of death-throes; experiences of the life after death; the reminders of the dreadful events of the Day of Judgement, and so on. These are some of the frequent themes of the spiritual pieces of advice of Nahjul-Balagha.

Ali's Logic

In order to understand this aspect of Nahjul-Balagha, or, in other words, to understand Ali (as) when he speaks as a moral and spiritual counselor and to understand his didactic outlook, so as to draw benefit from that ever-flowing source, it is not enough to enumerate the various themes and topics dealt with by Ali (as) in his discourses.

It is not sufficient merely to remark that Ali (as) has spoken about taqwa, tawakkul or zuhd; rather, we must see what significance did he attribute to these words. We must uncover his didactic philosophy regarding the development of the human character and his perception of the human aspiration for piety, purity, freedom, and deliverance from spiritual servitude and thralldom.

As we know, these are words employed by all—in particular those who are wont to play the role of a moralist; but all individuals do not mean the same kind of things by these terms. Sometimes, the meanings one person attributes to these words are quite contrary to those meant by another, and naturally lead to conclusions which are quite opposite.

Consequently, it is essential to elaborate somewhat the specific meanings of these terms in Ali's vocabulary, starting with taqwa.

Taqwa

Taqwa is one of the most frequent motifs of Nahjul-Balagha. In fact it would be hard to find another book which emphasizes this spiritual term to the extent of this book. Even in Nahjul-Balagha, no other term or concept receives so much attention and stress as taqwa. What is taqwa?

Often, it is thought that taqwa means piety and abstinence and so implies a negative attitude. In other words, it is maintained that the greater the amount of abstinence, withdrawal, and self-denial, the more perfect is one's taqwa. According to this interpretation, taqwa is a concept divorced from active life; secondly it is a negative attitude; thirdly, it means that the more severely this negative attitude is exercised, the greater one's taqwa would be.

Accordingly, the sanctimonious professors of taqwa, in order to avoid its being tainted and to protect it from any blemish, withdraw from the bustle of life, keeping themselves away from involvement in any matter or affair of the world.

Undeniably, abstinence and caution exercised with discretion is an essential principle of wholesome living. For, in order to lead a healthy life, man is forced to negate and affirm, deny and posit, renounce and accept, avoid and welcome different things. It is through denial and negation that the positive in life can be realized. It is through renunciation and avoidance that concentration is given to action.

The principle of tawhid contained in the dictum la ilaha illa Allah is at the same time a negation as well as an affirmation. Without negation of everything other than Allah it is not possible to arrive at tawhid. That is why rebellion and surrender, kufr (unbelief) and iman (belief), go together; that is, every surrender requires a rebellion and every faith (iman) calls for a denial and rejection (kufr), and every affirmation implies a negation. The Holy Qur'an says the following:

So whoever disbelieves in taghut and believes in Allah, has laid hold of the most firm bond. (2: 256)

However, firstly, every denial, negation, rejection, and rebellion operates between the limits of two opposites; the negation of one thing implies movement towards its opposite; therejection of the one marks the beginning of the acceptance of the other. Accordingly, every healthy denial and rejection has both a direction and a goal, and is confined within certain definite limits. Therefore, a blind practice and purposeless attitude, which has neither direction nor a goal, nor is confined within any limits, is neither defensible nor of any spiritual worth.

Secondly, the meaning of taqwa in Nahjul-Balagha is not synonymous with that of "abstinence", even in its logically accepted sense discussed above. Taqwa, on the other hand, according to Nahjul-Balagha, is a spiritual faculty which appears as a result of continued exercise and practice. The healthy and rational forms of abstinence are, firstly, the preparatory causes for the emergence of that spiritual faculty; secondly, they are also its effects and outcome.

This faculty strengthens and vitalizes the soul, giving it a kind of immunity. A person who is devoid of this faculty, if he wants to keep himself free from sins, it is unavoidable for him to keep away from the causes of sin. Since society is never without these causes, inevitably he has to go into seclusion and isolate himself. It follows from this argument that one should either remain pious by isolating himself from one's environment, or he should enter society and bid farewell to taqwa. Moreover, according to this logic, the

more isolated and secluded a person's life is and the more he abstains from mixing with other people, the greater is his piety and taqwa in the eyes of the common people.

However, if the faculty of taqwa is cultivated inside a person's soul, it is no longer necessary for him to seclude himself from his environment. He can keep himself clean and uncorrupted without severing his relations with society.

The former kinds of persons are like those who take refuge in mountains for fear of some plague or epidemic. The second kinds resemble those who acquire immunity and resistance through vaccination and so do not deem it necessary to leave the city and avoid contact with their townfolk. On the other hand, they hasten to the aid of the suffering sick in order to save them. Sa'di is alluding to the first kind of pious in his Gulistan, when he says the following:

Saw I a sage in the mountains,
Happy in a cave, far from the world's tide.
Said I, Why not to the city return,
And lighten your heart of this burden?
He said, "The city abounds in tempting beauties,
And even elephants slip where mud is thick.

Nahjul-Balagha speaks of taqwa as a spiritual faculty acquired through exercise and assiduity, which on its emergence produces certain characteristic effects, one of which is the ability to abstain from sins with ease.

I guarantee the truth of my words and I am responsible for what I say. If similar events and experiences of the past serve as a lesson for a person, then taqwa prevents him from plunging recklessly into doubts.[2](#)

Beware that sins are like unruly horses whose reins have been taken away and which plunge with their riders into hell-fire. But taqwa is like a trained steed whose reins are in the hands of its rider and enters with its rider into Paradise.[3](#)

In this sermon taqwa is described as a spiritual condition which results in control and command over one's self. It explains that the result of subjugation to desires and lusts and being devoid of taqwa degrades one's personality making it vulnerable to the cravings of the carnal self.

In such a state, man is like a helpless rider without any power and control, whom his mount takes wherever it desires. The essence of taqwa lies in possessing a spiritual personality endowed with will-power, and possessing mastery over the domain of one's self. A man with taqwa is like an expert horseman riding a well-trained horse and who with complete mastery and control drives his tractable steed in the direction of his choice.

Certainly the taqwa of Allah assists His awliya' (friends) in abstaining from unlawful deeds and instils His fear into their hearts. As a result, their nights are passed in wakefulness and their days in thirst [on account of fasting].[4](#)

Here Ali (as) makes it clear that taqwa is something which automatically leads to abstention from unlawful actions and to the fear of Allah, which are its necessary effects. Therefore, according to this view, taqwa is neither itself abstinence nor fear of Allah; rather, it is a sacred spiritual faculty of which these two are only consequences:

For indeed, today taqwa is a shield and a safeguard, and tomorrow (i.e. in the Hereafter) it shall be the path to Paradise.[5](#)

In khutba 157, taqwa is compared to an invincible fortress built on heights which the enemy has no power to infiltrate. Throughout, the emphasis of the Imam (as) lies on the spiritual and psychological aspect of taqwa and its effects upon human spirit involving the emergence of a dislike for sin and corruption and an inclination towards piety, purity, and virtue.

Further illustrations of this view can be cited from Nahjul- Balagha, but it seems that the above quotations are sufficient.

Taqwa Is Immunity Not Restraint

We have already mentioned some of the various elements found in the spiritual pieces of advice (mawa'iz) of Nahjul-Balagha. We began with taqwa and saw that taqwa, from the viewpoint of Nahjul-Balagha, is a sublime spiritual faculty which is the cause of certain attractions and repulsions; i.e. attraction towards edifying spiritual values and repulsion towards degrading materialistic vices. Nahjul-Balagha considers taqwa as a spiritual state that gives strength to human personality and makes man the master of his own self.

Taqwa As Immunity

Nahjul-Balagha stresses that taqwa is for man a shield and a shelter, not a chain or a prison. There are many who do not distinguish between immunity and restraint, between security and confinement, and promptly advocate the destruction of the sanctuary of taqwa in the name of freedom and liberation from bonds and restraint.

That which is common between a sanctuary and a prison is the existence of a barrier. Whereas the walls of a sanctuary avert dangers, the walls of a prison hinder the inmates from realizing their inner capacities and from benefitting from the bounties of life. Ali (as) clarifies the difference between the two, where he says the following:

Let it be known to you, O servants of Allah!, that taqwa is a formidable fortress, whereas impiety and

corruption is a weak and indefensible enclosure that does not safeguard its people, and does not offer any protection to those who take refuge in it. Indeed, it is only with taqwa that the tentacles of sins and misdeeds can be severed.⁶

Ali (as), in this sublime advice, compares sins and evil deeds which are afflictions of the human soul to poisonous insects and reptiles, and suggests that the faculty of taqwa is an effective defence against them. In some of his discourses, he makes it clear that taqwa not only does not entail restraint and restriction or is an impediment to freedom, but on the other hand it is the source and fountainhead of all true freedoms. In khutba 230, he says the following:

Taqwa is the key to guidance, the provision for the Hereafter, the freedom from every kind of slavery, and the deliverance from every form of destruction.

The message is clear. Taqwa gives man spiritual freedom and liberates him from the chains of slavery and servitude to lusts and passions. It releases him from the bonds of envy, lust, and anger, and this expurgates society from all kinds of social bondage and servitude. Men who are not slaves of comfort, money, power, and glory, never surrender to the various forms of bondage which plague the human society.

Nahjul-Balagha deals with the theme of taqwa and its various effects in many of its passages; but we don't consider it necessary to discuss all of them here. Our main objective here is to discover the meaning of taqwa from the point of view of Nahjul-Balagha, so as to unearth thereason for so much emphasis that this book places on this concept.

Of the many effects of taqwa that have been pointed out, two are more important than the rest: firstly, the development of insight and clarity of vision; secondly, the capacity to solve problems and to weather difficulties and crises. We have discussed this in detail elsewhere.⁷ Moreover, a discussion of these effects of taqwa here will take us beyond our present aim which is to clarify the true meaning of taqwa. It will not be out of place to call attention to certain profound remarks of Nahjul- Balagha about the reciprocal relationship between the human being and taqwa.

Reciprocal Commitment

In spite of the great emphasis laid by Nahjul-Balagha on taqwa as a kind of guarantee and immunity against sin and temptation, it should be noticed that one must never neglect to safeguard and protect taqwa itself. Taqwa guards man, and man must safeguard his taqwa. This, as we shall presently explain, is not a vicious circle.

This reciprocal guarding of the one by the other is comparable to the one between a person and his clothes. A man takes care of his clothes and protects them from being spoiled or stolen, while the clothes in turn guard him against heat or cold. In fact the Holy Qur'an speaks of taqwa as a garment:

And the garment of taqwa –that is better. (7: 26)

Ali (as), speaking about this relationship of mutual protection between a person and his taqwa, says the following: “Turn your sleep into wakefulness by the means of taqwa and spend your days in its company. Keep its consciousness alive in your hearts. With it wash away your sins and cure your ailments. Beware, guard your taqwa and place yourself under its guard.”⁸

At another place in the same sermon, Ali (as) says the following: “O Allah’s servants, I admonish you to cultivate the taqwa of Allah. Indeed it is a right that Allah has over you and it is through it that you can have any right over Allah. You should beseech Allah’s help for guarding it and seek its aid for [fulfilling your duty to] Allah.”⁹

Zuhd (Asceticism) And Piety

Another spiritual motif conspicuous in the teachings of Nahjul– Balagha is zuhd, which after taqwa is the most recurring theme of the book. “Zuhd’ means renunciation of the “world’, and very often we encounter denunciation of the “world’, and invitation and exhortation to renounce it. It appears to me that it forms one of the important themes of Nahjul–Balagha, which needs to be elucidated and explained in the light of various aspects of Ali’s approach.

We shall begin our discussion with the word “zuhd’ the words “zuhd’ and “raghbah’ (attraction, desire), if mentioned without reference to their objects, are opposite to each other. “Zuhd’ means indifference and avoidance, and “raghbah “means attraction, inclination, and desire.

Indifference can be of two kinds: involuntary and cultivated. A person is involuntarily indifferent towards a certain thing when by nature he does not have any desire for it, as in the case of a sick person who shows no desire either for food, or fruits, or anything else. Obviously, this kind of indifference and abstinence has nothing to do with the particular sense implied in zuhd.

Another kind of indifference or abstinence is spiritual or intellectual; that is, things which are natural objects of desire are not considered the goal and objective by a human being in the course of his struggle for perfection and felicity. The ultimate objective and goal may be something above mundane aims and sensual pleasures; either it may be to attain The sensuous pleasures of the Hereafter, or it may not belong to this kind of things. It may be some high ethical and moral ideal, like honor, dignity, nobility, liberty, or it may belong to the spiritual sphere, like the remembrance of Allah, the love of Allah, and the desire to acquire nearness to Him.

Accordingly the zahid (i.e. one who practises zuhd) is someone whose interest transcends the sphere of material existence, and whose object of aspiration lies beyond the kind of things we have mentioned above. The indifference of a zahid originates in the sphere of his ideas, ideals, and hopes, not in his physiological makeup.

There are two places where we come across the definition of “zuhd’ in Nahjul–Balagha. Both of them confirm the above interpretation of zuhd. Ali (as), in khutba 81, says the following:

O people! Zuhd means curtailing of hopes, thanking Allah for His blessings and bounties, and abstaining from that which He has forbidden.

In hikma 439, he says the following:

“All zuhd is summarized in two sentences of the Holy Qur’an: “Allah, the Most Exalted, says,. So that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor rejoice in what has come to you. [57: 23] Whoever does not grieve over what he has lost and does not rejoice over what comes to him has acquired zuhd in both of its aspects.”

Obviously when something does not occupy a significant status among one’s objectives and ideals, or rather is not at all significant in the scheme of things which matter to him, its gain and loss do not make the slightest difference to him.

However, there are some points that need clarification. Is zuhd, or detachment from the world, on which Nahjul–Balagha, following the Qur’anic teachings, puts so much emphasis, to be taken solely in an ethical and spiritual sense? In other words, is zuhd purely a spiritual state, or does it possess practical implications also? That is, is zuhd spiritual abstinence only or is it accompanied by an abstinence in practical life also? Assuming that zuhd is to be applied in practice, is it limited to abstinence from unlawful things (muharramat), as pointed out in khutba 81, or does it include something more, as exemplified by the life of Ali (as) and before him by the life of the Holy Prophet (S)?

Proceeding on the assumption that zuhd is not limited to– muharramat only and that it covers permissible things (mubahat) as well, one may ask: what is its underlying rationale and philosophy? What is the use of an ascetic life that limits and confines life, rejecting its blessings and bounties? Is zuhd to be practiced at all times or only under certain particular conditions? Is zuhd–in The sense of abstinence from even permissible things–basically in agreement with other Islamic teachings?

Apart from this, the basis of zuhd and renunciation of the world is the pursuit of supra–material objectives and ideals. What are they from the point of view of Islam? In particular, how does Nahjul–Balagha describe them?

All these questions regarding zuhd, renunciation, and curtailing of hopes–themes which have so often been discussed in Nahjul–Balagha– need to be clarified. We shall discuss these questions in the following pages and try to answer them.

Islamic Zuhd And Christian Asceticism

In the last section we said that zuhd, as defined by Nahjul– Balagha, is a spiritual state that makes the

zahid, on account of his spiritual and other worldly aspirations, indifferent towards the manifestations of material existence. This indifference is not confined to his heart, intellect, and feelings and is not limited to his conscience. It also manifests itself on the practical level of life in the form of simplicity, contentment, and abstention from hedonistic urges and love of luxuries.

A life of zuhd not only implies that a man should be free from attachment to the material aspects of life, but he should also practically abstain from indulgence in pleasures. The zuhhad are those who in life are satisfied with the barest material necessities. Ali (as) was a zahid, who was not only emotionally detached from the world but also indifferent to its pleasures and enjoyments. In other words, he had “renounced” the “world”.

Two Questions

Here, inevitably, two questions shall arise in the reader’s mind. Firstly, as we know, Islam has opposed monasticism considering it to be an innovation of Christian priests and monks. ¹⁰ The Prophet (S) has stated in unequivocal terms that: “There is no monasticism (rahbaniyya) in Islam.”

Once when the Prophet (S) was informed that some of his Companions had retired into seclusion renouncing everything and devoting all their time to worship and prayer in seclusion, he became very indignant. He told them: “I, who am your prophet, am not such. In this way, the Prophet (S) made them to understand that Islam is a religion of life and society, not a monastic faith. Moreover, the comprehensive and multi-faceted teachings of Islam in social, economic, political and moral spheres are based on reverence for life, not on its renunciation.”

Apart from this, monasticism and renunciation of life are incompatible with the world-view of Islam and its optimistic outlook about the universe and creation. Unlike some other philosophies and creeds, Islam does not view the world and life in society with pessimism. It does not divide all creation into ugly and beautiful, black and white, good and evil, proper and improper, right and wrong. Now the second question may be stated in these words: “Aside from the fact that asceticism is the same as monasticism—which are both incompatible with the Islamic spirit—, what is the philosophy underlying zuhd?”

Moreover, why should men be urged to practice zuhd? Why should man, seeing the limitless bounties of Allah and good things of life around him, be called upon to pass by the side of this delightful stream indifferently and without so much as wetting his feet? Are the ascetic teachings found in Islam, on this basis, later innovations (bid’a) introduced into Islam from other creeds like Christianity and Buddhism? And if this is correct, how are we to explain and interpret the teachings of Nahjul-Balagha? How can we explain the indubitable details known about the Prophet’s life and that of Ali (as)?

The answer is that Islamic zuhd is different from Christian asceticism or monasticism. Asceticism is retreat from people and society and seclusion for the purpose of worship. According to it, the life and

works of the world are separate from the works of the Here-after and the one is alien to the other. One should, of necessity, choose either one of the two. One should either devote oneself to worship of Allah which shall bear fruits in the Hereafter, or take up the life of the world and benefit from its immediate pleasures. Accordingly, monasticism is opposed to life and social relationships. It requires withdrawal from people and negation of responsibility and commitment towards them.

On the other hand, zuhd in Islam, though it requires a simple and unaffected life-style and is based on abstention from luxuries and love of comforts and pleasures, operates in the very midst of life and social relations and is sociable. It draws inspiration, and proceeds, from the goal of better fulfilment of social responsibilities and duties.

The conception of zuhd in Islam is not something that would lead to asceticism because a sharp distinction between this world and the next is nowhere drawn. From the viewpoint of Islam, this world and the next are not separable, not alien to each other. The relation of this world to the other is similar to that between the inward and outward sides of a single reality. They are like the warp and woof of a single fabric. They are to each other as the soul to the body. Their relationship can be assumed to be something midway between unity and duality. The works of this world and those of the next are interrelated similarly. Their difference is that of quality, without being essential.

Accordingly, that which is harmful for the other world is also to one's detriment in the present world, and everything which is beneficial for the summum bonum of life in this world is also beneficial for life in the Hereafter. Therefore, if a certain work which is in accordance with the higher interests of life in this world is performed with motives that are devoid of the higher, supra-material, and transcendental elements, that work would be considered totally this-worldly and would not, as the Holy Qur'an tells us, elevate man in his ascent towards Allah. However, if a work or action is motivated by sublime aims and intentions and is executed with a higher vision that transcends the narrow limits of worldly life, the same work and action is considered "other-worldly."

The Islamic zuhd, as we said, is grounded in the very context and stream of life and gives a peculiar quality to living by emphasizing certain values in life. As affirmed by the Islamic texts, zuhd in Islam is based on three essential principles of the Islamic world-outlook.

The Three Essential Principles

Enjoyments derived from the physical, material, and natural means of life are not sufficient for man's happiness and felicity. A series of spiritual needs are inbuilt in the human nature, without whose satisfaction the enjoyment provided by material means of life is not enough to make man truly happy.

The individual's felicity and happiness is not separable from that of society. Since man is emotionally bound to his society, and carries within him a sense of responsibility towards it, his individual happiness cannot be independent of the prosperity and peace of his fellow men.

The soul, despite its fusion and a kind of unity with the body, has a reality of its own. It is a principle in addition to the body which constitutes another principle in itself. The soul is an independent source of pleasure and pain. Like the body, or rather even more than it, it stands in need of nourishment, training, growth, and development. The soul, however, cannot dispense with the health and vigour of the body.

At the same time, it is undeniable that total indulgence in physical pleasures and complete immersion into the delights of sensual experiences does not leave any opportunity for realizing the soul's unlimited possibilities. Therefore, there exists a kind of incompatibility between physical enjoyment and spiritual satisfaction. This is especially true if the attention and attachment to physical needs were carried to the very extreme of total immersion and absorption.

It is not true that all sorrow and grief are related to the soul and that all pleasures are derived from the body. In fact, the spiritual pleasures are much profounder, purer, and lasting than bodily pleasures. To sum up, one-sided attention to physical pleasures and material enjoyments finally results in compromising the total human happiness. Therefore, if we want to make our lives happy, rich, pure, majestic, attractive, and beautiful, we cannot afford to ignore the spiritual aspects of our being.

With due attention to these principles, the meaning of zuhd in Islam becomes clear. The knowledge of these principles allows us to understand why Islam rejects monasticism but welcomes a form of asceticism which is rooted in the very heart of life and in the context of social existence. We shall explain the meaning of zuhd in Islamic texts on the basis of these three principles.

The Zahid And The Monk

We said that Islam encourages zuhd but condemns monasticism. Both the zahid and the ascetic monk seek abstinence from pleasures and enjoyments. But the monk evades life in society and the responsibilities and the duties it entails, regarding them as the low and mean facets of worldly existence, and takes refuge in mountains or monasteries. On the other hand, the zahid accepts society with its norms, ideals, duties, and commitments. Both the zahid and the monk are otherworldly, but the zahid is a social otherworldly. Also their attitudes to abstinence from pleasures are not identical; the monk disdains hygiene and cleanliness and derides married life and procreation.

The zahid, on the contrary, considers hygiene and cleanliness, matrimony and parenthood to be a part of his duties. Both the zahid and the monk are ascetics, but whereas the "world" renounced by the zahid is indulgence and immersion in pleasures, luxuries, and comforts (he rejects the attitude which considers them to be life's ultimate goal and objective), the "world" renounced by the monk includes life's work and activity, and the duty and responsibility which go with social life. That is why the zahid's zuhd operates in the midst of social life, and is, therefore, not only compatible with social responsibility and commitment but is moreover a very effective means of discharging them.

The difference between the zahid and the monk arises from two different world-outlooks. From the

viewpoint of the monk, this world and the next are two different spheres, separate from and unrelated to each other. To him, happiness in this world is not only independent of happiness in the next but is incompatible with it. He considers the two forms of happiness as irreconcilable contradictories.

Naturally, that which leads to felicity and happiness in this world is considered different from the works and deeds which lead to success in the Hereafter. In other words, the means of acquiring happiness in this world and the next are regarded as being incompatible and contradictory. It is imagined that a single work and action cannot simultaneously be a means for acquiring happiness in both the worlds.

But in the world-view of the zahid, the world and the Hereafter are interconnected. The world is a preamble to the Hereafter. It is a farm of which the Hereafter is the harvest. From the zahid's viewpoint, that which gives order, security, uprightness, prosperity, and flourish to life is application of other-worldly criteria to the life of this world.

The essence of felicity and happiness in the other world lies in successful accomplishment of commitments and responsibilities of this world, performed with faith, piety, purity, and taqwa.

In truth, the zahid's concept of zuhd and the monk's rationale for his asceticism are incompatible and contradictory to each other. Basically, monasticism is a deviation introduced by men into the teachings of prophets, due to ignorance or vested interests. Now we shall explain the philosophy of zuhd in the light of the teachings of the Islamic texts.

Zuhd And Altruism

One of the ingredients of zuhd is altruism. Ithar (altruism) and atharah (egoism) are derived from the same root. Atharah means giving precedence to one's interests over those of others. In other words it implies monopolizing everything for oneself and depriving others. But Ithar means preferring others over oneself and bearing hardship for the comfort and good of others.

The zahid, by virtue of his simple, humble, and content living, is hard upon himself so that others may live in ease. He sacrifices for the sake of the needy because with his sensitive heart which feels the pains of others he can relish the world's bounties only when there does not exist a single man oppressed by need. He derives greater satisfaction by feeding and clothing others and working for their ease than if he did those things for himself. He endures deprivation, hunger, and pain, so that others may be well fed and live without hardships.

Ithar represents the most majestic and sublime manifestation of human greatness, and only very great human beings climb to its noble heights.

The Holy Qur'an refers to the episode of The self-sacrifice of Ali (as) and his honored family in the glorious verses of surat Hal Ata. Ali (as), Fatima (as), and their sons once gave away whatever they had—which was no more than a few loaves of bread—to the poor for the sake of Allah, and despite their

own distress. That is why this story circulated among the angels and a verse of the Holy Qur'an was revealed in the praise of their act.

Once when the Holy Prophet (S) came to visit Hadrat al-Zahra' (k), observing that his daughter had put on a silver bracelet and hung a new curtain on the door, signs of unease appeared upon his face. Al-Zahra' (as) was quick to discern the cause of her father's reaction.

When the Prophet (S) left, without losing time, she took out her bracelet and removing the curtain from the door, sent them to be carried to the Prophet (S) so that he might give them to the needy. When al-Zahra's messenger brought them to the Prophet (S) he looked at them with amazement. He was glad that his daughter had taken the hint and foregone her simplest luxuries for the benefit of others.

"The neighbours first", was the maxim in the household of Ali (as) and Fatima (as). In khutba 193, which describes the qualities of the pious, Ali (as) says the following: "The man of [taqwa] subjects his own self to hardships so that the people may live in comfort."

The Holy Qur'an describes the Ansar (Helpers), who in spite of their poverty welcomed the Muhajirun (the Emigrants) as their own brethren, giving them preference over their own selves, in these words:

They love whosoever has migrated to them, not finding in their breasts any need for what they have been given, and prefer others above themselves, even though poverty be their lot. (59: 9)

Obviously, the altruistic ingredient of zuhd comes into play only under certain conditions. In an affluent society, altruism is less frequently required. But in conditions where poverty and deprivation are prevalent— as in the society of al-Medina during the Prophet's time—its need is greater. This is one of the secrets of the apparent difference of the life- styles of Ali (as) and the Holy Prophet (S) with the rest of the Imams.

In any case, zuhd with its underlying altruistic motives has nothing in common with monasticism and escape from society; instead it is a product of man's gregarious instincts and a manifestation of his noblest feelings, which reinforce the social bonds between fellow human beings.

Sympathy And Kindness

The sympathy and the willingness to share the suffering of the needy and the deprived is another ingredient of zuhd. When the destitute witness the luxuries and comforts of the richer classes, their anguish is multiplied. To the hardships of poverty and destitution is added the stinging feeling of deprivation and backwardness in relation to others.

Man, by nature, cannot tolerate to remain a silent spectator while others, who have no merit over him, eat, drink, enjoy and relish freely at the cost of his deprivation. When society is divided into haves and have-nots, the man of Allah considers himself responsible.

In the first place, as Amir al-Mu'minin (as) says, he should strive to change the situation which permits the gluttony of the rich oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, in accordance with the covenant of Allah with the learned men of the umma. [11](#)

In the second place, he strives to ameliorate the state of affairs through altruism and self-sacrifice by sharing whatever he possesses with the needy and the deprived. But when he sees the situation deteriorating beyond reparation and it is practically impossible to alleviate the misery of the poor through sympathy, he practically shares their deprivation and tries to soothe their wounded hearts by adopting a life-style similar to that of the poor.

Sympathy with others and sharing their suffering is of essential importance especially in the case of the leaders of the umma on whom all eyes are fixed. Ali (as), more than at any other time, lived a severely ascetic life during the days of his caliphate. He used to say: "Indeed Allah has made it obligatory for just leaders that they should maintain themselves at the level of the poor class so that they do not despair of their distress. [12](#) Should I be content with being called Amir al-Mu'minin (as) while refusing to share the adversities of the times with the people? Or should I be an example to them in the distress of life?" [13](#)

In the same letter (to 'Othman ibn Hunayf), he says the following: "It is absolutely out of question that my desires should overpower me and my greed should lead me to relish the choicest foods while in Hijaz and Yamama there may be some people who despair of even a single loaf of bread and who do not get a full meal. Shall I lie with a satiated belly while around me are those whose stomachs are hungry and whose livers are burning?" [14](#)

At the same time, Ali (as) would reproach anyone else for practicing the same kind of asceticism in life. When faced with their objection as to why he himself practiced it, he would reply, Al am not like you. The leaders have a different duty. This approach of Ali (as) can be observed in the conversation with "Asim ibn Ziyad al-Harith. [15](#)

In Volume 9 of Bihar al-Anwar, it has been related from Al-Kafi that Amir al-Mu'minin (as) said: "Allah has appointed me as the leader of the people and made it my duty to adopt a way of living, in food and clothing, on par with the poorest classes of the society so that, on the one hand, it may soothe the distress of the poor and, on the other, restrain the rich from rebelling." [16](#)

An incident is related from the life of the great faqih Wahid Behbahani, may Allah be pleased with him. One day he observed one of his daughters-in-law wearing a garment made of a fabric usually worn by women of rich families of those days. He reproached his son (the late Aqa Muhammad Ismail, the lady's husband) in that regard. The son recited this verse of the Holy Qur'an in reply to his father's remarks:

"Say: Who has forbidden the ornament of Allah which He has brought forth for His servants and the good things of His providing?"(7: 32).

The father said: "I don't say that putting on good dresses, eating good food, and making use of Allah's

bounties is forbidden. Not at all. Such restrictions do not exist in Islam. However, there is one thing to be remembered. We are a family charged with the duty of the religious leadership of Muslims and have special responsibilities. When the people of poor families see the rich live luxuriously, their frustration is aggravated. Their only consolation is that at least the Aqa's family lives like they do. Now if we, too, adopt the life-styles of the rich, that will deprive them of their only consolation. However, we cannot practically change the present social condition, but let us not grudge at least this much of sympathy."

As can be clearly seen, zuhd, which derives motivation from sympathy and readiness to share the sufferings of others, has nothing common with monastic asceticism. It is not based on escapism from the society. The Islamic concept of zuhd is a means of alleviating the sufferings of the society.

Zuhd And Freedom

Another ingredient of zuhd is love of freedom and independence. The union between zuhd and freedom is as primordial as it is indissoluble.

The dictates of need and exigency are the criteria of opportunists, whereas independence from want is characteristic of free men. The deepest aspiration of the free men unattached to the world is non-encumbrance, buoyancy, absence of hindrance and freedom of movement.

As a result, they adopt zuhd and contentment so as to reduce their wants to a minimum, thus liberating themselves from the bondage of need for things and persons.

The life of a human being, like that of any other [rational] animal, requires a series of natural and indispensable necessities like air, shelter, food, water and clothing. Man cannot free himself entirely from attachment to such needs and other things such as light and heat so as to make himself, in philosophical terminology, "self-sustaining"(muktafi bidhatih).

However, there are series of other wants which are not necessary and natural but are imposed upon one in the course of one's life either by oneself or by social and historical factors beyond his control, which nevertheless set limits upon his freedom. Such constraints are not very dangerous as long as they are not transformed into inner needs, such as certain political constraints and compulsions. The most dangerous of compulsions are those which emerge as inner needs from within one's own self to shackle him.

The mechanism of these needs which lead to inner weakness, impotence and defeat, operates in such a way that when one turns to luxuries and comforts in order to add charm, delight and glamour to one's life so as to feel more secure and strong in order to derive a greater gratification from life, one is impelled to possess more and more things.

In the course of time, one gets gradually accustomed to and engrossed in the means of comfort, luxury and power. These habits gradually result in a deeper attachment to and love for those things, and he is

bound to them with invisible bonds, thus becoming helpless and impotent in front of them. That is, the same thing which had once added charm and delight to his life later deprives his personality of its vigor, and the same thing which once made him feel powerful against nature now turns him into a helpless slave without a will of his own.

Man's inclination towards zuhd is rooted in his love of freedom. By nature, he is disposed toward possession of things and their exploitation. But when he realizes that the things, to the very extent they make him outwardly powerful and successful, inwardly transform him into a weakling without a will-power and a slave, he rebels against this slavery. This rebellion of man is what we call zuhd.

Our poets and sages have spoken a lot about freedom and liberation. Hafiz calls himself "the slave of the magnanimity of the One Who is free of everything under the blue sky that carries any taint of attachment." Among the trees, he admires the cypress which to him seems free of all woes. What those great men meant by "freedom is freedom from attachment, freedom from being possessed, bewitched, and captivated by anything."

But freedom implies something greater than being devoid of attachments. The ties which make a man weak, helpless, dependent and impotent are not only those which originate in the heart or emotional attachments; to these must be added the various bodily, physical and psychological conditioning and artificial appendages that are first acquired for adding charm and glory to life and for the satisfaction of the lust for power and dominance, later growing into a form of addiction or rather becoming a second nature.

These, while they may not involve one's emotional attachments or may even be regarded by one as reprehensible, should be counted as even stronger means of human servitude: They may bring an even greater degradation than emotional attachments do.

Take the example of an enlightened arif with a heart free of worldly attachments. For him, an addiction to tea, tobacco or opium has become a second nature. For him, abstention from foods to which he is accustomed may endanger his life. Can such a man lead a carefree life?

Liberty from attachments is a necessary condition of freedom, but it is not sufficient in itself. Getting used to a minimum amount of the niceties of life, an abstention from affluent living, is another condition of freedom.

The first thing to strike Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, one of the honored Companions, when describing the station of the Holy Prophet (S), is the following: "The Prophet of Allah (S) was able to manage with the minimum necessities of life."

Is it a merit to be able to do with a minimum amount of means? If we take only the economic aspect into view, we should say that the Prophet's level of consumption was quite low. In this respect, therefore, the answer would be: "No, not at all; it is not a significant merit."

But if viewed from a spiritual viewpoint, that is, when examined according to the criterion of one being free from the worldly bondage, we have to admit that it is a great merit indeed because it is only by acquisition of this merit that a human being can live with any measure of unfettered freedom and unimpeded mobility and participate in the incessant struggle of life with agility and vigor.

This matter is not restricted to habits involving the individual; binding one's self to social habits and customs, to modes and manners of dealing with people, the mesh of social connections and gatherings, adherence to styles and fashions in dress and demeanor... these and the like encumber life and deprive it of dynamism

Freedom of movement in the arena of life is like swimming: The lesser the interference and incumbrance for the swimmer, the greater is his ability to move around in the water. Too many attachments will not only deprive him of his mobility but bring him closer to the danger of drowning. Athir al-Din Akhsikati (d. 577 or 579/1181 or 1183) says the following:

To cross the river of life, shed your robes;
Nakedness is a condition of keeping afloat.

Farrukhi Yazdi says the following:

Of nakedness the sage does not complain,
A sword of good steel would not rust without a sheath.

Baba Tahir has a rubai which, though intended for some other purpose, is nevertheless relevant here:

O heart! Thy path is better when covered with thorns;
Your track is better when stretched on heavens high;
Nay! If thou can strip the skin off thine flesh,
Do it, for the lighter thy burden the better it be.

Sa'di, too, relates a relevant fable in chapter 7 of his Gulistan, although it also aims at some other purpose: "I saw a rich man's son squatting by the side of his father's grave and bragging thus before the son of a darwish son: 'My father's tomb is constructed of rare stones. Inside, it is paved with marble with inlaid turquoise. And look at your father's! An unbaked brick or two was/were fetched on which a handful of earth was thrown!'

"The sage's son heard these remarks and replied: 'Yet before your father is able to budge under the pile of those stones, my father would have already reached Paradise!'"

These are allegories underlining the significance of lightness and freedom from bondage, the essential condition for dynamism, nobility and nimbleness. Leaps, movements and struggles were achieved by individuals who were practically freer of bondage and attachments, that is, in some sense, they were zahids. Gandhi, with his ascetic mode of life, brought the British imperialism to its knees.

In the words of Ya'qub Layth al-Saffar, Ghandi Adid not set aside his diet of bread and onions till he became a terror for the caliph. In our own times, the Vietcong fighters were such an example. Their surprising power of resistance was drawn from what in Islamic idioms has been called "Alightness of provisions." A Vietcong fighter could sustain himself for days in his shelter with a handful of rice and continue his battle against the enemy.

Which leader, religious or political, living in luxury and comfort has brought about drastic upheavals in world history? Which monarch who, having founded a dynasty, transferred power from another family to his own, has been a lover of luxuries and comforts?

Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) was the most free of all the world's free men. He was a free man in the complete sense of the word because he was a zahid in the most profound sense of the word. Ali (as), in Nahjul-Balagha, lays great emphasis on renunciation of worldly pleasures and

comforts as a means of liberation. In one of the hikam (aphorisms), he says the following: "Greed is everlasting slavery."¹⁷

In one of his sermons, he describes the zuhd of Jesus, the son of Mary (as), in these words: "He was free of any abasing greed."¹⁸ In another place he says the following: "The world is a place of transit, not a place of abode. Its people fall into two categories: those who sell away their souls into slavery and those who ransom their souls and liberate them."¹⁹

In a letter to Othman ibn Hunayf, Ali (as) is more explicit than elsewhere. Towards the end of the letter, addressing the world and its pleasures, he reveals to us the philosophy of zuhd and the secrets of renunciation thus: "O world! Get away from me! I have thrown your reins on your shoulders, have freed myself from your claws and released myself from your snares. Go, get away! By Allah, I shall not surrender to you so that you should abase me! I shall not follow you tractably so that you may control me and lead me wherever you please."

Yes. Ali's zuhd is a rebellion against abasement and indignity on account of life's pleasures. It is a rebellion against human weaknesses and impotence before the tyranny of desires. It is a defiance of servitude to the world and obsequiousness before its charms.

Zuhd And Spirituality; Zuhd, Love And Worship

Another fountainhead of zuhd and renunciation of hedonism is the aspiration to avail of spiritual bounties. Presently, we do not intend to undertake any argument to the effect that man and the universe possess an undeniable spiritual aspect. This is another story all by itself. It is evident that from a materialistic outlook of the world, the rejection of hedonism, materialism and love for money and wealth as a prerequisite for acquisition of spiritual virtues is devoid of any meaning.

We have, here, nothing to say about the followers of materialism as a school of thought. At present, we

address only those who have experienced the aroma of spirituality. This is so because anyone who has smelled its fragrance knows that as long as one does not liberate himself from the bondage of desire, as long as the infant soul is not weaned away from the breasts of nature, and as long as the material aspects of life are seen as not being the ultimate end of life and are seen, instead, only as means, the domain of the heart is not ready for the emergence of chaste emotions, majestic thoughts and angelic feelings. That is why, it is said, that zuhd is the essential condition for exuberance of gnosis and is inalienably linked to it.

The worship of Allah, in its real sense, that is, the ardor of love, the zeal of devotion and service in the way of Allah, His constant presence in thoughts and His remembrance, the sense of delight and ecstasy in His adoration and worship... is not at all compatible with self-adoration, hedonist attitude and being captured by the glamour and charm of material things.

The need of zuhd is not characteristic solely of the worship of Allah; rather, every kind of love and adoration, whether it pertains to one's country, creed, conviction, or someone/something else, calls for some kind of zuhd and indifference towards the material aspects of life.

It is characteristic of love and adoration, as opposed to knowledge, science or philosophy, that they have to deal with the heart and, as such, they do not tolerate any rivals. Nothing prevents a scientist or a philosopher who is enslaved to money and wealth from devoting and concentrating his intellectual powers, when necessary, on the study of the problems of philosophy, logic, physics, or mathematics.

But it is not possible, at the same time, that his heart should be full to the brim with love, especially love of a spiritual nature, such as love for humanity, for his religion or creed. Certainly, it cannot burn with the light of the Divine love nor can it receive an enlightenment or inspiration of the Divine sort.

Consequently, the essential condition for receiving the spiritual grace and the realization of true humanitarianism is the purging of the temple of the heart from every trace of materialistic attachments, the extermination from the Ka'ba of the heart of all the idols of gold and silver and of their destruction.

As we have said before, we should not be led to misinterpret freedom from the bondage of gold and silver and the indifference towards what these metals can be exchanged for as monastic asceticism which is an attempt to evade responsibility and commitment. Instead, it is only in the light of such zuhd that responsibility and commitment reacquire their real significance and are no longer empty words without content and but hollow claims.

The personality of Ali (as) is a glorious example. In him, zuhd and commitment were combined together. While he was a zahid who had renounced the world, he, at the same time, had a heart that was most sensitive to the demands of social responsibility. On the one hand, he used to say: "What has Ali to do with perishable niceties and short-lived pleasures?"²⁰ On the other hand, a small injustice or the sight of someone in distress was enough to snatch sleep from his eyes for nights. He was ready to go to bed with an empty stomach lest someone in his dominion should remain hungry: "Shall I stuff my belly with

delicious foods while in Hijaz and in Yamama there may be people who have no hope of getting a loaf of bread or a full meal?"[21](#)

There was a direct co-relation between such zuhd of his and such sensitivity. Since Ali (as) was a zahid, an unselfish man indifferent to the world, with a heart that overflowed with the exuberance of the love for Allah, he looked at the world, from the minutest particle to the greatest star, as a unit entrusted with responsibility and duty. This is why he was so sensitive towards the issues of social rights. Had he been a hedonist devoted to his own interests, he would never have been the responsible and committed person that he was.

The Islamic traditions are eloquent with regard to this philosophy of zuhd and Nahjul-Balagha lays particular emphasis upon it. In one particular hadith, it is related from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) that he said, "All hearts that harbor doubt or entertain shirk shall be inauthentic; that is why they adopted zuhd so that such hearts may be emptied and be prepared for the Hereafter."[22](#)

As can be seen from this tradition, every kind of hedonism and attachment to pleasures is considered as shirk and contrary to the worship of the One God, Allah. Rumi describes the zuhd of the A'arif in these words: "Zuhd means taking pains while sowing. Mystic knowledge (ma'rifa) is (care during) its cultivation; the arif is the soul of the Law and the spirit of taqwa. Mystic knowledge is the fruit of the labors of zuhd."

Abu Ali ibn Sina, in the ninth namat of his work Al-Isharat, which he devotes to the description of various stations of the mystics (maqamat al-'arifin), differentiates between the zuhd of the arif and that of the non-arif.

He writes the following: "The zahids who have no knowledge of the philosophy of zuhd make a certain deal in their imagination: They barter the goods of the world for the goods of the Hereafter. They forego the enjoyments of the world so that they may enjoy the pleasures of the Hereafter. In other words, they abstain here in order to indulge there. But an aware zahid, one who is acquainted with the philosophy of zuhd, practices it because of his unwillingness to engage his inner self with anything other than Allah. Such a man, out of his self-respect, regards anything other than Allah to be unworthy of attention and servitude."

In another section of the same book, where he discusses spiritual discipline, Ibn Sina says the following: "This training has three ends in view. First, the removal of impediments from the path towards Allah; second, the subjugation of the carnal self (al-nafs al-ammara) to the contented self (al-nafs al-mutma'inna), third, the refinement of the inward (batin)."

Then he proceeds to mention the effective means of realizing these three ends. He tells us that true zuhd helps in achieving the first of these objectives, that is, the removal of impediments, the non-God, from the way.

Contradiction Between The This World And The Hereafter

The problem of the conflict between this world and the Hereafter and the contradiction between them as two opposite poles, like the north and the south, which are such that proximity to the one means remoteness from the other, is related to the world of the human heart, of conscience, human attachment, love and worship. Allah has not given two hearts to man:

Allah has not assigned to any man two hearts within his breast. (Qur'an, 33:4)

With one heart, one cannot choose two beloved persons. That is why once when questioned about his old and worn-out clothes, Ali (as) replied: "These make the heart humble, subdue the self [nafs] and induce the believers to emulate it."[23](#)

That is, those who have no new clothes to wear are not ashamed to put on old and worn-out clothes. They no longer suffer from humiliation on their account, for they see that their leader himself has not put on anything better.

Then Ali (as) goes on to add that the world and the Hereafter are like two irreconcilable enemies. They are two divergent paths. Anyone who loves the world and chooses its bondage is, by nature, led to loathe the Hereafter and detest everything that is related to it. The world and the Hereafter are like the east and the west, the north and the south. Anyone who approaches the one gets farther from the other. They are like two wives.

In one of his epistles, he writes the following: "I swear by Allah that, if He wills, I shall so discipline my own self that it would rejoice to have a single loaf of bread and be content with only salt to season it. (In prayer) I shall empty my eyes of tears until they become like dried springs. The cattle fill their stomachs on the pasture and lie down to repose. The goats graze, devour green vegetation then enter their enclosures. Should Ali (as) in a similar manner swallow whatever he can lay his hands on and lie down to doze? Congratulations! For, if he does that, after long years, he then has chosen to follow the grazing animals and the cattle led out to pasture."[24](#)

Then he goes on to add: "Happy is the man who fulfils his duties to Allah and overcomes hardships like a mill grinding the grain, who allows himself no sleep at nights, and when he is overpowered, he lies down on the ground with his hand as a pillow. He is accompanied by those who keep their eyes awake out of their fear of the Day of Judgement, whose bodies are ever away from their beds, whose lips constantly hum in the Master's remembrance, whose sins have been erased by prolonged supplications for forgiveness. They are the party of Allah; why, ***'surely Allah's party are the ones who prosper'*** (Qur'an, 58: 22)".[25](#)

The two passages quoted above completely illustrate the relationship between zuhd and spirituality. To sum up, one has to choose one of the two paths; either to drink, eat, browse and hanker after sensual

pleasures in utter indifference to the secrets of the spirit, to avoid the agonies of love and its tears, to speak not of enlightenment and progress, not to take a step beyond the threshold of bestiality... or to resolve on a journey into the valley of true humanity, towards the glory and exuberance of the Divine grace which descends upon chaste hearts and enlightened souls.

Zuhd: Minimum Of Intake For Maximum Output

Some days ago, I was in Isfahan on a visit for a few days. During it, in a gathering of the learned, a discussion started about zuhd. The various aspects of it were scrutinized in the light of the multi-faceted teachings of Islam. Everyone wanted to find a comprehensive and articulate definition of zuhd. Among them, a learned high school teacher²⁶ who (I later came to know, that he was writing a treatise on the subject, the manuscript of which he showed me later) suggested a wonderfully eloquent definition of zuhd. He said: “Islamic zuhd is minimizing the intake and maximizing the output.”

This definition fascinated me; I saw that it was in conformity with my own earlier understanding and the conclusions that I have drawn in the foregoing chapters. Here I, with the permission of that learned man, making a little amendment in his definition, would like to say the following: “Zuhd in Islam means drawing a minimum of intake for the sake of maximizing the output.”

That is, there exists a relation between drawing as little as possible of material benefits of life on the one hand and aiming at maximizing one’s output on the other. Human outputs, whether in the sphere of the actualization of one’s potentials, whether on the level of emotion and morality, or from the point of view of individuals’ role in social cooperation and mutual help, or from the aspect of realizing spiritual edification and refinement... all in all have a converse relationship to one’s intake, consumption or acquisition of material benefits.

It is a human characteristic that the greater one’s enjoyment of material benefits and indulgence in such things as pleasures, luxuries and affluence, the greater is one’s weakness, indignity, impotence, sterility and impoverishment. Conversely, abstinence from indulgent and extravagant enjoyments of nature (surely within definite limits) refines and purifies the human nature, invigorates and strengthens two of the highest of all human powers: thought and will.

It is true only of animals that a greater benefit from the possibilities provided by nature contributes to their animal development and perfection. Even in animals, it is not applicable when we consider what is called the merits desirable in a beast.

For example, sheep and cattle which are reared for in order to obtain a greater amount of meat, milk, or fleece, etc. should be given a greater attention and care and be well fed. However, this is not true of, say, a race horse. It is impossible for a common stable horse to show any good performance in a race. The horse which has to run and win races is given days or rather months of training with a controlled diet until its body becomes lean and nimble, shedding all its excessive fat, so that it can acquire the desirable

agility and speed or the excellence of which it is capable.

Zuhd is also an exercise and discipline for man. But it is the exercise of the soul. Through zuhd, the soul is disciplined, shedding all excessive appendages and becoming, as a result, light, agile and nimble, it takes an easy flight into the skies of spiritual merits.

Incidentally, Ali (as) also describes taqwa and zuhd as exercise and practice. The word riyada originally meant exercising horses intended for racing. Physical exercise is also called riyada. Ali (as) says the following: “Indeed, as to myself, I shall exercise it and discipline it through taqwa.”²⁷

What about plant life? Like animals, that which may be, loosely speaking, called the merit of a tree or a shrub is its capacity to thrive with a minimum amount of nourishment from nature. Ali (as) also makes an allusion to this point in one of his letters to his governors.

In that letter, after describing his own ascetic life–style, characterized by a minimum of consumption, Ali (as) encourages him to emulate it. He says the following: “I can already anticipate your criticism. Someone might say that if this is what the son of Abu Talib eats, then weakness should have made him unfit for an encounter with the enemy’s warriors. Remember the untended tree that thrives in the harsh conditions of the desert: its wood is firm and tough; even the fire lit from it is more enduring and fierce.

This law, which applies to all living things and beings, is more effective in the case of man because of the various characteristics special to him which are summed up under the term “human personality”.²⁸

The word zuhd, despite its sublime human meaning, has suffered an evil fate and is fiercely denounced particularly in our own times. Sometimes, the term is advertently or; otherwise, misinterpreted; sometimes, it is equated with sanctimoniousness and show of piety. At other times, it is considered equivalent to monasticism and ascetic seclusion. Everybody is free to coin terms of his own with any meaning of his own choice. But no one has the right to condemn any concept or term by imparting to it a wrong and misconceived meaning and sense.

In its system of ethics and education, Islam has used a certain term, zuhd. Nahjul–Balagha and the Islamic tradition are replete with it. Before we make any judgment about zuhd in Islam, first and foremost, we must understand its Islamic connotation. The meaning of zuhd in Islam is what we have tried to explain and the philosophy behind it is what we have discussed in the light of Islamic texts. If anyone finds fault with this meaning and philosophy, let him inform me so that I, too, may benefit from it.

What school of thought and what kind of logic can justify monasticism? What school of thought can recommend and justify the worship of money, consumerism, love of goods, lust for status or, to use an expression which includes them all, worldliness? Is it possible for man to be the slave and prisoner of material things or, in the words of Amir al– Mu’minin Ali (as), the slave of the world and the slave of him who exercises control over it and yet speak of human personality?

Here, it would not be out of place to cite the views of a Marxist writer about the relationship between love for money and human personality. In a useful and concise book regarding capitalist and Marxist economies, he points out the moral consequences of the power of money in the society.

He writes the following: The extraordinary power of gold over our contemporary society is something deeply detested by men of sensitive nature. Men in search of truth have always expressed their strong aversion towards this filthy metal and consider it to be the main cause of corruption in contemporary society. However, those little round pieces of a shining yellow metal called gold are really not to be blamed. The power and domination of money as a general manifestation of power and authority of things over man is the essential characteristic of a disorderly economy based on barter and exchange.

In the same way as the uncivilized man of ancient times adored and worshipped idols made with his own hands, the contemporary man also worships the product of his own labor. His life is overwhelmed by the power of things which he has made with his own hands. In order that the worship of consumer goods and the worship of money, which is the filthiest form evolved of idolatry, may be completely eradicated, the social causes which brought them into existence should be eliminated and the society should be so organized that the power and authority of the little coins of this yellow brilliant metal would be thoroughly obliterated.

In such an organization of society, things will no more wield their present power over human beings. On the other hand, man's power and predominance over things shall be absolute and in accordance with a preconceived scheme. The worship of money and things shall then give place to honor and reverence for the human personality.

We agree with the author that the power of things over man, particularly the power of money, is opposed to the demands of human dignity and nobility and is as condemnable as idolatry. However, we do not agree with his suggested exclusive prescription for solution of this problem.

Here we are not concerned with the question whether collective ownership is preferable from a social or economic point of view. Nevertheless, morally speaking, this suggestion, instead of redeeming society's spirit of honesty, it eliminates right away the very object of honesty!

Man can reclaim his identity only by liberating himself from the power of money and by bringing money under his own control. True human personality can emerge when the danger of money and goods remains possible without overcoming man, who is not ruled by them but rules them. Such a person is called by Islam zahid.

In the educational system of Islam, man regains his personality without the need to obliterate the right to own property. Those who are trained in the school of Islamic teachings are equipped with the power of zuhd. They strip money and goods of their power and subjugate them to their own authority.

1. Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab, No. 51 pp. 88-89.

- [2.](#) Ibid. Khutab 16.
- [3.](#) Ibid.
- [4.](#) Ibid. Khutab 114.
- [5.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 191.
- [6.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 157.
- [7.](#) See Guftar-e-mah, Vol. 1, the second speech.
- [8.](#) Ibid. Khutab 191.
- [9.](#) Ibid.
- [10.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 15, Bab al-nahy an al-rahbaniyyah wa al-siyahah. Rumi in the sixth part of his Mathnawi, refers to this tradition in the story of the bird and the hunter.
- [11.](#) This is a reference to to Khutab No. 3, p. 50.
- [12.](#) Ibid. Khutab 209.
- [13.](#) Ibid. Khutab 45.
- [14.](#) Ibid.
- [15.](#) Ibid. Khutab 209
- [16.](#) 78Bihar al-anwar (Tabriz), Vol. 9, p. 758.
- [17.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Hikam, No. 103.
- [18.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 160.
- [19.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 133.
- [20.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 224.
- [21.](#) Ibid. Epistle, No. 45.
- [22.](#) Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, pp. 194-5.
- [23.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Hikam, No. 103.
- [24.](#) Ibid. Epistle, No. 45.
- [25.](#) Ibid. 420.
- [26.](#) The person referred here is Akbar Parwarish.
- [27.](#) Ibid. Epistle 45
- [28.](#) Usul-e-Iqtisad-e-Nuhsin, Shaki-e-arzish-e-pul.

Part Six

Dunya : The World And Worldliness Renunciation Of Dunya In Nahjul-Balagha

Of the frequent themes of Nahjul-Balagha is strong warning against the dangers of worldliness. Our preceding discussion about zuhd (asceticism) and its aims also serves here to shed a light on the meaning of worldliness because zuhd, which is strongly enjoined, is the very opposite of the worldliness which is severely condemned. To define and explain any one of them is to define and explain the other. However, in view of the tremendous emphasis laid in Ali's moral sermons upon the warning against the dangers of worldliness, we consider it appropriate to devote a separate chapter to this topic with a view to further explaining this concept so that all ambiguities in this matter are removed.

The first point to be investigated is this: Why has so much attention been given to the concept of zuhd in the sayings and sermons of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) to the extent that no other issue has been so much underscored by him nor by the Holy Prophet (S) nor has any other Imam spoken as repeatedly about the deceptions of worldly life, its ephemeral and temporal nature, the disloyalty of its slippery comforts and the dangers of wealth, affluence and immersion in and complete surrender to worldly pleasures and comforts?

The Danger Created By War Booty

This was not a matter of accident. Rather, it was something related to the conditions that came into existence during Ali's epochs, that is, during the days of the caliphs who preceded him, especially during the caliphate of Othman. A series of serious dangers visited the world of Islam in the wake of the influx of huge amounts of wealth and riches.

Ali (as) sensed its dangerous consequences and struggled against them. This struggle is reflected in his practices and policies during the period of his caliphate, in the course of which he ultimately gave up his life. This struggle, at the ideological level, is also reflected in his sermons, letters and sayings.

The Muslims were blessed with great victories in battles that diverted huge amounts of property and wealth into the Muslim world. However, instead of being utilized for public benefit or distributed justly among the people, the wealth fell into the hands of a few individuals and an elite class.

Especially during the days of 'Othman, this imbalance became greatly pronounced. Individuals who possessed nothing only a few years ago appropriated for their own personal use fabulous amounts of wealth. This was the time when worldly tendencies gained momentum in the Muslim society: The Muslim umma started on a course of moral decline and degeneration.

It was following the awareness of this great danger to society that Ali (as) raised his cry of protest to warn the umma of Islam. Writing about the days of Othman, al-Masudi says the following: "Othman was a man of extraordinary generosity (of course, it was exercised at the cost of the public treasury).

The government officials and the people followed his example. He was the first among the caliphs to build a mansion of stone and mortar with wooden doors made of teak and juniper. He amassed other properties such as gardens, orchards and springs in Medina. When he died, there were 150,000 dinars and a thousand thousand (million) dirhams in cash with his treasurer. His property in Wadi al-Qura, Hunain and elsewhere was valued above 100,000 dinars. His legacy consisted of a large number of horses and camels."

Then he writes the following: "During his reign, a group of his associates also hoarded similar amounts of wealth. Al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam built a mansion in Basra which still stands intact in the year 332 H. [al-Masudi's own time]. It is also well known that he built similar mansions in Egypt, Kufa and

Alexandria. When az-Subayr [ibn al- Awwam] died, he left 50,000 dinars in cash, a thousand horses and thousands of other things. The brick, mortar and teak mansion which Talhah ibn ‘Abdullah built in Kufa still exists and is known as Dar al- Talhatayn. Talhah’s daily income from his properties in Iraq was one thousand dinars. He had one thousand horses in his stables. A one-thirty- second (1/32) part of the wealth that he left at his death was estimated at 84,000 dinars.”

Al-Masudi mentions similar amounts of wealth in the possession of Zayd ibn Thabit, Ya’li ibn Umayyah and others. Evidently, such huge amounts of wealth do not emerge from under the ground nor fall from the sky. Such immense riches are never amassed except by the side of extreme and horrifying poverty. This is why Ali (as), in sermon 129, after warning the people of the dangers of worldliness, says the following: “You live in a period when virtues recede and evils advance step by step and Satan becomes greedier in his eagerness to ruin human beings.

Today, his equipment have been reinforced, his traps are set in every place and his prey comes easily. Look around; you will see either a poor man hardly able to breathe in extreme poverty and penury, or a rich man who has transformed Allah’s blessings into his own infidelity, or you will see a miser who makes stinginess in discharging the obligations imposed by Allah a means of increasing his own wealth, or you will find the rebellious whose unruly hearts are deaf to moral admonition. Where are the virtuous, the righteous among you? Where are the free men and the magnanimous? Where are those who avoid every trace of deceit in their dealings and pursue piety and honesty in their ways?

Intoxication Of Affluence

Amir al-Mu’minin (as), in his utterances, has used the phrase sakarat al-ni’ma, meaning intoxication induced by comfort and affluence, which is inevitably followed by a vengeful disaster. In sermon 151, he warns them thus: “You, O people of Arabia, will be victims of calamities which are drawing near. Beware of the intoxication induced by affluence and fear the vengeful disaster which will follow it.”

Then he describes the misfortunes caused by such immoderation. In sermon 187, he foretells the future calamities that were to befall the Muslim society. He says the following: “This will happen when you are intoxicated, not by drinking wine, but by wealth and affluence.”

Yes, the flow of immense amounts of wealth into the coffers of the Islamic domain and the unjust distribution of this wealth, together with nepotism and partiality, infected the Islamic society with the disease of worldliness and the race for affluence.

Ali (as) struggled to save the Islamic world from this grave danger. He was severely critical of those who were responsible for the infection to set in. He set an example of an altogether different life style in his own personal way of life and, on attaining caliphate, he gave the top priority to the campaign against these dangers in his revolutionary program.

General Aspect Of Ali's Warnings

This prologue was intended to cast some light at the particular aspect of the warnings of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) against worldliness as a specific reaction to a particular social phenomenon of his time. Yet, aside from this particular feature, there is a general aspect to Ali's words that is not confined to his own time and applies to all times and all people as an essential part of Islamic teachings. This specific logic emanates from the teaching of the Holy Qur'an which is followed up in the sayings of the Holy Prophet (S), Amir al-Mu'minin (as) and the rest of Imams (as), as well as in the writings of great Muslim sages. However, it is a logic which needs a detailed analysis. In the present discussion, our concern will be more with the general aspect of the discourses of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) in the sense that in them, Ali (as) addresses himself to all human beings of all times.

Every School Has Its Own Terminology

Every school of thought has a terminology which is specific to it. In order to understand the concepts and issues of a certain school, it is essential to be familiar with its terms. On the other hand, in order to understand its particular terminology, it is necessary, in the first place, to understand its general view of the universe, life and man, that is, its Weltanschauung.

Islam has a clear view of being and creation. It has a particular way of looking at man and his life. One of the fundamental principles of the Islamic world outlook is the notion that there is no duality of any kind whatsoever in being; that is, the world of creation is not divisible into two domains of good and evil. That is, it is not true that some existent beings are good and beautiful and should have been created, whereas some others are evil and ugly and should not have been created but nevertheless exist. Such a view is regarded as kufr in the Islamic world outlook and is considered contrary to the principle of tawhid. According to Islam, the creation of all things and beings is based on goodness, wisdom and beauty:

“You see no imperfection [whatsoever] in the creation of the all- Merciful One”(Qur'an, 67: 3).

“He knows the unseen and the seen, [He is] the Almighty, the all- Compassionate Who made everything He created good”(Qur'an, 32: 6-7).

Accordingly, Islam's condemnation of the world does not apply to the world of creation. The Islamic world outlook rests on the foundation of pure Tawhid and lays great emphasis on the Unity of the Acting Principle; it does not admit the existence of any partner who would share Allah's sovereignty. Such a world outlook can never be pessimistic. The idea of an evil world abounding in crookedness and wickedness is not Islamic. Then why does it denounce the world?

Condemned World

Commonly, it is said that attachment to the world is condemned and disapproved by Islam. This is both true and false. If what is implied is an emotional attachment, it cannot be true because man, in relation to the total system of creation, has been created with a series of congenital emotional attachments and inclinations. In addition, he does not acquire these inclinations, nor are they superfluous or incongruous.

Even as in the human body there is no superfluous organ not even a single nerve ending so also there are no redundant congenital tendencies of attachment in his nature. All innate human tendencies and aptitudes have a purpose which is wise and sagacious. The Holy Qur'an regards such tendencies as the signs of the Divine Wisdom and the Creator's consummate design:

“And [some] of His signs is that He created for you, of yourselves, spouses so that you may repose in them and He has set between you love and mercy”(Qur'an, 30: 21).

These attachments and sentiments form a series of channels of communication between man and his world. Without them, man would not be able to pursue the course of his development. Consequently, it should be said that the Islamic world outlook, even as it does not permit us to denounce and reject the world, it also does allow us to regard the natural attachments and the channels of communication as superfluous, useless and breakable because such sentiments and tendencies are a part of the general pattern of creation. In fact, the prophets and the awliya were endowed with these sentiments and emotions to a high degree of exuberance.

The truth is that what is implied by 'attachment to the world' are not these natural and innate inclinations; instead, what is meant is bondage to material and worldly things/affairs and total surrender to them, which leads to spiritual stagnation and inertia, depriving the human spirit of its freedom of movement and buoyancy and making it immobile and dead.

This is what Islam calls worldliness and has severely campaigned against it as something contrary to the evolutionary system of creation. Not only this, Islam considers this struggle as being in tune with the laws of the evolutionary processes of creation. The expressions employed by the Holy Qur'an in this regard are miraculous, as we shall explain in the following sections.

Relationship Between Man And World

As made explicit in the last chapter, that which is disapproved by the Holy Qur'an and by Nahjul-Balagha is neither the world-in-itself, nor the natural and innate human urges and attachments. In the view of Islam, neither has the world been created without a purpose, nor has man strayed into it aimlessly.

There have been some schools of thought which view the world with pessimism. In their view, the

existing order of the universe is far from being perfect. There have existed other schools which considered man's entry into the world of existence to be the result of some cosmic error, as if man had strayed into it!

According to them, man is a total stranger in this world with which he has no ties of consanguinity and is a prisoner of existence. Like Joseph, he has been thrown into the black hole of being by his evil brethren where he is confined and his every endeavor should be aimed at finding an exit from such an abyss.

Obviously, when the relation of man to the world and nature is regarded as the one between a prison and its prisoner, an abyss in which one is entrapped; one's ultimate aim cannot be anything but seeking deliverance from it.

Logic Of Islam

But from the Islamic viewpoint, the relation of man to the world is not that of a prisoner with his prison, or that of one entrapped in a well with the well. Rather, it is the kind of relation that exists between a peasant and his farm¹, or a horse and the racecourse², or a merchant and the marketplace³, or a devotee and his temple⁴. The world, from the Islamic point of view, is a school for man, his training ground and the place where he can acquire perfection.

There is an anecdote narrated in Nahjul-Balagha of a man who condemned the world in Amir al-Mu'minin's presence. Ali (as) rebuked him for his confusing the world which is condemned by Islam with the actual physical world and informed him about his error⁵. Shaikh Farid al-Din Attar has rendered this incident into poetry in his Musibat nameh thus:

In the presence of the Tiger of Providence,

A man denounced the world with vehemence.

The world, exclaimed Hayder, is not to blame.

Wretched are you, being far from wisdom.

The world, son, is a farm To be tended day and night.

Whatsoever is of the honor and riches of faith,

And in all it is to be acquired from this world.

Tomorrow's fruit is the blooming of today's seed;

And one who is idle here shall taste the bitter fruit of regret.

The world is the best place for you,

Where in you can prepare provision for the Hereafter.

Go into the world, but do not get immersed in the ego.

And prepare yourself for the other world.

If you act thus, the world will suit you,

Hence, befriend the world just for this aim.

Nasir Khusrow Alawi, justifiably considered as a philosopher among the poets (hakim al-shu'ara'), is one of the most profound and truly religious among Persian poets. He has composed a praise about the world, simultaneously highlighting both the good and the evil qualities of it, which is as much in conformity with the Islamic outlook as it is extraordinarily beautiful from the artistic viewpoint. This praise appears in his collected poetical works (diwan) and is included in his book Jami' al-hikmatayn. He says the following:

O world! How apt and essential you are!
Even though you haven't been loyal to any.
Sick and wretched you appear to the afflicted eye,
Yet fine and healthy if one looks at your inside.
If sometimes you have broken a robust man or two,
Many a broken one you have joined and restored.
You are filthy to the unclean,
To the pure unstained.
If any one should blame you, say,
You know me not.
You have grown out of me.
If you are wise,
Why blame the tree of which you are a branch?
The Master made me a path for your ascending journey,
And you have settled down on this lowly road.
Allah planted a tree from whose trunk you have grown;
If you grow out straight, you will be saved,
And if crooked, confined to the flames.
Yes, everyone burns crooked branches,
And asks not "Is it teak or walnut?"
You are the arrow of Allah aimed at His enemy,
Why have you hurt yourself with this weapon?!

Now it is evident that man's relation to the world is similar to the one that exists between the farmer and his field of cultivation, the merchant and the marketplace, the devotee and the temple. It is not possible for man to alienate himself from the world or sever his ties with it or develop a kind of relationship which is wholly negative. There exists a design and intelligent planning behind every natural urge. Man has neither come to this world by cheating or fraud, nor should he go from here cursed.

There is a general force of attraction and gravitation that encompasses the whole universe. All the

particles in it attract each other according to a set pattern. This pattern of mutual attraction and absorption is determined by a judicious design. Moreover, the force of attraction and love is not confined to man alone. No particle in the universe is devoid of this power. The difference, however, is that man, contrary to other beings, is aware of his own leanings and inclinations.

Wahshi Kirmani says the following:

Every dancing particle is permeated with the same force of attraction
That draws it towards a certain specific goal. It carries one Rower to the side of another,
And urges one spark to pursue the company of its likes,
From fire to wind, from water to dust,
From underneath the moon to the top of the heavens,
From flock to flock and from horde to horde,
You will observe this attraction in every moving thing ,
From heavenly spheres to the terrestrial bodies.

Accordingly, from the Islamic viewpoint, the world is neither without a purpose nor are the human beings created by any error, nor are man's innate tendencies undesirable and evil. Then what is meant by the world that the Holy Qur'an and Nahjul-Balagha regard as undesirable and condemnable?

Before embarking on the issue, a few preliminary principles need to be clarified. It is characteristic of man that he is inherently an idealist and a lover of perfection. He is in pursuit of something with which he wants to develop a relationship closer than an ordinary attachment. In other words, he is by nature a devotee and a worshipper in search of something which is the ultimate object of his desire and the end of his entire being.

However, if he is not rightly guided, or not on his guard, his relationship with things and inclination towards them is transformed into a relationship of reliance and attachment, changing means into end and an association into bondage. As a result, his spirit of mobility, freedom and ability to pursue are transformed into inertia, complacency and captivity.

This is what is undesirable and contrary to the perfection-seeking order of the world. It is a defect and a kind of non-being, not a merit or a positive mode of a being. It is a dangerous malady and a disaster for man; the Holy Qur'an and Nahjul-Balagha warn against it.

Without any doubt, Islam does not regard the material world and life in it even if it involves the greatest material achievements as a fitting goal of man's highest aspirations. This is so because, firstly, from the Islamic world outlook, this world is followed by the eternal and everlasting world of the Hereafter where conditions of life will be determined by the deeds, good or evil, of a person in this world. Secondly, the value of a human being is too great to warrant his surrender to the slavery of and servitude to the material aspects of life.

This is why Ali (as) so often points out that the world is a good place but only for one who knows that it is not a permanent abode, only a road, a caravanserai: “What a good abode it is for whoever would not want to make it a home!”⁶

“This world is, indeed, a transit camp, whereas the Hereafter is a place of permanent abode. So take from the transit what you need for your destination.”⁷

From the viewpoint of humanistic philosophies, there is no doubt that everything which binds man to itself and immerses him completely within itself violates his human identity by making it inert and frozen. The process of human perfection knows no limit or end. Every halt, delay and bondage is injurious to it. As we find no reason to controvert this view, we accept it without any argument. However, there are two other points that need to be discussed here.

Firstly, does the Holy Qur’an and following it Nahjul-Balagha confirm such a relationship between man and his world? Is it true that what the Holy Qur’an condemns is attachment and bondage to the world when taken as the ultimate end of life, an attitude which retards man’s movement towards perfection and represents inertness, stagnation and non-being? Does the Holy Qur’an abstain from absolutely condemning worldly ties and sentiments so long as they do not become man’s ultimate goal of life, stalling his progress?

Secondly, if it is admitted that human attachment to beings other than himself causes bondage and servitude and retards the development of human personality, does it make any difference if that being is Allah or someone/something else?

The Holy Qur’an negates every form of bondage and servitude and calls upon man to welcome every kind of spiritual and human freedom. It does not, however, condemn servitude to Allah; it does not invite man to liberate himself from Allah in order to acquire absolute freedom. Instead, the invitation of the Holy Qur’an is based on liberation from everything besides Allah and complete surrender to Him and only to Him. It is based on the rejection of obedience to anything except to Him and the acceptance of such a submission to Him.

The expression La ilaha illa Allah (There is no god except Allah) is the foundation of the Islamic faith. It implies simultaneously a negation and an affirmation, a rejection and an acceptance, kufr and iman. It signifies the negation, the rejection, the renunciation and the kufr in relation to the non-God, and the affirmation, acceptance, submission and iman in relation to Allah. The essential testimony required by Islam is neither just a AYes nor merely a ANo; it is a combination of both a “Yes” and a “No”.

If the needs of the growth of the human personality demand that man should liberate himself from every kind of bondage, servitude and submissiveness to anything whatsoever, that he should rebellion against everything that compromises his absolute freedom, that he ought to say No to everything as the advocates of Existentialism claim what difference does it make whether that “thing” is Allah or something else? And if it is to be decided that man should renounce his freedom and adopt slavery, servitude and

submission to someone/something, what difference does it make, after all, whether it is Allah or someone/something else?

Is there a difference between accepting Allah as the supreme ideal and accepting some other thing as the *Summum Bonum*. Does it mean that only Allah is such that servitude to Him is freedom in itself and that losing of one's self in Him is identical with the realization of one's self and the recovery of one's true identity and personality? And if this is true, what is the basis of this claim? How can it be justified?

In our opinion, here we arrive at one of the most subtle, profound and progressive teachings of Islam and one of the most glorious of human ideologies. It is here that the sublimity of the logic of Islam and the insignificance and pettiness of other ideologies becomes evident. We shall answer these queries in the following sections.

[The World In The Holy Qur'an And Nahjul-Balagha](#)

In the last chapter, we said that what is execrable from the viewpoint of Islam with regard to man's relationship with the world is that it should grow to the extent of becoming a malady and an affliction of the human soul. It is the bondage and the enslaving attachment to the world against which Islam has waged an unrelenting struggle, considering it as undesirable, not the mere relationship with and attachment to it. It is the life of captivity that is condemnable, not the life of freedom. The world is rejected as a goal and objective, not as a way or a means.

If the relationship of man to the world develops into his servitude and subjugation, it leads to the negation and obliteration of all higher human values; man's worth lies in the greatness of his pursued ends and objectives.

Obviously, if, for instance, his ultimate objectives do not go beyond filling his belly to satisfaction, and if all his efforts and aspirations were to revolve around his stomach, his worth will not surpass that of his stomach. That is why Ali (as) says the following: "The worth of a man whose only aim is to stuff his belly is equal to that which is excreted from it.

The question is: What kind of relationship is appropriate between the human being and the world and what form should it have? In one kind of relationship, his personality is effaced and sacrificed to things, and since the worth of anyone in pursuit of an objective is lower than the objective itself, he is, to use a Qur'anic expression, bound to sink to the level of 'the lowest of the low' (*asfal al-safilin*), becoming thereby the most abject, degenerate and contemptible creature in the world. He, then, loses not only his higher values but also his human identity.

In the other kind of relationship, the world and worldly things are sacrificed at the altar of his humanity and are used to serve man while he reclaims his higher ideals. This is why it has been said in one qudsi hadith:

O son of Adam! I have created everything for your sake,
But I have created you for My Own Self.

We have already cited two passages from Nahjul-Balagha indicating its status in denouncing the degenerate and distorted kind of relationship between man and the world of nature that leads to man's servitude and bondage. Here, we shall quote a few verses from the Holy Qur'an to endorse this viewpoint and return to Nahjul-Balagha for further relevant references.

The Qur'anic verses relevant to man and the world are of two kinds: The first group of verses is of an introductory nature; that is, it lays the ground for the second group of verses. In truth, the first group can be regarded as representing the major and the minor premises of a syllogism of which the second group constitutes the conclusion.

The first set of verses consists of those which emphasize the changeability, the inconstancy and the ephemeral nature of this world. In these verses, the reality of material objects is depicted as being changeable, fleeting and transitory. For instance, the world is compared to the vegetation that sprouts from the ground. In the beginning, it is green and flourishing, but little by little, it turns yellow; it shrivels and ultimately dries up. Then the elements break it into bits and scatter it into the wind. Such is life in the present world.

Obviously, whether man likes it or not, his physical life is not much more durable than that of the reed and is subject to a similar fate. If man must base his outlook on reality, not on fancy, and if it is only through the discovery of truth, not by flight of imagination and hallucinations, that he can hope to attain felicity and true happiness... then he should not forget this fact.

This set of verses constitutes a sort of a background argument for denying the importance of material things as ultimate ideals worthy of man's adoration. These verses are followed immediately by the reminder that man should know that there exists another world which is eternal and everlasting. Do not imagine that the present life is everything. Since it is not worthy of man, do not conclude that life is futile and meaningless, they remind.

The second set of verses illuminates the solution to the problem of man's relationship to the world. It can be clearly seen from these verses that the execrable form of relationship is one that grows to the extent of becoming a bondage, requiring man's submission, willing surrender and servitude to the transitory things of the world. It is in these verses that the crux of the Holy Qur'an's logic comes to light:

Wealth and sons are the adornment of the worldly life; but the abiding things, the deeds of righteousness (which survive one's death and continue to benefit other people) are better with Allah in reward and better in hope. (Qur'an, 18: 46)

This verse, as can be seen, speaks of the ultimate aspiration of man. His ultimate aspiration is the thing for which he lives and without which life has no meaning in his eyes.

Surely those who look not to encounter Us and are well- pleased with the present life and are at rest in it, and those who are heedless of Our signs, their refuge is the Fire, for that they have been earning. (Qur'an, 10: 7-8)

In this verse, that which is considered execrable is the absence of hope in the next life and the satisfaction and contentment with material things.

So turn from him who turns away from Our remembrance and desires only the present life. That is [the extent of] their attainment of knowledge. (Qur'an, 53: 29-30)

They rejoice in this world's life, and this world's life is nothing compared with the Hereafter but a temporary enjoyment. (Qur'an, 13: 26)

They know an outward part of the present life, but of the Hereafter they are heedless. (Qur'an, 30: 7)

There are many other verses which have a similar meaning. In all of them the same theme recurs, that is the negation of the world as the goal and ideal of man's highest aspirations and the ultimate object of his desire and the only source of his happiness and delight. It is held that this form of relationship between man and the world, instead of putting the world at man's disposal, sacrifices man to it and dispossesses him of his humanity.

In Nahjul-Balagha as in the Holy Qur'an we encounter a similar twofold argument. In the first set of statements the transitory nature of the world is depicted in profound, forceful metaphors, allegories and parables put in precise and elegant phrases which follow one another in an absorbing rhythm. In the second category, conclusions are drawn which are exactly the same as those derived by the Holy Qur'an.

In Khutbah 32, people are at first divided into two categories: The worldly and the otherworldly. The worldly people are again divided into four groups.

In the first group are put those who are meek and tractable like sheep. They are the most innocuous of creatures, never seen to commit any overt injustice or aggression, or covert deceit or subversion. Not that they detest such things but because they lack the power and daring to carry them out.

To the second category belong those who possess both the power and the daring to carry out such ambitions. They muster their will to amass money and wealth, to acquire power and authority, or to occupy important posts and offices and do not stop short of any degree of perverseness.

Those belonging to the third group are wolves in the skins of sheep. They are slaves of the world in the garb of the otherworldly and the pious. They, sanctimoniously, hang their heads in affected humility, walk with the slow steps of a sage and dress like the devout. Through their hypocrisy they win the confidence of the people and become their most confident trustees.

To the fourth group belong those whose hearts burn regretfully with the fire of ambition but their feeling of inferiority has forced them to retire to seclusion. They put on the dress of piety and zuhd in order to conceal their deep sense of inferiority and dejection.

All the four kinds of people, regardless of the diverse degrees of their success and failure, are regarded by Ali (as) to constitute, spiritually, a single class on account of their commonly shared attitude: worldliness. Why? Because all of them have one common characteristic: They are like the unfortunate birds whom the world has made its prey one way or another. Captured, they enjoy no longer the freedom of flight. They are slaves and prisoners of the world.

In the same sermon, Ali (as) describes the qualities of the other- worldly, the opposite group and says the following:

Evil is the barter of those who purchase this world at the cost of their souls.

In the eyes of Ali (as) the whole world with everything in it is too inferior to be the price of a man's humanity; hence it ends in the great loss of one who exchanges it for his human identity. Nasir Khusrow has the same theme in mind, when he says the following:

Never shall I fall an easy prey to the world,
For no more do its woes burden my heart.
In fact, I am the hunter and the world my prey,
Though once it did pursue me on its hunt.
Though many a man has fallen pierced by its arrows,
The world could not make me a target.
My soul flies over the world's tides,
And no more do I worry about its waves and tides.

This theme that one should never sacrifice one's humanity for anything in the world is a theme that recurs a lot in the sayings of the leaders of the Islamic faith. Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as), in his famous will to Imam al-Hassan (as), which is included in the section of Epistles (letters) in Nahjul-Balagha, says the following: "Keep your self above every contemptible thing because, whatever it may be, it is not worth the compromise of your self.

In Tuhaf al-Uqul, the following tradition is recorded:

Imam al-Sajjad (as) was asked, "Who is the most important among people?" He replied, "The one who does not regard the whole world to be equal to his worth.

There are many traditions which deal with a similar theme, but we shall abstain from quoting more for the sake of brevity.

A close study of the Holy Qur'an, Nahjul-Balagha and the sayings of other religious leaders will reveal

that Islam has not depreciated the world; rather, it has elevated the station and worth of the human being as compared to it. In Islam, the world is for the sake of man and not the other way around. It aims to revive the human values, not to disparage the world.

Freedom And Bondage

Our discussion of the meaning of “worldliness” in Nahjul- Balagha has become somewhat drawn out. However, one issue, which cannot be omitted, remains unanswered. We raised it earlier in the form of a question which we had promised to answer later. The question was this: If attachment and bondage to anything is a kind of unhealthy condition that leads to abandonment of human values and causes stagnation, inertness and inertia of the human personality, what difference does it make whether that thing is something material or spiritual, this worldly or otherworldly, or, as goes the saying, “the Master or the apple”?

It may be said that if the aim of Islam, by prohibiting attachment and by warning against bondage to temporal things, is to safeguard the human being’s identity, to rescue him from servitude and to protect him from stagnating and vegetating in life, it should have encouraged man to acquire absolute freedom and to consider everything that compromises and confines it as kufr, for such is the standpoint of some modern schools of philosophy which consider freedom to be the essence of man’s human identity.

These schools of thought equate man’s human identity with his capacity to rebel, disobey every form of servitude and assert his absolute freedom. Accordingly, every manner of bondage, confinement and submission is, according to them, inconsistent with man’s real identity and leads to self- alienation.

They say that man realizes his true humanity only by refusing to submit and surrender. It is characteristic of attachment that the object of love absorbs man’s attention and compromises his self-awareness. This results in his forgetting his own self and, subsequently, this aware and free being called man, whose identity is summarized in his awareness and freedom, becomes a slavish creature devoid of freedom and self- awareness. In forgetting his own identity, man also becomes oblivious of his human values.

In such a state of bondage and servitude, he ceases to progress, edifying himself and becoming stagnant, frozen at some point. If Islam’s philosophy of struggle against worldliness aims at the resurrection of the human identity and personality, it should oppose every form of servitude and liberate man from every form of bondage. Such, however, is not the case for Islam, undeniably, advocates the liberation from materialism for the sake of spiritual servitude. Freedom from the world is acquired for the sake of the fetters of the Hereafter and the apple is renounced for the sake of the Master.

The ‘Urafa’ who advise absolute freedom from attachments, however, do allow an exception. Hafiz says the following:

I am the slave of the magnanimity of Him

Who is free of the taint of attachment to anything under the blue sky
Except the love of the moon-cheeked one,
The joy of whose love redeems all sorrows and woes.
Openly do I declare and am delighted to proclaim:
I am the slave of Love and am free from both the worlds
Except for the Beloved's Name inscribed on the slate of my heart,
The teacher did not teach me another word.

From the viewpoint of irfan, one must be free of both worlds but should surrender totally to love. As Hafiz says, the tablet of the heart must be clean of every name except that of the Beloved One. The heart should be cleansed of every attachment except the love of Allah Whose love brings redemption from all sorrows and woes.

However, from the viewpoint of the so-called humanistic philosophy, the freedom of the arif, being only relative, does not take us anywhere because it is freedom from everything for the sake of a total surrender and servitude to One Being. Servitude is, after all, servitude, and bondage is bondage, regardless of the agent towards which it is directed.

This is the objection raised by the followers of modern humanistic philosophies. In order that the issues involved may be further illuminated, we are compelled to refer to certain philosophical issues.

First of all, one may point out that to assume that there exists a kind of human selfhood and identity and to insist that this identity should be safeguarded in itself amounts to the negation of movement, progress and development of this selfhood because, motion and change necessarily result in alienation from this selfhood. This is so because movement means becoming: that is, becoming something one is not; it implies a continuous transcendence of selfhood and the embracing of otherness.

Obviously, if we accept this view, it is only by the means of immobility and stagnation that one can preserve his identity. The development necessitates self-alienation. For this reason, some ancient philosophers defined motion in terms of otherness and self-estrangement. Accordingly, to assume that there exists a certain kind of human Aself and to insist that this self should be safeguarded and protected from becoming Anon-self and to speak of movement, progress and evolution in the same breath involves an unresolvable contradiction.

Some people, in order to free themselves from this contradiction, have said that man's identity lies in being devoid of any kind of self whatsoever. Man, they say, is a creature absolutely undefined in his essence and free from any kind of limit, form or essence. His essence lies in his being without any defined essence. Man is a creature devoid of a fixed nature and essential necessity. Any attempt to define, limit or confine him amounts to depriving him of his real self and identity.

Such a view may be aptly considered poetry and a flight of imagination rather than a philosophy. The absolute absence of a fixed form and essence is possible in one of two cases: Firstly, such a being

should possess infinite perfection, pure and unlimited actuality; that is, it should be a being unlimited and unconfined, encompassing all times and places and predominant over all things and beings in existence, such as the Being of the Creator.

For such a Being, movement and growth are impossible because motion and development involve overcoming of defects and imperfections, whereas such a being cannot possibly be supposed to possess any imperfection. Secondly, it may apply to a being devoid of every kind of actuality and merit. That is, it should be a pure possibility and sheer potentiality, a neighbor of nothingness, existing only on the remotest frontiers of existence.

It should be devoid of any innate reality and essence though capable of assuming any form or essence. Such a being, which itself absolutely undefined, is always associated with a definite being; though shapeless and colorless in itself, it exists in the protective shadow of a being possessing form, shape and color. Such a being is what the philosophers call the primal matter.

It occupies the lowest status in the hierarchy of existence and stands on the extremity of being, even as the Divine Essence, being the absolute perfection, stands on the other extremity of existence with the difference that the extremity occupied by the Divine Essence circumscribes all the contents of being. Man, like all other creatures, is situated somewhere between these two extremes and cannot lack any defined essence. Admittedly, he is different from other creatures but, unlike them, there is no limit to his movement towards perfection. Whereas other creatures remain confined to certain definite limits which they cannot transcend, there is no end to the possibilities of the human development.

Man possesses a special kind of being. But contrary to the view of the philosophers who believe in the precedence of essence and reduce the being of everything to its quiddity and who deny the possibility of transcendence and essential change as being self-contradictory and consider all changes to occur at the level of accidents, the existential nature of man, like that of any other material thing, is fluid, with the difference that its movement and fluidity know no final limits.

Some commentators of the Holy Qur'an, in their explanations of the verse: "O people of Yathrib! There is no abiding here for you (Qur'an, 33: 13), have generalized it to cover all humanity. They hold that man is a creature which does not move to a certain and definite stage or halt; the further he moves the greater are the possibilities open to him. Here we do not wish to indulge in discussing the legitimacy of imposing such interpretations on Qur'anic verses; we only intend to demonstrate that Muslim scholars have thought about man in such terms.

In the hadith about the Prophet's Ascension (al-mi'raj), Gabriel, who accompanies the Prophet (S), at a certain point gives up his journey declaring: "I will get burnt if I move an inch further, while the Prophet (S) leaves him behind and moves further." This is an allusion to the truth mentioned above.

Also, as we know, there is a debate among Muslim scholars about the salawat (Benedictions) upon the Holy Prophet (S) and Ahl al-Bayt (as), which we make as a prayer to Allah to shower greater blessings

upon them. Now the debate is whether the salawat is of any benefit to the Holy Prophet (S), who is the most perfect man. In other words, is there any possibility of ascension in the Prophet's station? Or does the salawat benefit only the person who pronounces it and beseeches Allah to bless the Prophet (S), a favor that has already been granted?

The late Sayyid Ali Khan opened this debate in his commentary on Al-Sahifa Al-Kamila. A group of theologians believe that the Holy Prophet (S) is always ascending and climbing higher and higher in his station and this movement is never halted.

Yes, such is the station of man. That which makes man as such is not the absolute absence of a defined essence but a certain kind of essence which is ordinarily referred to as the human nature and other such expressions.

Man does not have any ultimate limits, but he has a path. The Holy Qur'an lays a great emphasis on what it calls the Straight Path, which is an unambiguous path before man. Man is not constrained by stages so as to be forced to stop at every stage in his journey. Instead, there is an orbit in which he should move. This is the orbit of human perfection which is different from those of the animals. This means the movement in a specified orbit is orderly, not haphazard.

Existentialist Viewpoint

Existentialism has been rightly criticized for its refusal to acknowledge any kind of determination or definition of the human nature, for its considering every determination (even in the form of a path or an orbit) as contrary to his humanity and for its emphasis on his absolute freedom and capacity for rebellion. This philosophy necessarily leads to the breakdown of social morality and the negation of the individual's commitments and responsibilities.

Does Evolution Involve Self-Alienation?

Now, returning to what we said earlier, does movement and evolution necessitate alienation from one's self? Should every being, in order to remain itself, abstain from change and evolution? Does it mean that either man should retain his human identity or, if he chooses an evolutionary course, become something alien to his essence?

The answer is that the true evolution of anything is a movement towards the perfect state which conforms to its nature. In other words, the transformations during movement on the straight path of nature by no means necessitate any loss of a specific identity.

That which constitutes the real self of a being is its existence, not its essence. Accordingly, any change in essence does not imply mutation of the Aself' into a Anon-self. Mulla Sadra, who is the champion of this philosophy, holds that man does not have any definite essence; rather, every developing being

passing through the stages of its evolution is not a single species but a plurality of species.

The relationship of an imperfect being with its ultimate stage of perfection is not a relationship of otherness; rather it is a relationship of the thing to itself. It is the relation of an imperfect self to the perfect self. A thing while evolving toward its perfect state is in movement from its self to its self. In a sense, it can be said to be in movement from the non-self towards its true self. A seed that breaks the ground and sprouts leaves and sends out branches and flowers does not move from the self to the non-self. If it were aware of itself and aware of its ultimate evolution, it would not feel self-alienated.

This is why the love of true perfection is the love of a higher self; a praiseworthy love is in itself a desirable and praiseworthy egotism or self-love. Shaikh al-Ishraq Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi has an elegant ruba'i on this subject:

Beware lest you lose the wisdom's thread,
And lose your self for the sake of water and bread.
You are the traveller, the way, the destination,
Beware lest you lose the path from the self to the self.

On the basis of what has been said it can be surmised that there is a great difference between desiring Allah, the movement towards Allah, the love of Allah, the attachment and the servitude to Allah and submission to Him and the love, the submission and the servitude to other things. The servitude to Allah is freedom itself.

It is the only relationship and tie which does not stagnate the human personality or make it inert and immobile. It is the only kind of worship which does not imply self-forgetfulness and self-alienation. Why? Because He is the Absolute Perfection, the Ultimate Goal and the Destination of everything in existence:

“And unto your Lord will be the end of all things (Qur'an, 53: 42).

Now we have reached a point from where we can proceed to explain the status of the Holy Qur'an that forgetting Allah is forgetting one's own self and the separation from Allah is absolute annihilation.

Forgetting And Losing The “Self”

I remember that about eighteen years ago, while discussing the exegesis of certain verses of the Holy Qur'an in a private gathering, for the first time the point struck me that the Holy Qur'an very often employs typical expressions about a certain group of human beings such as those who lose, forget, or sell their selves. For instance, it says the following:

They have, indeed, lost their selves [souls] and that which they were forging has gone astray from them. (Qur'an, 7: 53)

Say: "Surely the losers are they who lose their selves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. (Qur'an, 39: 15)

Be not as those who forgot Allah and so He caused them to forget their selves; those-they are the ungodly. (Qur'an, 59: 19)

The question might occur to a mind with a philosophic bent. Is it possible for a man to lose his self? The loss of anything necessitates two things: The loser and the thing lost. Now how is it possible for a human being to lose himself? Is this not self-contradictory?

Likewise, is it possible for a man to forget himself? A living human being is always immersed in itself and perceives everything as something other and additional to its own self; its attention is, before everything else, focused on itself. Then what is meant by forgetting one's self?

Later I realized that this matter occupies a significant place in Islamic teachings, especially in the prayers and some traditions as well as in the writings of Muslim Urafa. It shows that often man mistakes 'Anon-self' as his self, regarding non-self as his real self. Then, imagining the non-self to be his self, he treats the non-self and takes care of it as he would have treated and cared for his true self.

The true self, as a result, falls into neglect and oblivion and occasionally undergoes a metamorphosis. For instance, when man imagines his body as representative of his total entity, all his endeavor revolves around his body, it means that he has forgotten his self conceiving the non-self to be his real self. Such a man, in the words of Rumi, is like the one who owns a piece of land somewhere; he carries building materials and hires masons and workers to build a house for him.

After much toil, the house is made ready for living; the doors and windows are painted, the floor is carpeted, curtains are hung and the house is furnished beautifully in every way; however, one day, when he prepares to move into the new house, all of a sudden he realizes his mistake. To his dismay, he notes that instead of erecting the house on his own land, he has constructed it on a land that belongs to someone else, while his own plot lies abandoned elsewhere:

Don't build your house on the land of another,
Work for your own self and toil not for the stranger.
Who is the stranger except your own earthen frame?
On whose account are all your sorrows and woes?
So long as you nurse and pamper your body,
The soul would not prosper, nor would it become sturdy.
At another, place Rumi says the following:
You, who have lost your self in a losing encounter,
Distinguishing not the other from your own true self;
At every shadow you are quick to exclaim:
Ah! This is me! By Allah it is not you!

Isolate yourself for a while from the crowd,
And immerse yourself to the neck in thought.
Indeed you shall find that you are one with the One,
Beautiful, serene and blessed is your self.

Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as) has a saying in this regard which is as profound as it is elegant: "I wonder at the man who searches for his lost things but doesn't care to recover his lost self [soul]."⁸

Losing oneself and forgetting oneself is not confined to man's error in recognizing his true identity and essence such as the ordinary man's self-identification with the body, or the arif's occasional identification of himself with his barzakhi body. We have said in the last chapter that actually every being in the natural course of its development moves from the self to the self; that is, it moves from a lower, weaker self to a self which is powerful and higher. Accordingly, the deviation of every existent from the path of its perfection and development is the deviation from the self towards the non-self.

Man, more than any other creature, being endowed with a free will and the freedom of choice, is subject to this deviation. By choosing a deviant objective as ultimate for himself, in reality he replaces his true self with the non-self, mistaking the non-self to be the self. It is on this basis that the human being's total immersion in material aspects of life has been regarded as condemnable.

Therefore, the adoption of devious goals and ends is one of the factors of self-alienation that leads man to forget his true self and finally to lose it.

Devious goals and objectives not only result in the disease of self-loss, they ultimately lead to the metamorphosis of man's human essence, a metamorphosis that is determined by that particular devious goal. A significant part of Islamic teachings is devoted to drive home the point that on the Day of Resurrection, every human being shall be resurrected together with the object of his love. Our traditions declare the following unequivocally:

Everyone, on the Day of Judgement shall be resurrected in the company of his object of love, whatever that may be, even if it is a stone.⁹

With attention to the indubitable and unequivocal Islamic teaching that on the Day of Judgement, man will be resurrected in the form of what he acquired in this world, it becomes clear that the reason for a person's resurrection together with the objects of his love is that the love and attachment for that object make it the ultimate goal of the path of his becoming. However devious that object may be, it causes the soul and the inner reality of a person to transform into it.

This subject has been given a great attention by Muslim sages and philosophers who have made great many interesting observations in this regard. For brevity's sake, we shall quote only one rubai on this topic: The seeker of a mine of diamonds is himself a mine; the seeker of the spirit is himself the spirit; I will divulge the secret of this matter: You are whatever you seek; you are the object of your quest.

Discovery Of The Self And Of Allah

The rediscovery of the self, in addition to the above two, requires to fulfil one more condition: The realization and knowledge of the cause of one's creation and existence. That is to say, it is impossible for man to recognize himself and know himself by viewing himself in separation from the cause of his creation. The real cause of every existent is prior to it and nearer to it than it is to its own self:

“And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein”(Qur’an, 50: 16);

“And know that Allah stands between a man and his heart”(Qur’an, 8: 24).

The Muslim mystics have laid a great emphasis on the point that the knowledge of the self (ma'rifat al-nafs) and the knowledge of Allah (ma'rifat Allah) are not separate from one another. To experience the spirit, which, according to the Holy Qur'an, is Allah's 'breath', is to experience the Divine Essence. Muslim mystics have raised severe objections against the statements of other Muslim philosophers regarding the problem of self-knowledge and consider them to be inadequate.

Shaikh Mahmud al-Shabistari was sent a series of diverse questions by someone from Khurasan. His poem Gulshan-e raz is the reply which he gave to those questions. In one of the questions, the inquirer asks:

Who am I?

Inform me about myself.

What is meant by a Journey within thy self?

The Shaikh's reply is elaborate. There, he says the following:

Forms and spirits, from the same light are derived,

Reflected of mirror or beaming from the lamp.

Al, the word, is everywhere in all your speech.

It refers to the soul, the spirit. “I” and “You”

Are greater than the body and the spirit,

Which are together parts of the self.

Go, then, my good man, first know well your self,

And remember: edema is different from robustness. [10](#)

Leave one of them to soar over the undulations of space and time,

Abandon the world in order to become a world in yourself.

A further elaboration of this theme will take us outside the scope of our present discussion. To be brief, it should be said that the gnosis of the self is inseparable from that of Allah. This is exactly the meaning of the famous saying of the Prophet (S) and the same theme recurs in the recorded statements of Imam Ali (as): “He who knows his own self knows his Master.

In Nahjul-Balagha, it is reported that Imam Ali (as) was asked by somebody: “Have you seen your God? Ali (as) replied: “Would I worship what I have not seen?!” Then he elaborated on his answer thus: “He is not visible to the eyes but the hearts perceive Him through (the factual experience of) faith (iman).”¹¹

An interesting point that is implicit in the verses of the Holy Qur’an is that man is in possession of himself as long as he “possesses” Allah. Only through the remembrance of Allah does he remember his self and become fully aware of it; to forget Allah is to neglect one’s own self. Forgetting Allah is accompanied by self-forgetfulness:

“Be not as those who forgot Allah, so He caused them to forget their own selves [souls]” (Qur’an, 59: 19).

Rumi, following the verses quoted above, says the following:

Even if the body should lie amidst fragrance and musk,
On death it will petrify and give out its stink.
So scent not the body, but perfume the soul with musk,
What is such musk but the Name of the Glorious Master?!

Hafiz says the following:

Hafiz, if you desire presence,
Do not be absent from Him.
If you desire His rendezvous,
Abandon the world and forget it.

This shows why the remembrance of Allah is essential for the life of the heart; it awakens and illumines the heart and gives peace to the soul; it revives, purifies, refines and humbles the human conscience and fills it with delight. How profound and beautiful are Ali’s words in Nahjul-Balagha where he says the following: “Certainly Allah Almighty has made His remembrance a means for cleaning and polishing the hearts. It makes them hear after deafness, see after blindness, and it makes them submissive to guidance after being stubborn and resisting.” In all periods and times, when there were no prophets, there were individuals to whom He whispered through their thoughts and spoke to their intellects. As a result, they were enlightened with an awakening in their hearts, vision and hearing.¹²

Worship And Rediscovery Of The Self

There is so much that can be said about worship that if we were to elaborate, we would have to devote scores of chapters to this subject. Here, we shall make a brief reference to the value of worship in the rediscovery of the self.

As much as the bondage to material matters and immersion in them severs man from his true self and induces self-alienation, worship helps him in recovering his own self. Worship awakens man from his

spiritual slumber. It rescues him from drowning in the sea of self-neglect and forgetfulness and saves his identity from being lapsed in the world of material things. It is in the mirror of worship and Allah's remembrance that man can observe himself as he really is and become aware of his failings and faults. It is in worship that he acquires the true perspective of being, life, space and time, like watching a city from a high mountain and perceives the insignificance, pettiness and abjectness of his materialistic hopes, desires and ambitions. It is in worship that a yearning is awakened in his heart to attain to the very core of being.

I have always marveled at the following words of the famous scientist of our age, Albert Einstein. What adds to my amazement is that he was a physicist and a mathematician, not a psychologist, theologian or philosopher. After dividing religion into three stages, he calls the third stage of religious experience as the one arising from cosmic religious feeling.

He describes this religious experience in these words: "The individual feels the futility of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought. Individual existence impresses him as a sort of prison and he wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole." [13](#)

William James, writing about prayer, says the following: "The impulse to pray is a necessary consequence of the fact that while the innermost of the empirical selves of a man is a self of the social sort, it yet can find its only adequate socius (its great companion) in an ideal world. Most men, either continually or occasionally, carry a reference to it in their breasts. The humblest outcast on this earth can feel himself to be real and valid by means of this higher recognition." [14](#)

Iqbal also has something profound to say about worship and prayer and their value for the rediscovery of the self. He writes the following: "Prayer as a means of spiritual illumination is a normal vital act by which the island of our personality suddenly discovers its situation in a larger whole of life." [15](#)

We conclude our discussion of this extensive subject right here.

Some Relevant Issues

Now that our discussion about the concept of the "world"[dunya] in Nahjul-Balagha is nearing its conclusion, I want to clarify some issues with attention to the principles discussed above.

Life In This World Versus In The Hereafter

Some Islamic traditions seem to imply that there exists a kind of conflict between the world and the Hereafter. For instance, it is stated that they are like two rival wives who can never be reconciled, or it is said that they are like the East and the West: one cannot approach any of them without moving farther from the other. How should one interpret these statements in order to reconcile them with what has been said above?

The answer is that, firstly, as has been expressly stated in most Islamic traditions, a reconciliation between winning the world and the Hereafter is not only possible but is a necessity of the Islamic creed. That which is impossible is their reconciliation as ultimate ends and goals.

The enjoyment of the good things of the world does not necessarily require deprivation from the blessings of the Hereafter. That which deprives one of the rewards of the next life is a series of mortal sins, not the enjoyment of a wholesome, comfortable life and the availing of pure and lawful bounties provided by Allah. Similarly, that which leads to deprivation in the world is not taqwa or righteous deeds or the endeavor for the Hereafter; a number of other factors are responsible for it.

Many prophets, Imams and pious believers, whose virtues and piety are indubitable, have been among those who benefitted greatly from the legitimate bounties of the world. Accordingly, even if it is assumed that the religious texts do imply irreconcilability between the enjoyment of the world and that of the Hereafter, they would not be acceptable because of the incontrovertible testimony to the contrary.

Secondly, if we scrutinize such traditions closely, an interesting point comes to the surface in whose light we observe no contradiction between them and the incontrovertible principles of Islam.

But before this point is explained, we should examine three possible relationships between the world and the Hereafter: “The relationship between enjoyment of the good things of the world and enjoyment of the rewards of the Hereafter. The relationship between the world as the ultimate goal and the Hereafter as such. The relationship between adoption of one of these as the ultimate goal with the enjoyment of the other.”

There is no conflict whatsoever involved in the first case. Accordingly, a reconciliation between the two is quite possible. The second case, however, involves a contradiction. There is no possibility of reconciling these two opposite goals.

As to the third, it involves in turn two cases: first, the adoption of the world as the ultimate end and the enjoyment of the Hereafter; second, the adoption of the Hereafter as the ultimate goal and the enjoyment of the world. The first case involves a contradiction, whereas the second does not.

The Primary And The Secondary

The conflict between the adoption of either the world or the Hereafter as ultimate ends and the enjoyment of the other is the kind that exists between a perfect and an imperfect end. If the imperfect is made the ultimate goal, the perfect is necessarily missed whereas, if the perfect were one's end and goal, it would not necessarily preclude the imperfect. The same is true of anything primary in relationship to its secondaries.

If something secondary were made as the aim, it would result in deprivation from the primary. But if the primary is made the aim and the goal, the secondary, being a corollary of the primary, is automatically

included. This is most eloquently explained in Hikma 269 of Nahjul-Balagha:

There are two types of workers among the people of the world: (One type is represented by) the man who works in this world for this world, and his involvement in the world makes him forget the Hereafter. He is worried about those whom he shall leave behind (when he dies) lest poverty should strike them, as if he were himself secure of it (i.e. sure of not being poor in the Hereafter). So he spends his life for the (worldly) benefit of others [earning nothing for his own eternal life in the Hereafter].

The other type of man works in the world for the sake of the Hereafter and secures his share of the world effortlessly. Thus, he derives benefit from both and comes to possess both the worlds. As a result, he acquires honor before Allah Who grants him whatever he asks of Him.

Rumi offers an interesting allegory. He compares the Hereafter and the world to a caravan of camels and the trail of dung that it leaves behind. If one's aim were to own the camels, he would also have the camels' dung and wool. But if one wants only the dung and the wool, he will never come to acquire the camels and will always be collecting dung and wool of camels which belong to others.

Hanker you after faith for its pursuit yields
Beauty, wealth, honor and good fortune.
Consider the Hereafter as a camel train;
The world is a trail of wool and dung in its rear.
If you want only the wool, you will never the camels own;
Yet if you own a camel train, isn't its wool your own ?!

That the relation of the world to the Hereafter is like that of a secondary thing to its primary. Worldliness, being a pursuit of the secondary, leads to deprivation from the benefits of the Hereafter. Other worldliness by itself ensures the benefits of the world. Such a teaching originates in the Holy Qur'an. Verses 145–148 of surat Imran expressly and verses 18 and 19 of surat al-“Isra’ together with verse 20 of surat al- Shura implicitly present this view.

[A Relevant Tradition](#)

There is a well-known tradition found in the texts of hadith as well as in other books and is also mentioned in the last will of Imam al- Hassan al-Mujtaba (as). This is the text of the tradition: “In regard to the world, be as if you were going to live forever. With respect to the Hereafter, be as if you were going to die tomorrow. [16](#)

This tradition has been highly controversial in that it has led to contradictory interpretations. Some people interpret it as implying that one should deal with worldly matters with relaxed inattention and without hurrying. Whenever one is faced with an affair of worldly life, one should say to himself, “There is still a lot of time, why hurry?” But when performing good deeds for the Hereafter, one should imagine as if he were not going to be alive after tomorrow and say to himself: “There is not much time left; it is

already too late.”

Others with the conviction that Islam never recommends negligence and carelessness, which certainly has not been the practice of the leaders of the faith, have said that what is implied is that one should always approach the worldly affairs as if he were immortal, attend to them with attention and care and not perform them in a perfunctory manner with the pretext that life is fleeting.

Rather, they say, the works of the world should be done with firmness and great foresight and attention, as if one were going to live till the end of the world. The rationale for this is that if one were to die, others will derive benefit from one's deeds. The affairs of the Hereafter, however, are in Allah's hand; so think of them as if you were going to die tomorrow and there is not much time left for anything.

As can be noticed, the first of these two interpretations recommends negligence and lack of commitment towards the affairs of the world, whereas the second advises a similar attitude towards the Hereafter. Obviously, none of these two interpretations can be regarded as acceptable.

In our opinion, this, one of the most subtle of traditions, consists of an invitation to action, care and attention and avoidance of negligence and indifference, whether with respect to the worldly activities or to those which relate to the Hereafter.

Suppose a person living in a house knows that sooner or later he will have to move to another house where he will stay permanently. However, he does not know the day, the month or the year when he shall have to make to move. Such a person is in a state of dilemma with regard to matters relevant to his present home and his plans about his future house. If he knows that he will move tomorrow, he will not pay any attention to the repairs and upkeep of his present house and attend only to matters concerning the planned move. But if he knows that he will not be changing residence for several years, he will act in an opposite manner.

Presently, he will devote all his attention to the present house, knowing that there is much time left to deal with those relevant to his future residence.

Now this person, who is in a state of doubt about the exact date of his move, not knowing whether he will have to move in the near future or remain in his present house for years, meets a friend who wisely advises him to tend to the affairs of his present house as if he were to continue living there for a long time and not to neglect its upkeep. As to the other house, the wise friend advises him to get it ready as if he were going to move tomorrow and have it furnished as soon as possible. This advice will have the consequence that it will make him adopt a serious and active attitude towards both his houses.

Suppose someone wants to start an undertaking, such as writing a book or founding an institution or taking up a project which requires years of pursuit. If such a person thinks that he will not live long enough to finish his work, he might desist from starting it. That is why it is said that one must think that he will live for long. But the same person, from the point of view of repenting for his sins and

compensating for the past excesses with regard to religious duties or the rights of the people which he has transgressed all of which require little time for their accomplishment given the will to do so may keep on postponing them every day so that the promised tomorrow may never come.

In such cases, contrary to the first kind of attitude, to assume that one has still enough time and there is no reason to hasten, would result in negligence and delay in the fulfillment of one's duties. Therefore, here one should assume that there is not much time left.

Thus, we see that in one case, to assume that one has enough time encourages action and endeavor and the assumption that there is no time left leads one to abstain from action and endeavor. In the other case, the result is quite the opposite. Here, the assumption that one has still a lot of time leads to negligence and procrastination and the assumption that there is not much time left leads to quick accomplishment of duties.

In the light of this, the hadith means to say that with regard to one kind of duties, one should assume that he is going to live on, and with respect to another kind, he must suppose that not much remains of his life.

This interpretation is not baseless. There are several traditions which confirm the above interpretation. The reason that this tradition gave rise to controversy is that attention was not paid to such traditions. Safinat al-Bihar, under rifq, relates a tradition of the Holy Prophet (S) addressed to Jabir: "Indeed, this (i.e. Islam) is a firm religion. So (do not make it hard on yourself but) act in it with mildness. Cultivate like one who thinks he will never die, and work (for the hereafter) like one who is afraid he will die tomorrow.

In Volume 15 of Bihar al-Anwar (in the section on akhlaq, Ch. 29), it is related from Al-Kafi that the Holy Prophet (S) addressed Ali (as) saying: "This (religion of Islam) is a firm religion. So, work like him who hopes to live for long and be cautious like him who is afraid that he will die tomorrow. That is, when commencing a useful project that requires a long time for its completion, assume that you will live long enough to complete it. However, with regard to matters which you might postpone, thinking that you have enough time to handle them, assume that you shall die tomorrow, so that time is not wasted and delay is avoided.

In Nahjul-Balagha, it is related from the Holy Prophet (S) that he said: "Attend to the affairs of the world; but with respect to the Hereafter, be such as if you are going to die tomorrow."

In the same book, the Prophet (S) is related as saying: "Work like the man who imagines that he will never die, and be cautious like one who knows he is going to die tomorrow."

In another tradition, the Prophet (S) is reported to have said: "The mu'min is the most vexed of all men, for he must attend to the affairs of the world as well as to those of the Hereafter."

In Safinat al-Bihar, under nafs, one hadith by Imam Musa al-Kazim (as) is related from Tuhaf al-Uqul

to the effect that: “He who abandons the world for his Hereafter or abandons his Hereafter for his world is not from us.

The above discussion, on the whole, underscores our interpretation of the said hadith and also shows that this approach finds a recurring echo in the teachings of the leaders of the Islamic faith.

Concluded; walhamdu lillah!

What Is Shi'ism?

1- Shi'ism in the Contemporary World

Nowadays, according to the latest statistics, there are more than one hundred and thirty million Shi'ites in different parts of the world. They are concentrated mostly in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Turkey, Caucasia, Egypt and other Muslim countries of North and Central Africa.

From the quantitative point of view, Shi'ism comprises about one fourth of the total Islamic community of the world. From the point of view of intellectual and scholarly activity, a notable portion of the intellectual treasures of the Islamic world has been created by Shi'ite scholars. Yet, unfortunately, there are still quite a few people everywhere who are not acquainted with the principles of Shi'ite ideologies. Even our Sunni brothers, who comprise three-fourths of the Islamic community and in many countries live along side by side with us, are not completely informed of our method of thought and beliefs.

For those who live in the East, this situation should not cause much surprise for the “agents of colonialism” who see the preservation of their interests in causing internal conflicts in this region, have explored every avenue possible to cause hatred and division between these two groups of Muslims. In order to achieve this end, they have even inverted the truth itself. As a consequence of this pessimism, there have been occasional fights between the two groups of Muslims, fights which have incurred nothing but loss upon the Islamic community. Yet, for those who had fixed their covetous eye on the extensive and vital resources of this vast region, such disputes were considered as a great victory.

Fortunately, as a result of the awakening of the East and the spread of means of communication as well as the disappearance of unworthy prejudices, this situation has changed almost completely nowadays.

This change is indicated by the fact that about 20 years ago, on behalf of the professors and directors of al-Azhar University in Cairo, one of the leading centers of learning of the Sunni world, there was established a center called the center for rapprochement between Islamic schools with the collaboration of Shi'ite scholars. The aim of this center, as certified by its name, is to bring about familiarity and proximity between the Muslims of the world. Its members are comprised of well-known Shi'ite and Sunni scholars and by chance the general secretary is [presently] a Persian Shi'ite.¹⁷ This Center publishes a scholarly journal called *Risalat al-Islam* in which scholars of both schools write

articles based on sound proofs in order to illuminate the minds of the general Muslim public throughout the world.

The late rector of al-Azhar University and the Grand Mufti of the Sunnis, Shaikh Mahmud Shaltut, for the first time declared openly the official recognition of the religious teaching of the Shi'ite school. He permitted all Sunnis to perform their religious duties according to Shi'ite beliefs if they wish to do so. (Of course the background of this declaration had been prepared before by other scholars such as Shaikh Abd al-Majid Salim.). This declaration had a very good effect on the great majority of the Muslim public and was very effective in creating mutual understanding between the two groups. Only a few fanatically minded people were disturbed by it.

2- Centers of Shi'ite Learning

Shi'ism possesses several universities in different parts of the world where Islamic sciences can be studied. The most important among them are the centers of Najaf, Qum and Mashhad. Most of the outstanding leaders of Shi'ism come from these three centers, and they are all professors who teach in these universities. In these and other centers of learning, there are numerous scholars, writers, propagators of the faith and preachers.

A relatively large number of students are studying in Qum, Mashhad and Najaf. The graduating students, after completing their studies, are sent to different regions as directors of religious affairs or religious preachers or, if necessary, they are called upon to become teachers and lecturers in the centers of learning.

An important segment of the scholarly and intellectual treasures of Islam has been written by Shi'ite scholars.

Also, according to reliable and trustworthy documents at hand, all or most of the Islamic sciences have been founded by Shi'ite scholars, that is, Shi'as have been the first to create and establish those sciences.

Shi'ite preachers are trained in such a way that, unlike other speakers, they can deliver from memory, and without any notes, instructive scientific and social lectures as well as warm and pleasing sermons, each exceeding one or two hours.

The late great leader and guide of the world of Shi'ism, namely Ayatullah Burujardi, expressed a great deal of interest in making Shi'ism known to the whole world. He was sure that if the beliefs of Shi'ite Muslims were to be made known to the world in a correct way, they would be rapidly accepted and people would find in them a shelter within which they can find solutions for the social and moral difficulties facing the modern world. Islam can provide an answer for the needs of the humanity of our century and of any other century. For this reason, he endeavored to send propagators of Shi'ism to Europe and America and sent competent preachers of the faith to these regions.

Unfortunately, the possibilities did not permit any more than this. In West Germany, specifically in Hamburg (on the bank of the beautiful Alster lake), plans were made for building a majestic mosque called the mosque of Persians. This mosque, the first Shi'ite religious building in the Western world, has been constructed on a four thousand square meter lot and with heavy expenses. A large number of Muslims, Shi'ite and Sunni alike, perform their religious rites in this mosque.

Tourists visiting Hamburg come to see this beautiful and interesting mosque in which are combined Oriental and Occidental schools of art and architecture and where the Oriental and Islamic aspects are very obvious.

In Shi'ite universities, especially those of Najaf, Qum, Mashhad and Tehran, there are large libraries most of whose books consist of works of renown Islamic scholars. It is also of interest to note that the great al-Azhar University of Cairo and the Islamic Qarawiyyin University in Morocco, which are among the eldest universities in the world, were founded by Shi'ites, the first by the Fatimide caliphs and the second by the Idrisid sultans.

3- Origin of Shi'ism

Occasionally, certain people, because of mis-information or ill-intentions, make it appear as if Shi'ism is something other than the religion promulgated by Muhammad (S) upon whom be blessings and peace, the great leader of the Islamic world and that Shi'ism came into being in later centuries.

The truth is that Shi'ism is nothing but Islam and Shi'ites consider as unworthy and without authority anything that has the least conflict with the religion of the Prophet (S) of Islam and the Holy Qur'an.

Altogether, it must be remembered that Shi'ism is not a special religion visa-vis Islam about whose origin one could debate. Shi'ism from its own point of view is none other than the sacred religion of Islam itself as founded by the Holy Prophet, Muhammad ibn Abdullah (S). Only Shi'ism believes that the best means to know Islam and the teachings of the Prophet (S) is through his family who were the closest to him and were brought up in the atmosphere of revelation., therefore, the date of origin of Shi'ism is same as Islam itself.

The Holy Qur'an, according to Shi'ism, is the most important untouched source of Islam which has reached us without any change from the Prophet (S). For this reason the Holy Qur'an is made the criterion and means of judgement of the authenticity or falsehood of sayings which have reached us from the great leaders of religions, the means to judge between authentic sayings and those that are forged. Any saying that has been handed down, if it accords with the Holy Qur'an is acceptable and if not, rejected.

Taking these truths into view, there is no need to remind people that Shi'ism begins with the first instance when the revelation descended upon the Prophet (S) of Islam.

4- Shi'ites and other Muslims

What distinguishes the Shi'ites from other Muslims? the answer to this question is clear. The first point that distinguishes the Shi'ites from Sunnis is the question of succession to the Prophet (S). Shi'ism believes that the status of succession and vicegerency (caliphate) of the Prophet (S) is a sacred and responsible function which like that of prediction itself must be designated by Allah. A person who occupies this status is called the Imam. The first Imam who was chosen by Allah through the prophet was Ali (as) upon whom be peace. After him eleven other members of the family of the Prophet (S) were chosen for this status.

The first of them is Ali (as) ibn Abu Talib upon whom be peace. Ali (as) was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet (S) and according to the confession of the scholars of Islam the most learned, self-sacrificing and courageous of the companions of the Prophet (S). He was the first man to accept the faith and never separated from the Prophet (S) throughout his life.

During the last year of his life the Prophet (S), while returning from pilgrimage to Medina in a place called Ghadir Khumm, officially designated Ali (as) as his successor before a large gathering of Muslims.

Before this event also he had referred several times to this matter. Furthermore, the intellectual, spiritual and religious distinctions of Ali (as) were such that there was no one more worthy of becoming the successor of the Prophet (S) than he. However, after the death of the Prophet (S) political and tribal competition prevented him from becoming officially the caliph and leader of Muslims.

At the same time many of the outstanding personalities among the well-known companions and aides of the Prophet (S) remained faithful to him and were proud to follow him. But in order not to create any dissension or breach in the ranks of Muslims, they did not oppose openly the caliph of the time.

Twenty-five years thereafter, following the caliphate of three other men, Muslims turned to him again and selected him as their leader.

Without doubt the period of rule and caliphate of Ali (as) which was unfortunately short, having lasted about five years and which terminated with his martyrdom, was the most perfect and exalted example of just and truthful government and fight against all unjust inequalities.

This is a matter which no historian can deny. Today his meaningful and wise sayings have survived and make known his school. The Shi'ites of the world boast in having such a leader. Even the word Shi'a which etymologically means "partisan" or "follower" has come into being through the fact that the members of this group are the partisans of such a leader.

Shi'ites believe that after Ali (as), eleven of his descendants became consecutively the successors and vicegerents of the Prophet (S) and with Ali (as) himself comprise the "Twelve Imams (as)".

Their names are as follows:

- 1 – Ali ibn abi Talib (as).
- 2 – Hassan ibn Ali (as).
- 3 – Hussein ibn Ali (as).
- 4 – Ali ibn al–Hussein (as).
- 5 – Muhammad ibn Ali (as).
- 6 – Ja'far ibn Muhammad (as).
- 7 – Musa ibn Ja'far (as).
- 8– Ali ibn Msa (as).
- 9– Muhammad ibn Ali (as).
- 10 – Ali ibn Muhammad (as).
- 11 – Hassan ibn Ali (as).
- 12 – Muhammad ibn Hassan (as).

From these excellent leaders we have today available abundant legacies of Islamic sciences.

Shi'ism believes that the earth can never be without the special representative of Allah (the Prophet [pbuh] and his vicegerents). They have been ordered to guide, lead and train the people of the world and continue to do so. Shi'ism believes that the Twelfth Imam is right now alive and endowed with a long life.

This matter is neither beyond the power of Allah which all religious people believe in nor against the principles of modern biology.

Shi'ites, like all Muslims, believe that finally a day will come when mankind will reach an impasse because of injustice, struggles, wars and bloodshed. Then with a sacred spiritual revolution guided by one of the descendants. Peace, justice and faith in Allah will dominate everywhere and all peoples and nations will live in a lasting peace and tranquillity. Only, Shi'ism believes that the leader of this revolution will be none other than the Twelfth Imam.

5- Shi'ite Beliefs

Shi'ism believes that Islam is not only a series of commands or ceremonial regulations which man performs at particular hours or days of the week. Rather, it believes religion is comprised of a series of exalted instructions and beliefs and a group of life–giving regulations and laws which are intertwined with man's individual and social life.

The aim of religion is to provide felicity for man in all aspects of

The basis of Shi'ite beliefs like those of other Muslims, is threefold.

I-Urity Of God (Tawhid)

Shi'a Muslism believe Allah to be one without any associate or like or progeny. Shi'ism is violently opposed to every form of polytheism, idol worshipping and deviation from unity and also to all kinds of taking human being as masters beside Allah and addressing prayers to them. It believes that Allah is the creator of the whole universe and, therefore, holds that throughout the universe nothing is created but for a benefit and purpose.

Shi'ism believes that Allah is neither body nor matter. Rather, He is above all that is material and, therefore, has no specific place or location. He is omnipresent and omniscient. He is closer to us than ourselves. He sees everything and hears every sound but His vision and hearing are not in our case with eyes and ears.

The near and remote past and future are alike for him and all things indifferently known and evident in His knowledge. He has even knowledge of thoughts that pass through our minds. He is one in every way and does not consist of parts. Even His Qualities, such as His power and knowledge, are identical with His Pure Essence. His Being has no beginning nor end.

It is pre-eternal and past-eternal (He exists from eternity to eternity). He is in every way Absolute Being. His Qualities do not resemble the qualities of the creatures for these are in all aspects limited whereas, He is in every way unlimited. Forgiving the sins of his servants is solely at his own absolute discretion and nobody even the prophet of Islam or the Imams can do anything for remission of the sins.

II-Prophethood: The Sending Of The Prophet (S) (Nubuwwa)

Shi'ism believes that Allah, in order to guide His creatures and lead them from the darkness of ignorance and misery to the light of knowledge and happiness, has sent a number of prophets. For Allah has created man for felicity and happiness and has created the means for the attainment of this end in the existence of the universe itself.

Sending prophets is also with the purpose of perfecting this goal. That is why the teachings of the prophets and the Divine Laws are always the supplement for creation organization of human being. Any law which is opposed to the primordial nature and creation of man is surely not revealed by Allah.

Shi'ism believes that the aim of the prophets has never been to propagate unintelligible matters such as the endurance of every kind of disagreeable situation and torture or sacrifice for the sins of others. Rather, their aim has been that same correct instruction and training, the strengthening of moral principles and the relation between men and the establishment of the principles of justice among mankind.

The Holy Qur'an in many verses has clearly reminded man of this truth.

Shi'ism respects all prophets of Allah without exception but believes that as a result of the passage of

time their holy books have become mixed with kinds of superstitions and have suffered various forms of deviation. A living witness to this fact is the unjust and childish qualities mentioned in these books about Allah and His prophets.

According to Shi'ism all the prophets of Allah, even Muhammad (k), Moses and Jesus Christ (as) are recognized as the servants of Allah! but they were qualified as obedient servants to whom Allah inspired. That is, the conviction is that all of the prophets and Imams have neither committed any sin nor any omission or error during their life time.

III-Belief In The Day Of Resurrection (Ma'ad)

Shi'ism, like all other Islamic schools of thought, believes that in a determined time all men will be resurrected and in another world which is everlasting and eternal and will receive the reward or punishment of their good or evil works. The least good or evil action is accounted for and its account is preserved by Allah. No one will be treated with injustice or oppression.

Those who have performed good works shall go to eternal paradise in which is found every kind of spiritual and corporeal blessing and evil doers will be sent to the inferno unless they repent in this world. Repentance means that one would seriously and cordially repent from his or her past sins and decide definitely not to adhere to such sins in the future, as well as indemnify and make good what would be deemed repayable and where he or she has infringed and violated the rights of other individuals, to restore and repair them to the rightful party.

6- Distinctions of Shi'ism

Shi'ism shares the three above-mentioned principles with other Muslims but there are two points which are its distinguishing marks:

1- Belief in the Twelve Imams who are the vicegerents of the Prophet (S) and whose account has already been given.

2 - Belief in the Divine justice. By this it means that Shi'ism believes Allah never deals with injustice or oppression toward others which is a sign of either ignorance or lack of power, whereas Allah is omniscient and omnipotent. As a consequence of this principle Shi'ism also believes that all human beings possess the freedom of will. No one is forced to obey or rebel. The destiny of each person is in his own hands. No one bears the weight of the sins of others nor is anyone punished for the wrong doings of others.

7- Sources of Shi'ite Religious Instructions

Shi'ism has received its religious instructions which concern all aspects of private and social life from the closest source of knowledge to the Prophet (S), that is, the household of the Prophet (S) (the Twelve

Imams) who have received their knowledge either directly or through intermediaries from the Prophet (S) himself. In its method the Prophet (S) which all Muslims remember from him: "I am departing from you but I have among you two precious things: The Holy Qur'an, the Book of Allah and my household who will never separate from each other.

In order to discern and distinguish religious obligations Shi'ism follows, in addition to the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (S) and the Imams, that which meets the consensus of the 'ulema' (scholars) and also that which reason can judge with certainty. These four principles (the Holy Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet (S) and Imams (as), consensus of the ulema' and reason) are called the fourfold proofs.

Shi'ism believes that it is a duty of religious scholars to investigate these sources and deduce the religious obligations and instructions of Islam from them. Or one could say that the gate of ijihad (giving judgement and opinion on religious matters) is open to all the 'ulema'.

In the principles of Islamic injunctions and laws there is no difference of opinion between Shi'ite and Sunni scholars.

The only difference of view is in certain aspects of the details of problems.

Shi'ism holds that Islam is an everlasting religion which is at the same time easy to accept and can be followed by one at all places. Shi'ite scholars have collected the individual and social duties and instructions of Islam in detail in books called the Abooks in jurisprudence (fiqh) and have created numerous sciences for the refinement and examination of these injunctions.

Shi'ism like all of Muslims believes that each Muslim must pray five times a day, fast one month a year during Ramadan and in case he or she possesses the financial and physical ability and means to participate once during his or her lifetime in the great Islamic congress, the Hajj, in Mecca and to perform special ceremonies that are full of majesty and spirituality with other Muslim brothers. Also each Muslim is obliged to pay to the public treasury to Islam a certain amount of his wealth (of course under special conditions) as Zakat in order to help the needy, perform charitable acts and defend the borders of Muslim countries.

Shi'ism also believes that in addition to this Islamic tax there is another tax described as Khums for individuals having financial ability according to special regulations.

Shi'ism also believes that in case Muslim countries are invaded by an enemy all who have the ability must take up arms and as a religious duty in the path of "defending their homeland" to fight with the enemy unto death. Martyrdom in such a path is considered as a great honor.

Moreover, all Muslims have the duty to act in a correct and logical manner to guide and instruct individuals who have perverted the right way toward the good and to combat individual and social

corruption. This “great national supervision,” following the inspiration of the Holy Qur’an, is called *amr bil maruf and nahy anil munkar*.

8- Social and Moral Duties

Shi’ism believes that a true and conscientious Muslim is one who does not forget Allah under any condition, who is truthful, trustworthy, upright and friendly, who is aware of the condition of his brother Muslims and does not refuse any kind of help to them. (One must remember that Muslims address each other as brothers and this is the closest relationship that exists between two human beings on the basis of mutual respect and equality.

In this matter they have been inspired by the Holy Qur’an that has said, “All Muslims are brethren”). No racial, class or family distinction can cause one person to become superior to another. The only distinction is what pertains to piety and chastity. Therefore, from our point of view every form of racial discrimination is rejected.

Shi’ism possesses extensive teachings concerning rights which it has received from the Imams. Even the animals have rights. To assault them without reason is condemned. On the contrary they should be protected.

Shi’ism asserts that no one should stop striving and trying in order to earn a livelihood and that no one should become a burden to society. At the same time striving to have a better life should not disregard moral principles and virtue.

Shi’ism prohibits alcoholic beverages, narcotics, pork, gambling, sexual promiscuity and usury and its like.

It considers the principle of cooperation as the most important basis of social life and the first duty of a Muslim toward others. Like other Muslims, Shi’ites consider human life as particularly significant so that for murder, blood-shed and injury upon others heavy penalties have been foreseen in Islamic penal codes.

Also special rights and much importance are held for the family, the upbringing of children, kindness towards relatives, even distant ones and neighbors.

Shi’ism like the rest of Islam respects the rights of women as a basic principle of the family and in contrast to many other religions gives complete economic independence to women.

Like other Muslims, Shi’ites are permitted to have more than one wife but not only is this matter non-obligatory but has heavy conditions imposed upon it. Taking these conditions into considerations, only in case one’s wife cannot bear children or perform thematerial act or if a woman does not have someone to look after her and is in need of such care or in similar cases does marriage to more than one wife take

place.

Contrary to what many westerners think the number of men in Islamic countries having more than one wife does not exceed one percent. It is obvious that this polygamy under stringent conditions is quite virtuous and cannot in any way be compared with the illicit and unconditional sexual relations of non-Muslim men with a large number of women.

Shi'ism believes that all Muslims should participate in all social and political problems that pertain to them and should pursue these problems with awareness. It is opposed to solitary life, retirement from the world and monasticism.

Shi'ism believes that Islamic societies should base their rule upon the teachings and laws of Islam and consider the welfare of the individuals with inspiration drawn from the teachings of Islam and according to the needs and requirements of the moment. They should try their utmost to advance in all spiritual and material domains.

- [1.](#) This is a tradition of the Prophet (S).
- [2.](#) This is in reference to a sentence from Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab, No. 28.
- [3.](#) This is in reference to a sentence from Nahjul-Balagha, Hikam, No. 131
- [4.](#) Ibid.
- [5.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Hikam, No. 131.
- [6.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 223.
- [7.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 203.
- [8.](#) al-Amudi, al-Shurar wa al-durar, Vol. 4 p. 340.
- [9.](#) Safinat ul Bihar, under hubb (love).
- [10.](#) This reference to the famous words of Ibn al-Arabi about one who imagines to have known the mysteries of the self through the statement of the philosophers.
- [11.](#) Nahjul-Balagha, Khutab, No. 179.
- [12.](#) Ibid. Khutab, No. 222.
- [13.](#) A. Einstein, Ideas and Opinions (London 1973) based on Mein Weltbild; ed by Carl Seeling, p. 38.
- [14.](#) Muhammad Iqbal, The reconstruction of Religious Yought in Islam, Lahore 1971, p. 89.
- [15.](#) Ibid. p. 90.
- [16.](#) Wasail al- Shia, Vol. 2, p. 535 (Bab No. 82, hadith No. 2).
- [17.](#) This statement may be labeled "out of date"now. The said center is now inactive due to the control of the Egyptian government of the management of the Al-Azhar Mosque and University, and prejudices against the Shi`as in Egypt and elsewhere are now rife. Ed.

Part Seven

[Nahjul-Balagha: The Book, This Book](#)

“One cannot help liking young Ali (as). A noble-minded person, as he shows himself, now and always afterwards, a man full of affection, one who loved everyone. There is something chivalrous in him: he is as brave as lion, yet with a grace, a truth and affection worthy of Christian knighthood.”

Thomas Carlyle, Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. 77 (1968 edition)

[This Book](#)

This book is a translation of the sermons, letters, orders and some of the sayings of Imam Ali (as) as compiled by Sayyid al-Razi and called A Nahjul-Balagha, the path to eloquence.

These sermons and preaching of Imam Ali (as) were so highly valued and venerated in the Islamic world that within a century of his death they were taught and read as the last word on the philosophy of monotheism, as the best lectures for character building, as exalted sources

of inspiration, as very persuasive sermons towards piety, as guiding beacons towards truth and justice, as marvelous eulogies of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Holy Qur'an, as convincing discourses on the spiritual values of Islam, as awe inspiring discussions about the attributes of Allah. As an historic masterpiece in literature alone Nahjul-Balagha is the original and undisputed model in the Art of Rhetoric.

[In the 1st Century A.H.](#)

According to the famous book of biographies Rijal al-Kabir, the first person to collect these sermons in a book form was Zaid ibn Wahab al-Juhni, who died in 90 A.H. And who was regarded as a narrator of ahadith. Thus, within thirty years of Imam Ali's death and during the first century of Hijra, his sermons, letters, ahadith etc. were collected quoted and preserved.

[In the 2nd Century A.H.](#)

With the dawn of 2nd century, Ibn Wahab's example was followed by (1) the famous calligrapher of the early Abbaside regime, Abdul Hamid ibn Yahya (132 A.H.), (2) then ibn al-Muqaffa' (142 A.H.) took up this work of compilation. Jahiz al-Othmani says ibn al-Muqaffa had very carefully studied these sermons and used to say that he had saturated himself from the Fountains head of knowledge and wisdom and was daily getting fresh inspirations from these sermons (3) Ibn Nadim in his biography book titled The Fahrist says that Hisham ibn al-Sa'ib al-Kalbi (146 A.H.) had also collected these sermons (Fahrist: Ibn Nadim, section VII page 251).

Thence onward, century after century, Muslim scholars, theologians, historians and traditionists were citing these sermons, quoting them, discussing the meanings of the words and phrases used by Imam

Ali (as) and referring them when they needed an authority on theology, ethics, the teaching of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Holy Qur'an or on literature and rhetoric.

In the 3rd Century

During the third century five famous men took up this work:

1. Abu 'Othman Umar ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, who died in 255 A.H. (868 A.D.), quoted many sermons in his book Al-Bayan wal Tabyin.
2. Ibn Qutaybah al-Daynuri, who died in 276 A.H. in his books Uyin al-Akhbar and Gharib al-Hadith quoted many sermons and discussed meanings of many words and phrases used by Imam Ali (as).
3. Ibn Wazih al-Ya'qubi, who died in 278 A.H. cited many sermons and sayings of Imam Ali (as) in his History.
4. Abu Hanifah al-Daynuri (280 A.H.), in his history Akhbar al-Tiwal, quotes many sermons and sayings.
5. Abul-Abbas al-Mubarrad (286 A.H.), in his book Kitab al-Mubarrad, collected many sermons and letters.

In the 4th Century

1. The famous historian ibn Jarir al-Tabari, who died in 310 A.H. quoted some of these sermons in his Tarikh al-Kabir.
2. Abu Muhammad Hassan ibn Ali ibn Shu'bah al-Halabi (320 A.H.) had collected some sermons in his book Tuhaf al-'Uqul. This book was later printed in Iran.

The following writers have also extensively quoted the sermons and sayings of Imam Ali (as) in their respective books.

3. Ibn Warid (321 A.H.) in his book Al-Mujtabeen.
4. Ibn Abd Rabbih (328 A.H.) in Al-Iqd al-Farid.
5. Thiqatul-Islam al-Kulayni (329 A.H.) in his book titled Al-Kafi.
6. Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Madani (335 A.H.) collected sermons, letters and sayings of the Imam (as) in his book. Yaqut al-Hamawi mentions of this book in Mu'jam al-Udaba' page 313 Vol. 5.
7. The historian al-Mas'udi (346 A.H.), in Muruj al-Dhahab, has quoted some of the letters and sermons of the Imam (as) Abul-Faraj al-Isbahani (356 A.H.) in his book titled Al-Aghani,
8. Abu Ali Quali (356 A.H.) in his Nawadir and

9. Shaikh al-Saduq (381 A.H.) in Kitab al-Tawhid, has extensively quoted these sermons, letters and sayings.

In the 5th Century

1. Shaikh al-Mufid (413 A.H.) in Al-Irshad has quoted many sermons, ahadith sayings and letters of the Imam (as).

2. Sayyid al-Razi (420 A.H.) compiled the book titled Nahjul- Balagha.

3. Shaikhul Ta'ifa [sect's scholar] Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn al- Hassan al-Tusi (460 A.H.) was a contemporary of Sayyid al-Razi and had collected some of these sermons etc. long before Sayyid took up his work.

What Sayyid al-Razi could compile in Nahjul-Balagha does not contain all the sermons letters and sayings of Imam Ali (as). Mas'udi (346 A.H.) in his famous history Muruj al-Dhahab (Vol. 2, p. 33 printed at Cairo) says that only sermons of Imam Ali (as), which have been preserved by various people, number more than four hundred and eighty. These were spontaneous orations, people have copied them one from another and have compiled them in book forms; they have cited them and have quoted passages from them in their books.

Apparently out of these four hundred and eighty sermons some were lost and Sayyid al-Razi could lay hand on only about 245 sermons, in addition he collected about 75 letters and more than 200 sayings. Almost everyone of the sermons, letters and sayings collected in Nahjul- Balagha is to be found in books of Authors who died long before Sayyid al-Razi was born, while some are found in works of such authors who, though his contemporaries, yet were older to him and had written their books before Nahjul-Balagha was compiled. In the Index No. 2: A,B and C, I have given a list of the names of these authors, books and the number of sermons, etc. found in those books.

If I quote all of what has been said by the Muslim and the Christian Arab scholars, theologians, philosophers and historians in praises of these sermons, sayings and letters, it will cover a Volume as big as this book, therefore, I shall briefly quote only a few of them:

1. Abu Sa'adah Mubarak ibn al-Athir al-Jazri (606 A.H.) is recognized unto this day not only as a narrator of ahadith but also as a lexicologist of great eminence. His book Al-Nihaya, is a study of the history and meanings of the difficult words of Holy Qur'an and the traditions. In this book he has at great length discussed many words, phrases and the sentences of the Imam Ali's sermons from the book Nahjul-Balagha. He says that so far as comprehensiveness is concerned Ali's words come next only to the Holy Qur'an.

2. Allama Shaikh Kamalludin ibn Muhammad ibn Talhah, the Shafi'ite, (who died in 652 A.H.) in his famous book Matalib al- Sul, writes the following: "The fourth attribute of Imam Ali (as) was his

eloquence and rhetoric. He was such an Imam in these arts that none can aspire to rise up to the level of the dust of his shoes. One who has studied Nahjul- Balagha can form some idea of his supreme eminence in this sphere.”

3. Allama Abu Hamid Abdul Hamid ibn Hibathullah, known as Ibn Abul-Hadid, the Mu'tazilite, who died in 655 A.H. And who has written a really great commentary on these sermons says the following:

i. His speeches, letters and sayings are so supremely eminent that they are above the sayings of man and below only the words of Allah. None can surpass it but the Holy Qur'an.

ii. In another place, he says, “His sayings are (the actualized) miracle of the Holy Prophet (S). His predictions show that his knowledge was super-human.”

4. Allama Sa'ddud-Din al-Taftazani (791 A.H.), in Sharh al- Maqasid, says, “Ali had a supreme command over the language, over ethics and over the tenets of the religion. At the same time, he was a great orator. His sermons, compiled in Nahjul-Balagha, bear witness to these facts.

5. Allama Ala'ud-Din al-Qawshaji (875 A.H.), in Sharah al-Tajrid, says, “The book Nahjul-Balagha, that is, the sermons and sayings contained the rein, prove that none can surpass it on these lines but the Holy Qur'an.

6. The mufti of Egypt, Shaikh Muhammad Abdoh (1323 A.H.), has written a commentary on the book, Nahjul-Balagha. He was among those modern thinkers, who made the modern world realize the beauties of the teaching of Islam. His introduction on his own commentary of Nahjul-Balagha deserves careful study.

In this Introduction, he says that everyone who fully understands Arabic language must agree that the sermons and sayings of the Imam (as) are next only to the words of Allah and the Holy Prophet (S). Ali's words are so full of meanings and they convey such great ideas that this book Nahjul-Balagha should be very carefully studied, referred and quoted by students as well as teachers. This professor of Arabic literature and philosophy persuaded the universities of Cairo and Beirut to include the book Nahjul-Balagha in their courses for advance studies of literature and philosophy.

7. The famous author and orator Shaikh Mustafa Ghalaini of Beirut, who is considered as an authority on commentaries (tafsir) of the Holy Qur'an and also on Arabic literature in his book, Arij al-Zahr and from the chapter titled The Style of Language is written: “Who can write better than Ali except the Holy Prophet (S) and Allah. Those who want to study eminent standards of literature should study the book Nahjul-Balagha. It contains such depth of knowledge and such wonderful advises on the subjects of ethics and religion that its constant study will make a man wise, pious and noble-minded and will train him to be an orator of great standing.

8. Muhammad Mohiuddin, a professor of Arabic at Al-Azhar University of Cairo, says that Nahjul-

Balagha is a collection of the works of Imam Ali (as). It is compiled by Sayyid al-Razi. It contains such examples of chaste language, noble eloquence and superior wisdom that none but Ali can produce such a work because next to the Holy Prophet (S), he was the greatest orator, the greatest authority on language and literature and the greatest source of wisdom of the religion (Islam). He was such a philosopher that from his words flow streams of knowledge and wisdom.

9. Abdul Wahhab Hammudah, an authority on Arabic literature and on traditions and also a professor at the Fu'ad I University of Cairo, wrote the following in 1951: "The Book Nahjul-Balagha contains all that great scholars, professor of ethics, philosophers, scientists, authorities on religions and politicians can say or write. The wonderful force of advises and the superfine way of presenting arguments and the depth of vision prove that it is the work of a super mind like that of Ali (as)."

10. Abdul Maseeh al-Antaki, the Christian editor of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram, in his famous book titled Sharh al-Quasaid al-Alawiyya writes the following: "It cannot be denied that Ali (as) was the Imam of speakers and orators and he was the teacher and leader of writers and philosophers. There is truth in this assertion that his sayings are superior to that of any man and are inferior only to the sayings of Allah the Almighty. He undoubtedly was the man from writers, speakers, philosophers, theologians and poets have drawn inspirations, have improved their styles and have mastered their arts. The compilation of his work is named Nahjul-Balagha, which should be read often."

11. Fu'ad Afram al-Bustani, a professor of Arabic literature, in the Qiddis Yousuf [Saint Joseph] College of Beirut, is a Roman Catholic. He has compiled a book containing selections from the works of philosophers, scientists, theologians and essayists. He starts this book with the following words, I want to start this work of mine with the selections from the book Nahjul-Balagha. It is a work of the greatest thinker of the world Imam Ali-Ibn Abu-Talib.

12. The famous Christian moralist, author and poet, Paulis Salamah, in his famous book Awwal Malhama al-Arabiyya (printed at al-Ansari Press of Beirut) says, "The famous book Nahjul-Balagha is the work which makes one realize the great mind of Ali ibn Abu Talib. No book can surpass it but the Holy Qur'an. In it, you will find pearls of knowledge strung in beautiful chains, flowers of language making one's mind fragrant with sweet and pleasing smell of heroism and nobility and streams of chaste language sweeter and cooler than the famous stream of the Kawthar flowing constantly and refreshing minds of readers.

Author: Imam Ali Ibn Abu Talib (as)

1. Genealogy

Imam Ali (as), the master of the faithful, was the first cousin of the Holy Prophet (S). His father, Abu Talib and the father of the Holy Prophet (S), Abdullah, were sons of Abdul-Muttalib and children of the same mother, Fatima (as), the daughter of Asad son of the famous Banu Hashim. Thus, his (Imam Ali's)

parents were cousins. His genealogical table is as follows. etc. (Refer to Index 1).

2. Birth

Hazrat Ali (as) was born on the 13th of Rajab 30 A.H. (in the Year of Elephant) (about 610 A.D.), i.e. 23 years before the Hijra of the Holy Prophet (S). Historians say that he was born in the precincts of Kaba. In this connection please refer the following books: 1. Imam Hakim, in his Mustadrak, 2. Al-Masudi, in his Muruj al-Dhahab, p. 125, 3. Izalatul-Khafa, 2nd subject, p. 251 and 4. Allama al-Lusi in Sharh al-Ainiyya.

3. Name

At the time of his birth his father and his cousin, Muhammad, the Holy Prophet (S), were out of Mecca, his mother gave him the names of Asad and Hayder; when his father returned he called him Zaid. But when the Holy Prophet (S) came back to the city, he took his young cousin in his charge and gave him the name Ali, saying that it was the name decreed for him by Allah.

- 1) Imam Noodi, the commentator of Bukhari.
- 2) Ibn al-Arabi in his book Yawaqit.
- 3) Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, in his book Tadhkirat Khawas al-Aimma. Hazrat Ali (as) has referred to himself as Ali and Hayder.

4. Kunya

Among various kunyas, the most famous were Abdul-Hassan, Abul-Sibtain and Abu Turab. (Refer to the note below).

5. Titles

His titles were: "al-Murtada (the pleased one), Amir al-Mu'minin (as) (the Commander of the Faithful), Almamul-Muttaqin (the leader of the pious).

6. Physique

The famous historian and biographist Allama Ali ibn Muhammad, in his book titled Usd al-Ghaba fi Tamyiz al-Sahaba (book IV page 398), says that he was a man of middle height with very black and very big and piercing eyes, very handsome cast of face, very clear and fair complexion, broad shoulders, powerful arms, vast chest, strong and roughened hands, a long muscular neck, a broad forehead and he had few hairs on the top of his head.

Note: The names are derived from some relationship or kinship. It is an Arab system that respectable

people are addressed with their kunya and not with their names.

Imam Hakim, in his *Mustadrak* (Vol. 3), Kamil ibn Athir in his *Tarikh al-Khamis*, Ibn Abdul Birr, in his *Istiah* (Vol. 2, p. 486) and Allama Tabrani, in his *Riyad al-Nadira* (Vol. 2 pp. 202 and 218) agree with the above description. Tabrani further says that he used to walk with very light tread and was very agile in his movements, had a very smiling face, very pleasing manner, a jovial temperament, very kind disposition and very courteous behavior. He would never lose his temper.

7. Upbringing

He was born three years before the marriage of the Holy Prophet (S) with Hazrat Khadija. Soon after his birth, the Holy Prophet (S) took him under his holy care and Ali was like a son unto him. He used to live with the Prophet (S), used to sleep with him, was fed by him, washed and dressed by him and even carried by him on a sling whenever he would go out. The historian al-Masudi, in *Ithbat al-Wasiyya* (p. 119) says that when the Holy Prophet (S) married Khadija, she adopted this child as her son.

Hazrat Ali himself has described his childhood in al-khutba al-qasi'a saying, "I was still a new born baby when the Prophet (S) took me from my parents. I used to cling to him; he would make me sleep in his bed, pressing my body against his and making me smell his fragrance and feel its warmth; he used to feed me and (when I grew a little older) he never found me uttering a lie or feigning a deceit.

To me, he was like a guiding star and I used to carefully follow his actions and deeds. I was attached to him like a young camel attached to its mother. He used to place before me high values of morality and used to advise me to follow them; every year he would spend some days at the grotto of the Hera mountain. And I used to be with him, I was his only companion then and none else could meet him at Hera, there I used to see the light of revelation and used to smell the fragrance of Prophethood.

Once the Holy Prophet (S) said to me, 'Ali! You have attained a very eminent place. You see what I see and you hear what I hear.'" Both hafiz Abu Na'im in his book *Hilyat al-Awliya'*, (Vol. 1, p.67) and imam al-Sayyuti in his *Tafsir al-Durr al-Manthur* say that once Holy Prophet (S) said to Hazrat Ali (as), "O Ali! Allah has ordered me to keep you near me. You are to me like an ear that retains everything because you are the retaining ears that the Holy book (Holy Qur'an) has praised."

8. The Holy Prophet (S) and Hazrat Ali (as): How They Loved Each Other

(i) Ibn Abul-Hadid, the Mu'tazilite scholar and commentator of *Nahjul-Balagha*, cites Abdullah ibn Abbas saying, "Once I asked my father: 'Father! My cousin, Muhammad, has many sons. They all died while still infants. Which of them did he love the most?' He replied: Ali ibn Abu Talib'. I said, 'Father! I was inquiring about his sons.' He replied, 'The Holy Prophet (S) loved Ali (as) more than all of his sons.

When Ali (as) was a child I never saw him separated from Muhammad (S) for half an hour, unless Muhammad (S) went out of the house for some work. I never saw a father love his son so much as the

Holy Prophet (S) loved Ali (as) and I never saw a son so obedient, so attached and so loving to his father as Ali (as) was to Muhammad (S).”

(ii) The same author cites the companion of the Holy Prophet (S), Jubayr Ibn Mut'im ibn 'Adiyy ibn Nawfil, saying that once his father addressed him and some young men of his family: “Have you noticed how the child Ali has been loving, venerating and obeying that young man, Muhammad (S), instead of his own father?! What an intensity of love and veneration! I swear by our gods, the Lat and the Uzza, that instead of having so many offspring of Nawfil around me, I wish I had a son like Ali (as)!”

(iii) Allama al-Tirmidhi (Jami al-Tirmidhi, Vol. 1, p. 38; Mishkat Vol. 2 p. 8 and Musnad Imam Ahmed Vol. 1 p. 146), quotes the Holy Prophet (S) saying, “O Ali! I wish to achieve every such thing for you that I desire to acquire myself and I want to keep you away from all those things whose contact I abhor.”

(iv) Allama al-Tabrani (in his book titled Al-Awsat) and Imam Hakim (in his Sahih) say that whenever the Holy Prophet (S) was in anger nobody dared to address him but Ali.

(v) Ibn Abul-Hadid (in his Commentary on Nahjul-Balagha, Vol. 21, p. 251) once again quotes the uncle of the Holy Prophet (S), Abbas, saying that they (the Holy Prophet [h] and Ali) loved each other intensely. The Prophet (S) was so fond of Ali that once when Ali was a young boy, he sent him out on some errand and the child took a long time to return, so he started getting worried and anxious; in the end, he prayed to Allah saying: Please, Lord! Do not let me die unless I see Ali again.” This incident is also quoted by al-Tirmidhi.

(vi) Ali started acting as the bodyguard of the Holy Prophet (S) even when he was just a boy of 13 or 14 years. The young men of Quraish under instigation of their parents used to stone the Holy Prophet (S). Ali took up the work of acting as his defender. He fell upon those young men, broke the nose of one, teeth of the other, pulled the ears of the third and threw down the fourth. He often fought against those who were older than himself, was often himself hurt, but he never forsook the self imposed duty. After some days he got the nickname of “Qazeem” (one who breaks or throws away) and nobody dared to throw anything at the Holy Prophet (S) when Ali (as) was with him. He would not let the Holy Prophet (S) go out of the house alone (Ayan, Vol. 3, p. 280).

Offering himself as a sacrifice at the night of Hijra (migration) and his subsequent behavior in all the battles are enough proofs of the intensity of Ali's love for the Holy Prophet (S).

9. Character

I. Jurjy Zaidan (George Gordan) who died recently was a famous Christian historian, linguist, philosopher and poet of modern Egypt. Arabic was his mother tongue, but he was so well-versed in English, French, Germany, Persian and Latin that he used to contribute to historical and philosophical magazines of France, Germany and England. About Hazrat Ali he says the following:

“None can praise Ali (as) to the extent that he deserves. So many instances of his piety and fear of Allah are cited that one starts loving and venerating him. He was a true, strict and scrupulous follower of Islam. His words and deeds bore stamps of nobility, sagacity and courage of conviction. He was a great man having his own independent views about life and its problems. He never deceived, misled, or betrayed anybody.

In various phases and periods of his life he exhibited marvelous strength of body and mind which were due to his true faith in religion and in his sincere belief in truth and justice. He never had servants and never allowed his slaves to work hard. Often he would carry his household goods himself and if anybody offered to relieve him of the weight he would refuse.”

II. The famous Egyptian philosopher and Professor of Islamics of Alazhar University, allama Muhammad Mustafa Beg Najeeb, in his equally famous book Himatul Islam [protectors of Islam] says the following: “What can be said about this Imam?! It is very difficult to fully explain his attributes and qualities. It is enough to realize that the Holy Prophet (S) had named him the gateway of knowledge and wisdom. He was the most learned person, the bravest man and the most eloquent speaker and orator.

His piety, his love of Allah, his sincerity and fortitude in following religion were of such high order that none could aspire to reach him. He was the greatest politician because he hated diplomacy in the way of injustice and loved truth and justice, his was the policy as taught by Allah.

On account of his sagacity and thorough knowledge of the human mind, he always arrived at correct conclusions and never changed his views. His was of the best judgement. Had he had no fear of Allah, he would have become the greatest politician among all the Arabs. He is loved by all and everyone has a place for him in his heart. He was a man of such surpassing and pre-eminent attributes and such transcending and peerless qualities that many learned men accepted perplexed about him and imagined him to be an incarnation of Allah. Several men among the Jews and Christians love him and such philosophers who came to know of his teachings bow down before his incomparable vast knowledge. Roman kings would have his pictures in their palaces and great warriors would engrave his name on their swords” (Himatul Islam, part I, p. 98).

III. Another philosopher and historian of Egypt, namely Prof. Muhammad Kamil Hatha, pays his tributes in the following words: His life is a agglomeration of pleasing incidents, bloody encounters and sad episodes. His personality is very prominent on account of his transcending and high qualities.

Each aspect of his life is so lofty and glorious that a study of one phase would make you feel that it was the best phase of his character and the most beautiful picture of his personality, while contemplation of any other phase will enchant you more and you will come to the conclusion that no human being can attain that height and a third aspect will fascinate you equally and you will realize that before you is a personality of such great eminence that you cannot fully appreciate its greatness and you will feel that Ali (as) was an Imam (Leader) in battlefield, was an Imam (Leader) in politics, was an Imam in religion and

also an Imam in ethics, in philosophy, in literature, in learning and wisdom. It is not difficult for Allah to create such a person (a review on the character of Ali by Ustad (Professor) Muhammad Kamil Hatha, P. 40)

IV. The historian John J. Pool (author of *The Life of H.M. Queen Victoria*) in his book *Studies in Muhammadanism* makes the following points:

i) This prince was a man of mild and forbearing character, wise in counsel and bold in war. Prophet Muhammad (S) had given him the surname of “the Lion of Allah.”

ii) Ali (as) and his sons Hassan (as) and Hussain (as) were truly noble men; men of righteousness, men of a brave, a humble and a forgiving spirit. Their lives deserve to be commemorated for there was a peculiar pathos about them (their lives) which were not spent selfishly or in vain. As Matthew Arnold (*Essays in Criticism*) says, “The sufferers of Kerbala’ had aloft to the eyes of millions the lessons so loved by the sufferer of Cavalry (*Representation of Crucifixion*): ‘Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls.’”

He further says that Ali (as) was the first Caliph to protect and encourage national literature. This prince was a scholar himself and many of his wise sayings and proverbs are published in a book. It is a remarkable work and deserves to be more widely read in the West.

V) Ibn Abul-Hadid, the Mu’tazilite commentator of *Nahjul-Balagha*, says the following: “Hazrat Ali had a personality in which opposite characteristics had so gathered that it was difficult to believe a human mind could manifest such a combination. He was the bravest man that history could cite and such brave persons are always hard hearted, cruel and eager for bloodshed. On the contrary Ali was kind, sympathetic, responsive and a warm-hearted person, qualities quite contradictory to the other phase of his character and more suited to pious and Allah fearing persons.”

He was an extremely pious and God-fearing person and often pious and religious persons avoid society and do not care to mix with men of sins and men of wrath. Similarly, warriors, kings and dictators are usually arrogant and haughty. They consider it below themselves to mix with poor, lowly and humble persons. But Ali (as) was different.

He was a friend to all. As a matter of historical fact it is known that he had a tender spot in his heart for the poor and humble and for the orphans and the cripples. To them he was always a kind friend, a sympathetic guide and a fellow sufferer; he was meek unto them but haughty and arrogant against famous warriors and generals, so many of whom he had killed in hand to hand combat. He was always kind but strict with wayward persons, sympathetically teaching them the ways of Allah. He always smiled and passed happy and witty rejoinders, it was difficult to overcome him in any debate or repartee, his rejoinders and retorts always bore high marks of culture, education and knowledge.

He was a scion of a very illustrious, rich and noble clan, as well as son-in-law and great favorite of the

Holy Prophet (S). At the same time he was the greatest warrior and marshal of his time, yet in spite of his riches he ate, dressed and lived like a poor person. To him wealth was for the use of other needy persons, not for himself and his family.

Change of times and change of circumstances did not bring any change in his bearing, mien, or character. Even when he ascended the throne of Arabia and was acclaimed as the Caliph, he was the same Ali (as) as they had found him to be during the previous regimes. Once in the society of Abdullah, son of Imam Malik ibn Hanbal, a discussion took place about Ali and his caliphate. Abdullah brought the discussion to an end saying that the caliphate did not bring any honor or glory to Ali, but it was itself honored and glorified by Ali and it received the status actually due to it.

V. Ibn Abul-Hadid also says that, in this world, an example cannot be found of any person other than Ali who was a first class warrior and a marshal, a philosopher, a moralist and a great teacher of religious principles and theology. A study of his life shows that his sword was the only help that Islam received during its early days of struggle and its wars of self-defense.

For Islam he was the first line of defense, the second line of defense and the last line of defense. Who was with him in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khundak, Khayber and Hunain? This is one aspect of his life. Yet the other phase of his character is portrayed by his sermons, orders, letters and sayings. What high values of morality they teach, what ethics they preach, what intricate problems of Unitarianism they elucidate, how rich they are in philosophy.

How they try to train us to be kind, good, benevolent and Allah fearing rulers and faithful, sincere and law abiding subjects. How they persuade us to be warriors who can fight only for Allah, truth and justice and not mercenaries murdering and plundering for wealth and riches, and how they instruct us to be teachers who can teach nothing injurious and harmful to mankind. Was there any such combination before and will there ever be?

VI. To Oelsner, the famous French Orientalist and author of *Les Effects de La Religion de Muhammad*, Ali (as) was the beau ideal of chivalry and the personification of gallantry, bravery and generosity.

He says the following: Pure, gentle and learned without fear and without reproach, he set for the world the noblest example of chivalrous grandeur of character. His spirit was a pure reflection of that of Muhammad (S), it overshadowed the Islamic world and formed the animating genius of succeeding ages.

VII. Osborne, in *Islam under the Arabs*, says that Ali (as) had been advised by several of his counselors to defer the dismissal of the corrupt governors previously appointed until he himself was sure against all enemies. The standard of Islam, the hero without fear and without reproach, refused to be guilty of any duplicity or compromise with injustice. This uncompromisingly noble attitude cost him his state and his life; but such was Ali, he never valued anything above justice and truth.

VIII. Gibbon, in Vol. 5 of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire says, “The zeal and virtues of Ali were never out- stripped by any recent proselyte. He united the qualification of a poet, a soldier and a saint. His wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings, and every antagonist in the combats of tongue or of sword was subdued by his eloquence and valor. From the first hour of mission to the last rites of his funeral, the messenger was never forsaken by this generous friend, whom he delighted to name his brother, his vicegerent and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses.

IX. Al-Masudi, the famous historian of Islam, says, “If the glorious name of being the first Muslim, a comrade of the prophet in exile, his faithful companion in the struggle for the faith, his intimate associate in life and his kinsman, if a true knowledge of the spirit of his teachings and of the Book, if self- abnegation and practice of justice, if honesty, purity and love of truth and if knowledge of law and science constitute a claim to pre-eminence, then all must regard Ali as the foremost Muslim. We shall search in vain to find, either among his predecessor (save the Holy Prophet [h]), or among his successor, those virtues with which Allah had endowed him.”

10. Faith

As has been declared by all the historians of Islam, since his childhood, Ali (as) was adopted and looked after by the Holy Prophet (S). It was only natural that his religious tendencies from his childhood were those of the Holy Prophet (S). The question as to when he embraced Islam is out of consideration. He was Muslim from the very beginning.

His religion was the religion of the Holy Prophet (S). At his 5th, 7th, 10th, 12th and 14th year of age, he was following the religion which the Holy Prophet (S) had at his 35th, 37th, 40th, 42nd and 44th year of his life respectively. The difference between the respective ages of the Holy Prophet (S) and Ali was about 30 years. If the Holy Prophet (S) at any period of his life was a non-Muslim, then Ali at that period was also a non-Muslim. This is the logic of facts. Imam Nur ad-Dīn Ali ibn Ibrahim, the Shafi’ite, in his book Al-Sira al-Halabiyya says, “Ali was like a son to the Holy Prophet (S); therefore, his religion from the very beginning was the religion of the Holy Prophet (S).” The famous historian Masudi says, “The general census of opinion among the Muslim historians and theologians is that Ali (as) was never a non-Muslim and never prayed before idols. Therefore, the question of his embracing Islam does not and cannot be raised.”

11. Wife, Children and Domestic Life

Hazrat Ali (as) was married to Hazrat Fatima (as), the only daughter of the Holy Prophet (S) from Hazrat Khadija. He had been betrothed to her several days before the expedition of Badr. But the marriage was celebrated three months later, Hazrat Ali, being 21 years old and Hazrat Fatima (as), being 15, (as stated in the Spirit of Islam), was very happy in his blessed marriage.

The transcendental distinctiveness of their respective characters blended with each other so well, so

much so that they never quarreled nor complained about each other, leading a happy and contented life. Each one of them was rich in his own rights. Fatima (as) was the only heir of one of the richest women of Arabia, Khadija and had inherited many orchards and gardens in Mecca and Medina. Besides, that she was the daughter of the head of a rich clan and a king of a fast growing kingdom.

Ali was a marshal who had very handsome shares from the spoils of wars. Yet all that they owned went to the poor, crippled and orphans and they themselves often starved. Their only luxury in life was prayer and the company of each other and their children. They willingly shared the sorrows and suffering of the poor. They were given a slave girl, Fizza, but the Holy Prophet (S) had made arrangements that every alternate day was the off day of Fizza and her mistress would do all the household work.

Even when Hazrat Fatima (as) was ill on Fizza's off day, Fizza would not be allowed to attend to the duties, but Hazrat Ali would work, and the hero of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, Khayber and Hunain was seen grinding oats, lighting the oven, preparing the bread and looking after the children. Salman says, "What a household, the only daughter of the Holy Prophet (S) and wife of his vicegerent leading the life of a poor laborer.

If they had spent one-tenth of what they were distributing daily they would have led a life of ease and comfort. From Hazrat Ali the Lady of Light (Fatima [x]) had four children and the fifth (Mohsin) was a still birth. The causes of this mishap and also that of her death are very sad and pathetic incidents of their lives. The names of these four children were Hassan, Hussain, Zainab (wife of Abdullah ibn Jafar) and Umm al-Kulsoom (wife of Obaydullah ibn Jafar).

During the lifetime of Hazrat Fatima (as) (S) Hazrat Ali did not marry another woman. After her death he married Yamama. After the latter's death, married another lady, having the name of Hanafiyya by whom he had a son, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya. After her death, he married again, thus he had many children some of whom had unparalleled places in the history of mankind, e.g. Hassan, Hussain (as) (the hero of Kerbala), Zainab (the defender of true Islam in Kufa and Damascus). Abbas (the commander of Hussain's army in Kerbala) and Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, the hero of Nahrawan.

12. Ali Among his Friends and Foes, the Rich and the Poor

Cited below are some incidents which typically portray the characteristics of Ali ibn Abu-Talib'. He was, as Pool says, "Truly a noble man, a man of righteousness and a man of brave, humble and forgiving spirit," and as Oelsner says, "Pure, gentle and learned without fear and without reproach, setting the noblest example of character to the world." Out of hundreds and hundreds of cases to select I find it rather difficult which to choose and which not to choose. I have selected a few according to the standard of my knowledge and visualization.

Ali's Treatment Of His Foes

(1) Talhah ibn Abu Talhah was not only a bitter enemy of Islam, but was a personal enemy of the Holy

Prophet (S) and Ali (as). His exertions to harm these two and their mission is historically verifiable. In the battle of Uhud, he was the flag-bearer of the army of Quraish. Ali (as) faced him and in a hand to hand encounter dealt him such a severe blow that he reeled and fell down. Ali (as) left him like that and walked away from him. Many Muslim warriors ran up to Ali (as) and advised him to finish Talhah, saying that he was Ali's worst enemy. Ali (as) replied, "Enemy or no enemy, he cannot defend himself now and I cannot strike a man who is not in a status to defend himself. If he survives, he is welcome to live as long as his life-span lasts."

(2) During the Battle of Jamal, in the thick of the encounter, his slave Qambar brought him some sweet syrup saying, "My master! The sun is very hot and you have been constantly fighting, so, have a glass of this cold drink to refresh yourself." Ali (as) looked around himself and replied, "Shall I refresh myself when hundreds of people around me are lying wounded and dying of thirst and of wounds?! Instead of bringing a sweet drink for me, take a few men with you and give each of these wounded men a cool drink." Qambar replied: "Master! But they are all our enemies!" Ali (as) said, "They may be, but they are human beings, so tend to them."

(3) In the battle of Siffin Muawiyah reached the river Euphrates before the army of the Imam (as) and took status of the river. When Hazrat's army reached there he was informed that they would not be allowed a drop of water from the river. The Imam (as) sent a messenger to Muawiyah saying that this action was against the canons of humanity and orders of Islam. Muawiyah replied saying, "A war is a war, and the rule is that one cannot accept the principles of humanity and doctrines of Islam. My sole aim is to kill Ali (as) and to demoralize his army and this blockage of water supply will bring about these results easily and quickly." The Imam (as) ordered Imam Hussain to attack and get back the river. The attack took place and the river-side status was captured. It was then Muawiyah's turn to beseech permission to get water from the river. His messengers arrived; Ali (as) told them to take as much water as they liked and as often as they needed. When his officers told him that those were the very people who had refused water to them adding, "Should they be allowed a free run of the river?" He replied, "They are human beings and, even though they have acted inhumanely, I cannot follow their example and cannot refuse a man food and drink because he happens to be my worst enemy."

(4) It was the battle of Nahrawan and he himself was fighting like any other ordinary soldier. During this battle a man came to face him and in the encounter lost his sword. He realized his hopeless plight of standing before Ali (as) without any weapon in hand.

Ali's hand was raised for a blow when he saw the antagonist trembling with fear; he, therefore, lowered his hand slowly and said, "Run away, friend! You are not in a status to defend yourself." This conciliatory attitude made the man bold, so he said, "Ali! Why don't you kill me?! It would have reduced the number of your enemies by one!" Ali (as) replied, "I do not strike a man who cannot defend himself. You are begging for your life and it was spared." The opponent got even bolder and said, "I am told that you have never refused a beggar. Now I beg you for your sword... Will you grant it to me?" Ali (as) handed him the

sword. Taking possession of the sword, the ungrateful foe said, “Now, Ali, who is going to defend you against me and save you from my killing blow?!” Ali (as) replied, “Allah, of course; He will defend me if He so wills. He has appointed my death to be my guarding angel.

None can harm me before it is opportune time is due, and none can save me when it does arrive.” Nobility of thought and action impressed Ali’s foe, so he kissed the bridle of Ali’s horse as he said, “O master! You are a great man, indeed. You cannot only forsake the life of your enemy in a battlefield but also you can grant him your sword. May I have the honor to act as your bodyguard and to fight for you?” Ali (as) replied, “Friend! Fight for truth and justice and do not fight for individuals.”

(5) During 39 and 40 A.H. Muawiyah organized bands of murderers and brigands to enter border towns and to carry on loot, plunder, arson and rape. Kumail was at that time the governor of Heet. He asked Hazrat Ali’s permission to organize similar bands and carry out plundering in the province of Circiea which was under the control of Muawiyah.

Hazrat Ali (as) replied to him saying, “I never expected such a suggestion from a man like you. It is more noble and more moral to guard your own people and province than to plunder others. They might be our enemies, but they are also human beings. They consist of a civilian population comprised of women and children. How can one kill, loot and plunder them? No, never, do not even dream of such a venture.”

(6) It was the month of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and the time was the morning prayers. The mosque was full of Muslims. Ali (as) was kneeling before Allah and when he raised his head a terrible blow fell upon it giving a very deep cut. There was a great disturbance and commotion in the mosque. The murderer started running. The Muslims followed, caught and bound him in ropes and brought him before Ali (as) who was on the prayer carpet drenched in blood and was reclining upon his sons. He knew the blow was fatal and he could not survive it but when the murderer was brought before him, he saw that the rope which had bound him was so tightly bound that it was cutting into his flesh. He turned towards those Muslims and said, “You should not be so cruel with your fellow being. Slacken his ropes. Do you not see that they are cutting into his flesh and he is in agony?”

Such was Ali (as). Islamic history repeatedly notes well the incidents of his chivalrous and merciful treatment towards his enemies.

His Behavior With His Friends And Relatives

1. Abdullah, a son of his brother Ja’far, was his favorite nephew whom he had raised since the death of Ja’far and to whom he had given his most favorite daughter, Zainab, to marry. This Abdullah came to him requesting an advance installment of his share from Baytul-Mal. Ali (as) refused and when the young man persisted, he said, “No, my son, not a day before all the others, nor one piece more!”

2. Aqil, his elder brother, was financially in a very unhappy condition, he asked for something more than his share and before the time was due. The Imam (as) refused, saying that he could not resort to

dishonesty. Aqil must wait till the time of distribution and must bear the sufferings patiently. He had cited this incident in one of his sermons.

3. Ibn Hanif was his trusted disciple and a faithful follower. He was governor of a province and was once invited to a function which was followed by sumptuous dinner. When Hazrat heard of this he wrote him a severe letter, criticizing his action and said, "You went to a dinner where only rich people were invited and the poor were scornfully excluded. This letter can be seen in Nahjul-Balagha.

Ali (As) Among His Servants And Slaves

He had two slaves, Qambar and Sa'id. After Ali's martyrdom, Qambar used to relate saying that he very seldom had the occasion to serve his master. The Imam (as) used to do his work for himself, washing his own clothes and even patching them when patching was needed. He also drew water from the well for his own daily use. He would give them good food and decent dresses and would himself eat and dress like a very poor man. Let alone whipping or beating he never even got angry with us. He never used a cane even on his horse, camel or mule. These animals apparently understood his mood and desire and would trot and walk as he wished them to do.

His often used phrase with them was 'Ago easy child' Continuing, Qambar said, "Once and only once he got annoyed with me. It was the occasion when I showed him the money that I had hoarded. It was from my share of income given to me like others from the Muslim treasury and the gifts I had received from the members of his family. I had no immediate use of it and had collected the amount. It was not much, being barely 100 dirhams. When I showed him the amount, he looked annoyed, and what caused me a greater pain was that he looked very sad. I asked him why he was so sad.

He said, 'Qambar! If you had no use for this money, were there not people around you who were in need of it? Some of them might have been starving and some ill and infirm, could you not have helped them? I never thought that you could be so heartless and cruel and loved wealth for the sake of wealth. Qambar! I am afraid you are not trying to acquire much from Islam. Try more seriously and sincerely. Take these coins out of my house.' I took them out and distributed them among the beggars at the Kufa Mosque."

Sa'id says, "It was a very hot day. The Imam (as) was writing some letters. He wanted to send me to call some of his officers. He called me once, twice and the third time. Each time I purposely remained silent and did not reply. He got up to go himself and saw me sitting not very far from him. He asked me why I did not respond to his call. I replied, 'Sir! I want to find out when and how you get angry.' A smile painted itself on his lips and he replied: 'You cannot rouse my anger with such childish tricks.' Then he set me free and kept on supporting me till his death."

Ali (as) Among His Subjects

(i) Once Ubaydullah ibn Abbas, when he was governor, ill-treated Banu Tamim's clan. They complained to the Imam (as). He wrote to ibn Abbas, "You should not behave like a beast with your subjects. They

are respectable people and should be treated respectfully. You are representing me and your treatment is considered as that of mine. Your first consideration should be the welfare of those over whom you rule then to treat them with due respect and consideration.

(ii) Once a group of non-Muslim subjects met the Imam (as) and complained about Abdullah ibn Abbas treating them with contempt and scorn. They were farm tillers and agricultural laborers. It had then become a practice that non-Muslims were usually treated scornfully. The Imam wrote to Abdullah, "The agricultural population of your province complains about your harsh, contemptuous and cruel treatment. Their complaints require careful considerations. I feel they deserve a better treatment than what was met out to them. Give them a chance to approach you and meet them kindly and politely. They may be heathens and polytheists, but being your subjects and human beings, they do not deserve to be driven from us and to be treated harshly and with contempt."

(iii) Hazrat Ali (as) was passing through Ahwaz (in present-day Iran) with his army. The rich men of the province, as was the custom of those times, came out to greet him. They offered him their best Persian horses as presents, requesting his permission to host his army. He met them very courteously. But he very politely refused to accept the gifts and the invitation saying, "You have paid your taxes. To receive anything more from you, even when you offer it voluntarily and willingly, is a crime against the state." But when they persisted and pressed their request, he ordered that the horses could be accepted against their taxes; so far as the feast was concerned, it must be paid out of the war budget.

(iv) In the magazine *Al-H ukam*, Vol. 2, No. 47 of 1906, there appeared an article saying that the Russians in 1905 found an order of Hazrat Ali (as), in his own handwriting which was in Kufic script. This was found in a monastery in Ardabil, chief town [provincial capital] of Azerbaijan. This letter was an amnesty deed to the monastery and the Christians of Ardabil. A translation of this deed appeared in the Russian newspapers, then it was translated and published in the Turkish papers as well as in the Arabic magazines of Cairo and Beirut. Many commenting articles on the spirit of toleration and the treatment of conquered by Islam were written by the Russians and by Arab Christians. Apparently, according to the magazine *Al Habl al-Mateen*, it was translated by *Al- Hukam*.

In this deed, the Imam (as) says that as the caliph and ruler, he promises safety and security of life, property, honor, social status and religious freedom of Armenian Christians. This order should be obeyed by his officers and his successors. The Christians should not be mistreated or looked down upon because they are non-Muslims so long as they do not try to betray or harm the cause or the State of Islam. They should not be maltreated and should be allowed to practice their religion and trade freely and openly.

Islam teaches us to carry a message of peace with us and improve the status of society wherever we go, and the best way to achieve this is to create amity, friendliness and concord among human beings. Therefore, Muslims should try to develop friendship of these people and should never resort to the wrong use of power, force and arrogance. They should not be over-taxed, humiliated and forced out of

their homes, lands and trades.

Their priests should be treated with due respect, their monasteries should be protected; they should be allowed to carry on their lectures, teachings and preaching as usual and their religious ceremonies should not be prohibited. If they want to build their places of worship, then fallow and ownerless lands should be allotted to them. One who disobeys this order, is going against the orders of Allah and the Holy Prophet (S) and will deserve His wrath. Harith ibn Shuhail, one of the governors of the provinces was in Kufa and while riding through the city he saw Imam Ali (as) also riding.

He got down from his horse to accompany the Imam (as) on foot. The Imam (as) stopped his horse and said, "It ill becomes a man to lower himself before anybody but his Allah. Please get back upon your horse.

Even had you not been an officer of the State, still I would not allow you to lower yourself like this. The sight of such humiliation of man before another man never pleases me. It is the worst form of tyranny which can be practiced.

There is a letter of the Imam (as) which is actually a system of rules and regulations for the administration of benign government and a code for higher values of morality. It is included in Nahjul-Balagha and it is referred to so very often by historians of Europe and philosophers of Arabia. Even Justice Kayani refers to it in his presidential address in Karachi on April 16, 1960, that it now needs no further introduction. In it, there are orders which show that he wanted his officers to remember that the people over whom they ruled are exclusively entrusted to them by Allah and should be treated as such.

[Ali \(As\) Among The Poor](#)

He had a very soft corner in his heart for old, weak, infirm, disabled and poor and children were always his favorites.

(i) It was the hottest day of the season, he had finished his noon- prayers in the mosque and was passing through the bazaar when he saw a young slave-girl piteously weeping on the road. He asked her the reason. She said that her master had given her some money to get dates from the bazaar. The dates which she brought were not liked by her master and he wanted them to be returned and his money refunded. The fruit seller refused to take them back, her master was beating her for the money and seller had also caned her for going to him over and over again. She did not know what to do and whom to approach for help. The Imam (as) accompanied her to the seller and advised him to take back the dates. He was a new comer to Kufa and did not recognize the Imam (as) and was rude to him. A passerby intervened and told him who the Imam (as) was. He jumped from his shop and begged of the Imam (as) to excuse him and said that he would give back the money immediately to her. The Imam (as) replied that it was really mean of him to treat an honest suggestion disdainfully and haughtily and to cower before power and might so abjectly and humiliatingly. The owner of the slave-girl had also heard the news of this incident and ran to meet the Imam (as) to apologize for the trouble caused by the slave-

girl. The Imam (as) told him, “You have no mercy for a person who is under your power and cannot forgive her mistake. Have you then a right to expect mercy and forgiveness from our Master? You, people, have acquired nothing from Islam except its name.”

(ii) One day, he saw an old woman carrying a heavy load of firewood which she could ill-afford to lift. She was tottering under the weight. The Imam (as) relieved her of her weight and carried it to her hamlet and, on her request, lit her oven for her and gave her some money. She did not know who the Imam (as) was and was thanking him for his kindness. When a neighbor entered the hamlet, he recognized the Imam (as) and told her who he was. Only then did she realize who had served her like an obedient servant; it was the caliph, the king.

(iii) Only after his death did the world come to know that he had provided a shelter outside of the town for a leper in an advanced stage of the disease. He used to go there daily, dress his wounds, feed him with his own hands (because the leper had lost his hands), wash him, put his bed in order and carry him out of the shelter for a little time so that he could get some fresh air. Accidentally, relatives and friends of the Imam (as) came across this shelter, found the leper in it, learned his story and told him the Imam (as) was murdered and that they had just buried him. The news affected the poor cripple so much that he died on the spot.

13. Ali's Diet

Imam Ali (as) always ate the kind of food and dressed in such a way that even the poorest could afford better. It was not because he was poor but because he wanted to lead the life of the poorest person and spend all that could be spared on the poor. I have noted below certain cases quoted by the historians. These incidents are of the time when he was the ruler and king of the entire Muslim Empire except Syria.

(i) Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal, in his Musnad, cited Suwayda ibn Ghafalah saying, “One day I went to see Ali (as) at the government house (Darul Imara). It was the time of breakfast and before him there was a cup of milk and some barley bread. The bread was dry, stale, hard and did not contain any butter or oil. It could not be easily broken into pieces. The Imam (as) was exerting himself to break and soften it. I turned towards his slave, Fizza and said, ‘Fizza! Have you no pity on your old master? Why cannot you give him softer bread and add some butter or oil to it?’ She replied, ‘Why should I pity him when he never pities himself. He has given strict orders that nothing is to be added to his bread and even chaff and husks are not to be separated from the flour. We, ourselves, eat much better food than this, though we are his slaves.’ Hearing this, I said to him, ‘O Master! Have pity on yourself! Look at your age, your responsibilities, your hard work and your food.’ He replied: ‘O Suwayda! You have no idea what the Holy Prophet (S) used to eat.’” He never ate to satiety for three consecutive days.

(ii) Allama Kamalud-Din Muhammad ibn Talhah al-Shafi'i, in his book titled Matalib al-Sul, quotes Abdullah ibn Zurarah saying, “I went to see Imam Ali (as) on an Eid day. He asked me to join in his

breakfast. I agreed. A very poor kind of food was served before us. I told him, O Master, you are such a rich man, a caliph and a king. I was expecting that game would be served before us but what do I see?"The Imam (as) replied, "O Ibn Zurara! You have heard of mighty kings who have lead life of luxury. Let me be a ruler leading the life of a poor and humble person, a humble laborer."

(iii) Al-Milani, in his book titled Sira and Imam Ahmed, in his Musnad, quote the famous tabi'i Ibn Abu Rafi saying that he went to the Imam (as) on an Eid day and while he was sitting there a bag was brought before the Imam (as) which he thought might contain jewels. The Imam (as) opened the bag but it only contained dried pieces of bread, which he softened with water. Ibn Abu Rafi asked him as to the reason of sealing such a kind of food which even a beggar would not care to steal. The Imam (as) smiled and said, "I keep it sealed because my children try to substitute softer bread, containing oil or butter in it. Ibn Abu Rafi said, "Has Allah prohibited you to eat better kind of food?"He replied, "No, but I want to eat the kind of food which the poorest of his realm can afford at least once a day. I shall improve it after I have improved their standards of life. I want to live, feel and suffer like them."

14. His Clothing

(i) Imam Ahmed, in his book Al-Manaqib and Ibn Athir in his history book, quote Harun ibn Anzah saying that he accompanied his father (Anzah) to the Khawarnaq castle to meet Imam Ali (as). Those were winter days and the winter was very severe. He found the Imam (as) in a very thin cotton garment and the cold wind was making him shiver. Anzah asked him, "O Commander of the faithful! Allah has reserved a share for you and your family from Baitul-Mal (Muslim state treasury). Why do you not make use of it?"He replied, "O Anzah! I do not want anything from your treasury; this is the same outfit which I have brought with me from Medina!"

(ii) Imam Ahmed quotes Zaid ibn Wahab saying that once the Imam (as) came out of his house and there were patches sewn to his dress. Ibn Na'ja, a Kharijite and an enemy, was allowed by the Imam (as) to lead a peaceful and comfortable life at Kufa taunted the Imam (as) on the very poor and coarse kind of outfit put on by him. He replied, "Let go, what have you to find objection in my outfit? It is the kind which our masses can afford. Why can you not think of their lives and outfits?! I shall improve my standard after I have succeeded in improving theirs. Meanwhile, I shall continue to live like them. Such kind of outfit makes one feel humble and meek, it is helpful as a reminder and an encouragement to give up vanity, haughtiness and arrogance."

(iii) Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, in his books titled Kanzul-'Ummal, and al-Tabari in Al-Riyad al-Nadira, quote 'Umar ibn Qais saying that once he asked the Imam (as) as to the reason of his having patches in his outfit."He replied, "O 'Umar! Such type of outfit makes you soft-hearted; it vanishes vanity from your mind and it is the kind which poor Muslims can conveniently afford."

(iv) Shaikul-Islam Imam Abu 'Umar, Yousuf ibn Abdul-Birr, in his book Al-Istiab quotes Hussan ibn Jermooz saying that his father once saw the Imam (as) coming out of the Kufa mosque in a shirt made

of jute cloth. Around him were people so well dressed that compared to him they looked like princes. He was instructing them as to how they might better understand their own submission to the Will of Allah (Islam).

(v) Imam Ahmed quotes Abu Noziah, the ready-made cloth merchant of Kufa, saying that the Imam (as) purchased two shirts from his shop, one was of superior quality, which he handed over to his slave Qambar to put on. The other was of a rough cloth, very coarse and cheap which he reserved for himself.

15. Ali's Services to Islam and the Holy Prophet (S)

(i) The first occasion on which Ali (as) offered his services to the cause of Islam was when the Holy Prophet (S) was first ordered by Allah to preach Islam openly.

For three years the Holy Prophet (S) was preaching Islam under absolute secrecy. At the end of the third year (i.e. The fourth year after the Bi'tha, dawn of Prophethood, in 45 mul-Fil), he received orders to preach to his near in kin and to admonish them. The Holy Prophet (S) directed Ali (as) to prepare a banquet and to invite to it the sons and grandsons of Abdul-Muttalib. This was done and about forty of them came, but Abu Lahab, made the company break up before Muhammad (S) had an opportunity to speak. The next day a second invitation was issued. When they came and the frugal meal was served the Holy Prophet (S) rose and declared his sacred character and offered the treasures of time and of eternity to whomsoever should become his disciples.

He then concluded by demanding, "Who among you will aid me to bear this burden, who will be my Lieutenant and Vizier, just as Aaron was to Moses?" The assembly remained mute with astonishment, not one venturing to accept the offered perilous office until Ali (as), Muhammad's cousin, stood up and exclaimed "O Prophet (S)! I will! Though I am indeed the youngest of these present, the most rheum of them as to the eyes and the slenderest of them as to the legs; I, O Prophet (S), will be your Vizier over them." Throwing his arms around the generous and courageous youth and pressing him to his bosom, Muhammad (S) declared: "Behold my brother and Vizier and obey him" (see John Davenport's An Apology to Muhammad and the Holy Qur'an).

Many historians are of the opinion that it was a monumental declaration and indeed a momentous occasion and that Ali's declaration was the first and greatest service done in behalf of the Islamic cause. Had the appeal of the Holy Prophet (S) been left unanswered, the propagation of Islam would have been nipped in the bud. To them the whole idea was the actualization of an adult person preaching Monotheism and Submission and a young courageous youth offering his services vehemently appeared completely foreign to the gatherings' traditional sensibilities. They laughed at both of them and dispersed, advising Ali's father to obey his youngest son from that day onward.

These two, the Holy Prophet (S) and Imam Ali (as) proved to the world that there was nothing laughable in their declaration. They proved to the world that their wisdom and courage was enough for Allah to

make their mission a success. Carlyle says that in his opinion, young Ali (as) had the kind of personality as could be liked, loved and venerated by everybody. He was a man of such excellent character, so loving and lovable and so intensely brave that if anything stood against his bravery it was consumed as if by fire, yet he was so gentle and kind that he represented the model of a Christian knight.

As was already said, this was really the first and the greatest service to the cause of Allah; Monotheism and Submission to His Will alone (Islam). From this day to the last day of his life, Imam Ali (as) sincerely, bravely and nobly acted as the defender of the faith.

(ii) The second great occasion was when the Holy Prophet (S) was forced to leave Mecca, making somebody stay in his place in such a way that his enemies would believe that he was still in his house and thus he might safely go away in the darkness of the night. This departure to Medina is called the Hijra and the Muslim era is named after this event. It took place during the month of September, 662 A.D. Thursday the 26th Safar (thirteen years after the Holy Prophet [h] started preaching Islam).

The people of Medina were favorably inclined towards Islam and some had embraced this religion and had promised every kind of support to the Holy Prophet (S). Many Muslims had left for Medina and were handsomely treated by the Ansars of Medina. The tribesmen of Quraish, realizing that Islam was gaining a good support and a firm hold at Medina and those who had fled from Mecca were being happily settled there, decided to strike at the root cause. Their hatred of the Holy Prophet (S) was so intense that nothing would satisfy them but his death. They gathered at Dar al-Nadwa and decided that a few people from each clan of Quraish would jointly attack the Holy Prophet (S) and strike him with their swords at one and the same time. Thus no individual of any single clan would be responsible of his death. Banu Hashim would not be able to kill any person in return or to fight against any single clan and as they were not strong enough to fight against all the clans of Quraish at the same time they would be forced to be satisfied with blood-money (diyya). They further decided to surround the house of the Holy Prophet (S) during the night so that he could not get away then to kill him the next morning. Thus forty men got ready and surrounded his house.

Allah revealed to His Messenger of the intrigue planned against him and ordered him to leave Mecca the very same night. It was a serious and dangerous occasion. He was ordered by Allah to go and to go in such a way that none of his enemies might suspect his departure and, if possible, none of his friends might know of it. The walls of his house were barely seven feet high and anyone placing a stone and standing upon it could easily peep into the house. He knew the house was surrounded. Anyone whom he asked to sleep in his bed covering himself with the Prophet (S)s coverlet. Such a person was expected not to expose his identity till dawn (by which time the Prophet (S) would be safe and out of danger). This person was also to be unarmed so that he might not rouse the suspicion of the peeping enemies.

He should thus be willing to bear the brunt of the enemies' anger in the morning and be ready to be killed. To whom but Ali could the Holy Prophet (S) turn at this most dangerous moment? In detail he

informed Ali (as) of the whole plan and of the positive danger of taking his place in details saying that the least that could be expected of those enemies would be death and torture. Ali (as) asked, "I take your place and leave you alone to go through the gathered enemies, will your life be safe?" "Yes," replied the Holy Prophet (S). Allah has promised me a safe passage through them. Ali (as) bowed his head before Allah as a sign of thanksgiving. He lied down on the bed of the Holy Prophet (S) and covered himself with the Prophet's coverlet. During the night, many stones and arrows were aimed at him. Stones hit him in the back and on the head and arrows embedded in his legs but he did not even turn in his bed. In the morning he was found out by the enemies only when one of them pulled back the coverlet. When they wanted to attack him, knowing that he was Ali (as) not Muhammad (S), only then did he unsheathe his sword.

In Medina, the Holy Prophet (S) was forced to defend himself and his followers and was thus forced to fight many battles. At each and every battle Ali (as) was the hero. And it was he who fought single-handedly with the famous warriors of Arabia, defeated the enemies and brought a victory to Islam. Records of these battles carry with them chronicles of his bravery, courage and chivalry. Even the enemies sang songs of his valor and gallantry.

Everyone of these battles was an outcome of very grave circumstances and conditions and a complex combination of intricately serious events initiated by quite real and extremely harmful forces launched against the peace and well being of Muslims and Islam. There were many such encounters but I have briefly mentioned only five of those instances where the events had far reaching effects. In each of them Ali (as) alone broke through evil combinations and carried the Muslims and Islam to a status of safety, eminence and power.

(iii) The first of these battles was Badr. It took place in the month of Ramadan of the 2nd year of Hijra. Muslims were not prepared for a battle and could ill-afford to fight against superior forces. But Medina was being invaded and the Holy Prophet (S) was necessarily forced to defend himself and his followers. He decided to leave Medina and fight out the battle in an open field. He had only 313 Muslims who were not adequately armed for a battle, many of them were nervous of an encounter and were suffering from inferiority complex. The tribesmen of Quraish had come with an army of about 1000 warriors which had frightened the Muslims even more. The battle took place and about 36 Quraish were killed by Ali (as); some of them were very important persons and famous warriors of the tribesmen of Quraish.

Ali (as) killed everyone of those 36 antagonists in hand to hand combat and most of them were the persons who had surrounded the house of Holy Prophet (S) on the night of the Hijra. During this encounter he was wounded, but by his bravery and courage he brought home to Muslims that he would act as the first line of defense for Islam, that they had no cause to suffer from inferiority complexes and that Allah would defend them against heavy odds. Among the tribesmen of Quraish were two of the worst enemies of Islam, Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan, and in this battle Abu Jahl was killed. Ali (as) was the hero of this battle and brought the first victory in Islam in armed encounters with its enemies.

(iv) The second most important battle was that of Uhud. The tribesmen of Quraish and their leader Abu Sufyan were smarting under the defeat of Badr and had sworn to retaliate. The idolaters were burning for revenge. They made formidable preparations for another encounter and succeeded in obtaining the assistance of Tihama and Kinana tribes. Abu Sufyan's wife, Hind, mother of Muawiyah, took a keen interest in all arrangements and preparations. She had written poems to entice Quraish against Islam and had organized a band of women minstrels who accompanied the army of Quraish to the battlefield. Thus they had mobilized an army of 3000 infantry and 2000 cavalry. The Holy Prophet could muster only 700 Muslims to face this horde. They faced each other in the battlefield of Uhud. The battle took place on the 11th Shawal 3 A.H. (a year after the battle of Badr). The command of the Muslim army was divided between Ali (as) and Hamza and Abu Sufyan had appointed Khalid ibn al-Walid, Akram ibn Abu Jahl and 'Umar ibn al-s as the three commanders to command the right wing, left wing and the center respectively.

The first encounter took place between Ali (as) and Talhah ibn Talhah. This encounter carries with it an incident of marvelous chivalry by Ali (as), which I have narrated elsewhere. Talhah suffered defeat at the hands of Ali (as) and died. He was the flag bearer of Quraish's army. His death brought his four sons and one grandson to face Ali (as) and each one of them was killed by him. As other flag bearers followed them, they were in turn killed by Ali (as). Then a general encounter took place in which Ali (as) and Hamza carried the day and the Muslims were victorious. But eagerness of spoils threw the ranks of the Muslim army into disorder, Ali (as) however tried to keep them in order, but it was not to be. Khalid ibn al-Walid immediately attacked them from the rear and the flank. He wounded the Holy Prophet (S) with a javelin and had also stoned him. The face of the Prophet (S) was also wounded and he had fallen down from the horse. Khalid ibn al-Walid started shouting with a loud voice: "The lying Prophet is slain!" Without stopping to verify this claim, the followers of Islam fled, panic-stricken (Davenport).

The wounded Prophet (S) was left in the battlefield with only Ali (as), Hamzah, Abu Dujanah and Thakwan to defend him. These brave warriors fought fiercely and during this encounter, Hamzah was killed, Thakwan and Abu Dajana lay seriously wounded and Ali (as) was left alone in the battlefield. He had received 16 wounds but he searched and found the Holy Prophet (S) lying wounded and surrounded by enemies under command of Khalid who were trying to kill him. He fought against these six men, killed two of them and scattered the rest. He bodily lifted the Holy Prophet (S) and carried him to a mount while he kept on attacking the rallying armies of the enemy and shouted that the Holy Prophet (S) is alive! and calling Muslims to "Come back!"

Those Muslims who had not fled very far came back and saw the wounded Prophet (S) with his daughter, Fatima (as) (who had come out of Medina upon hearing the rumor of her father's death) to look after him. They took heart and gathered again under the command of Ali (as) and starting to fight again, victory was gained. The most peculiar aspect of this battle was that the greed of the Muslim warriors had converted a hard-earned victory into a ignominious defeat and Ali (as) had reconverted this defeat into a glorious victory. He thus once again saved the day by saving the face of the fleeing

Muslims. Most important of all, he saved was the life of the Holy Prophet (S), for without Ali (as) the Holy Prophet (S) would have been killed.

Twenty-eight famous warriors of Arabia were killed by Ali (as) in this battle of whom seventeen were flag bearers of the tribesmen of Quraish. The Holy Prophet (S) declared that the Angel Gabriel was loud in the praise of Ali (as) and had said, "There is no braver youth than Ali and no better sword than his Dhul-Fiqar." A detailed account of this battle is available in

(1) Al-Waqidi's History of Prophets

(2) Shah Isma'il al-Hamawini's History

(3) Tabari's Tarikh

(v) The third momentous armed encounter of the Muslims with the tribesmen of Quraish is called the battle of the clans (Ahzab) or battle of the moat or ditch (Khandaq). It is so called because many clans of Arabs were persuaded by Abu Sufyan to help him to annihilate Islam and the Muslims. Because these forces invaded Medina, the Holy Prophet was obliged to dig a moat or ditch around his army. This battle also proves that the Holy Prophet (S) was forced to take up arms in defense of his followers and his mission. It took place on the 23rd of Dhul-Qi'da in the year 5 A.H.

The defeat at Uhud was a crushing blow to the tribesmen of Quraish and to their leader, Abu Sufyan. While retreating from Uhud, he promised that he would come back again to avenge the defeat. He instigated the clans of Banu al-Nazir, Banu Ghatfan, Banu Sleem and Banu Kinanah and also succeeded in persuading Banu Qurayzah who, till then, had not sided with any party, to join their forces against Islam. Abu Sufyan was very sure of his success. He especially relied upon the fame of Umar ibn Abd Wudd, who was as famous in Arabia as Rustam was in Iran. He had gathered an army of about 9 to 10 thousand soldiers under command of this famous warrior.

They marched upon Medina, the Holy Prophet (S) could barely muster 2000 Muslims to face this army. For nearly a month the armies stood facing each other and one day 'Umar jumped the moat and faced the Muslim army, challenging them for an encounter. He was accompanied by Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl, Abdullah ibn al-Mugheerah, Zurarah ibn al-Khattab, Nawfal ibn Abdullah and others.

His bravery, valor and courage were so well known in Arabia that none of the Muslims except Ali (as) dared face him. The assemblage of famous warrior tribes and the presence of 'Amr ibn Abd Wudd as their commander had made the Muslims so nervous that even the Holy Qur'an says that "Their eyes were petrified, their hearts were beating violently," and they were thinking of running away.

Thrice did 'Amr ibn Abd Wudd challenge them, and every time, none but Ali (as) stood up and asked permission of the Holy Prophet (S) to face him. Twice did the Holy Prophet (S) refuse him permission, but in the end he allowed him saying, "Today, faith in embodiment is facing embodied infidelity," then he

raised his hands in prayers, beseeching Allah thus: "O Lord! I am sending Ali (as) alone in the battlefield, do not allow me to be left alone; You are the best Companion and the best Guardian." Muslims were so certain of Ali (as) being killed by 'Amr that some of them came forward to have a last look at his face. The encounter ended in Ali's success and Omer's death. After 'Amr, he faced Abdullah ibn Mughirah and Nawfal ibn Abdullah, killing them both.

Thus, a victory was won without any Muslims, except Ali (as), coming out of the ranks. In the encounter with 'Amr and the defeat and death of this great warrior, Ali (as) again exhibited such a chivalrous attitude that the sister of Amr composed a poem in praise of the man who faced her brother, fought him bravely and demonstrated such a noble and chivalrous tribute to his subdued enemy. In it she said that if anyone else other than Ali (as) had killed her brother, she would have wept over the infamy for the rest of her life. The death of Amr had completely demoralized the various clans gathered; they started leaving the army in retreat, going back to their localities. The tribesmen of Quraishites went back to Mecca sad and dejected.

Thus, Ali (as) brought an end to the hostilities of Quraish in three encounters at Badr, Uhud and Khandaq. Their best warriors were killed, their unity against Islam was crushed, their pride was humiliated and their prestige before the Arab clans was lowered by him and by him alone.

He further raised the status of Muslims among the haughty, merciless and warring tribes of Arabia. In all of these three battles not more than sixty Muslims were killed. He alone had killed more than seventy enemies of Islam, everyone of whom was the head of some clan or a sub-clan, a warrior famous for his bravery or a deadly enemy of the Holy Prophet (S) and Islam.

For a detailed account of this battle following books may be consulted:

(1) Shah Waliyyullah Dehlawi's Ithbatul-Ghafa'.

(2) Kamil ibn al-Athir's History, Vol. 2.

(3) Al-Sayyuti's Al-Durr al-Manthur.

(4) Tabari's Tarikh.

(iv) In their struggle for existence, the Muslims had to face a very serious opposition from the Jews. In the beginning they tried to help the tribesmen of Quraish against Islam surreptitiously then openly. But when Ali (as) broke through the enmity of the tribesmen of Quraish and when the Holy Prophet (S) was forced to banish the Jews from Medina, they decided to try their fate against Islam with the help of Banu Asad, Banu Kinanah and Banu Ghatfan. Khayber was the province which they had occupied since the times of their banishment from Palestine¹. It contained a few fortresses, the biggest of them was called Qamos, which was on a steep hill. In these fortresses, they started gathering in large numbers. After raising an army of 10 to 12 thousand warriors their misguided venture was to include a march on

Medina. Hearing this serious news the Holy Prophet (S) decided to face them at Khayber only.

He marched at the head of an army of 3,000 soldiers. This battle took place in Muharram of the year 7 A.H.

Ali (as) then was suffering from an eye problem and was left at Medina. The Muslim army succeeded in defeating the Jews in minor skirmishes, but when they tried to capture the main fort of Qamos, they suffered a setback. They could not succeed though they tried for days at a stretch. The defeats sustained sadly demoralizing the Muslim army. Holy Prophet (S) had allowed every important person to command the Muslim forces day by day.

Yet each day the result was fresh defeat, fresh demoralization, fresh boldness of Jews and daily increasing danger of some more clans, emboldened by the weakness and defeats of Muslims, joining hands with the Jews. There were still many such tribes who were deadly against Islam and wanted to harm it, but Muslims victories at Badr, Uhud and Khandaq had made them nervous.

The news of the defeats at Khayber were making them bold. "The Jews of Khayber united by an ancient alliance with a Beduin horde of Banu Ghatfan were incessantly working for the formation of a powerful coalition against the Muslims. The Holy Prophet (S) knew fully well the power possessed by the desert races to injure the Muslims" (The Spirit of Islam). There was further danger of the munafiqun (hypocrites and double dealers) staging a rebellion in Medina. Prompt measures were needed to avert these evils. Only a victory could have saved the situation which was getting more and more critical day by day. The Prophet (S) was himself ill and sadly felt the need of Ali (as) at his side.

He knew that although he himself was ill, Ali (as) had not left him alone and had followed him., therefore, ill or not ill Ali (as) had to come to the succor of Muslims, Islam and the Holy Prophet (S). When the news of the last disastrous repulses of the Muslims were brought to him, the Holy Prophet (S) said, "Tomorrow I shall give the command (the flag, an insignia of the command) of this army to a man who is brave, who will keep on attacking, who will not run away from the battlefield, who loves Allah and His Prophet (S) and is beloved by Allah and His Prophet (S). He will not come back to me without success. The next day, Ali (as) was called from his bed and was handed over the command. He took the fort by storm; killed Marhab, Antar, Murrah, al-Harith and four other tribal chieftains of the Jews in hand to hand combat.

He broke the door of the fort single-handedly, carried his army inside the fort and within four hours he flew the flag of the Holy Prophet (S) on the biggest fortress of Arabia. He once again moved the cause of Allah ever closer towards an ultimate Islamic Victory at the hands of Muslims and on that day saved Islam from disastrous ends.

The news of success pleased the Holy Prophet (S) so much that he, though ill, came out to greet the victor, embraced him said, "Ali (as) had I not been afraid that Muslims will start regarding you as Christians regard the Christ, I would have said things about you which would have made the Muslims

venerate you and to consider the dust of your feet as something worth venerating. But it will suffice to say that you are from me and I am from you; you will inherit me and I will inherit you; you are unto me what Aaron was unto Moses.

You will fight for my cause, you will be nearest to me on the day of Judgement and you will be next to me on the fountain of Kawthar. Enmity against you is enmity against me; a war against you is a war against me; your friendship is my friendship. To be at peace with you is to be at peace with me; your flesh is my flesh; your blood is my blood; who will obey you will obey me. Truth is on your tongue, in your heart and in your mind. You have as much faith in Allah as I have. You are a door to me. As per orders of Allah I give you these tidings that your friends will be rewarded in the Heaven and your enemies will be punished in the Hell.

For further details of the above hadith and the battle of Khayber, following books may be consulted:

- (1) Maarij al-Nubuwwa, Vol. 4, p. 216.
- (2) The Manaqib of Akthab al-Kharzami
- (3) Mullah Ali Hamdani's Yanabi' al-Mawadda
- (4) Ibn Hisham's Sira, p. 187
- (5) Tabari's Tarikh.

(vi) The victory which Ali (as) brought to Islam in Khayber proved of great consequence to its mission and its followers. It gave such an importance and prestige over the infidels of the tribesmen of Quraish, who till then had complete control and sway over Mecca and did not even allow the Holy Prophet (S) and his followers to come for hajj and umra and had forced them for the treaty of Hudaibiya, were now obliged to surrender the city to him. Mecca fell before the superior forces of Islam.

The causes of the invasion and fall of Mecca are not to be discussed here. Suffice it to say that Abu Sufyan who had brought it all upon the heads of Quraish, later leaving the country and countrymen to the devil, started running after every important person to secure his own and his family's freedom of life and property from the Holy Prophet (S).

Through the mediation of Abbas (uncle of Holy Prophet [h]) he received the pardon that he sought. The behavior of the Holy Prophet (S) against these murderers of Muslims and the enemies of Islam was so merciful, benign and humane that he pardoned everyone of them, a clemency and kindness which was and shall ever remain unparalleled in the history of mankind. When Mecca was taken over by the Muslims, the precincts of Kaba were cleared of all idols by the person of the Holy Prophet (S) and Ali (as) and it ceased to exist as the center of infidelity and polytheism in Arabia.

The fall of Mecca which took place in the Ramadan of 8 A.H. (January 630 A.D.) was accompanied with

serious repercussions. The success of Islam since the Hijra had brought many followers to its fold. These were of three types. Some had seen the truth in its preaching and had accepted it sincerely and faithfully. Some were such that they wanted to bask in the glory of a religion which was fast becoming a mighty temporal power and they wished to make their worldly positions good through its influence and had accepted it with those ulterior motives. While there were some whose conversion was under false impression that unless they had accepted Islam their lives and properties were not safe.

The fall of Mecca had a very sad effect upon those two latter groups. They were not expecting that Abu Sufyan and the tribesmen of Quraish would succumb so easily to the pressure of Muslim invasion. The clearing of idols from the precincts of Ka'ba and closing its doors to the infidels was a heavy blow.

It became more poignant when they found out their age-long enemy, the man whose valor and whose sword brought all these victories to Islam as well as disastrous defeats to their side, Ali (as) was the flag bearer a (commander) of the Holy Prophet's (S) forces on the occasion of the fall of Mecca. Along with the Holy Prophet (S) he was the man who cleared the Ka'ba of its idols. There still were many polytheist clans in Arabia. To them Mecca was the center of worship.

Among them there were two powerful bedouin tribes; Banu Hawazin and Banu Thaqif. They now were joined by Banu Nusair, Banu Sa'd, Banu Hashim and Banu Hilal. Those tribes decided to stage a comeback and were quietly promised help by the hypocrites.

(vii) The whole thing was arranged so quickly and so stealthily that by the time the Muslims could come out of the sweet pleasure of success at Mecca there was an army of 20,000 warriors at Tayef ready to face them. The Holy Prophet (S) marched to Ta'if at the head of an army of 15,000 Muslims. Some of them were freed slaves of the Muslim's conquest of Mecca and many more were the hypocrites of the types mentioned above. There were a few thousand of those Muslims who had accompanied him from Medina.

The hostile tribes decided to attack the Muslim army at a point of vantage at Hunain and selected two prominent locations where they concealed their archers. The Muslims were very proud of their strength and were very sure of their success, but their behavior during the encounter was shamelessly timorous and cowardly. The Almighty discussing their attitude in this battle says, "Allah came to your help on so many occasions. Yet, on the day of Hunain, your vanity in the number of your soldiers and your arrogance did not prove of any avail to you, you were badly defeated and could not find any place of shelter. You started running away without shame (section 9, Tawba).

This encounter took place in the month of Shawwal 8, A.H. (January/February 630 AD). When the Muslim army marched towards the place where the archers were concealed the enemy opened the campaign with such a severe onslaught of their archery that the Muslim army could not stand it. The assault was fierce and the confusion in the Muslim ranks made the archers bolder and they came nearer and attacked from both flanks and from the front. The Muslims could not stand the attack any longer.

They started running without putting up any resistance and had lost their senses and touch with reality so much that they even left the Holy Prophet (S) unprotected beyond their cares (Bukhari's Sahih).

The first battalion to run in trouble was the one commanded by Khalid ibn al-Walid (Rawzat al-Safa, Vol. 2, p. 137, Tarikh al-Anbiya, Vol. 2 p. 388). He was accompanied by Banu Saleem and the recently converted Quraish of Mecca. This was followed by such a disorderly and tumultuous flight of Muslims that only ten persons out of an army of 15,000 were left with the Holy Prophet (S). Eight of them were Banu Hashim (Abbas and his two sons, Ali (as), Aqil and three other cousins of the Holy Prophet (S)).

Abbas was shouting at the Muslims to return, reminding them of oaths of allegiance taken and promises made, but it was of no avail. Those who had accepted Islam for wealth and power or under false fears were not willing to risk their lives. They ran as fast as they could. Many of them who had carefully hidden their enmity of the rising power were happy at the defeat. They gathered around Abu Sufyan, started congratulating him and saying that AThe magical spell of the lying prophet is broken! they were praying for the comeback of polytheism (Abul-Fida, p. 349, Rawzat al-Safa, p. 136 Vol. 2, Tarikh al-Anbiya', p. 389 Vol. 2).

Once again it fell to the lot of Ali (as) to save the Holy Prophet and Islam. Armies of Banu Hawazin and Banu Thaqif under the cover of their archers were rushing down the hillock and were getting ready for a fierce onslaught. Ali (as) divided the small band of faithful Muslims in three divisions; to Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Abbas ibn Abdul- Muttalib and his nephew Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith, he assigned the duty of guarding the Holy Prophet (S). To three others he gave orders to guard the rear while he faced the onslaught with only three warriors along with him. He fought and fought, was wounded, but faced the commander of the hostile army, Abu Jerdal in a hand to hand combat and killed him with one stroke of sword. He attacked the enemy's rank once again, bringing the number of those whom he had slain on that day to forty. His aides had a glorious example before them. They also fought bravely, killing thirty more men.

The day was saved, the commander of the enemy's army was killed, their ranks were broken, they had no courage to face Ali (as) and started retreating. The sight of a powerful enemy under retreat made the fleeing Muslims bold and they came back afterwards as victory was won for them.

A detailed account of this encounter is to be found in:

(1) Rawzat al-Safa, Vol. 2, p. 136.

(2) Tarikh al-Anbiya', Vol. 2, p. 388

(3) Sirat ibn Hisham, Vol. 2, p. 621

(4) Kunzul-Ummal, Vol. 5, p. 307

(viii) During the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (S), Imam Ali (as) was sent on many occasions for the

propagation of Islam and on many missions of mercy and peace. He carried out these duties to the satisfaction of the Holy Prophet (S) and Allah. For instance in the words of *The Spirit of Islam*, *The men of Khalid ibn al-Walid*, under the order of this newly converted warrior killed Banu Khazimah's bedouins. The news of this wanton bloodshed deeply grieved the Prophet (S) and he prayed "O Master! I am innocent of what Khalid has done. He immediately dispatched Imam Ali (as) to make every possible preparation for the outrage committed. Such a mission was congenial to Ali's nature and he executed it faithfully.

After making a careful enquiry as to the number of persons killed, their status and the losses incurred by their families and paid the *diyya* strictly. When every loss was made good he distributed the remainder of the money he had brought among the kinsman of the victims of other members of the tribe. This gladdened every heart by his gentleness and benevolence and while carrying with him the blessings of the whole people, he returned to the prophet who overwhelmed him with praises and thanks.

Similarly in 8 A.H. when other missions failed to bring the powerful Yemeni tribe of Banu Hamdan to the folds of Islam, Ali (as) was sent the re. Ibn Khaldun says that on the first occasion he gathered the tribesmen some of whom were very learned and spoke before them of the truths which Islam preached. This sermon was so effective that some of those learned persons immediately embraced Islam.

This was followed by long discussions with others. He made them realize the rationality of the doctrines of Islam. The discussions ended in the whole-hearted conversion of Banu Hamdan, who followed their learned leaders. This news pleased the Holy Prophet (S) to the extent that he bowed down before Allah in thanks and thrice said, "Peace be to Banu Hamdan and to Ali (as). Again in 10 A.H. his sermons and preaching proved so effective that the whole province embraced Islam as one entity.

16. Appointment of Ali (as) as the Prophet's Vicegerent

It is generally supposed that the Holy Prophet (S) had not expressly designated anyone as his successor in the spiritual and temporal government. Yet this notion is framed on an incorrect apprehension of fact, for there is abundant testimony that many times the Prophet (S) had openly indicated Ali (as) as his successor (see *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 292).

(i) The first occasion was when he was ordered by Allah to openly and unreservedly invite his kith and kin to Islam. This occasion is called *Adawat al-asheera* (inviting the relatives to Islam). In the words of Rev. Sale, the Holy Prophet (S) said, "Allah has commanded me to call you unto Him; who therefore, among you will be assisting to me herein and become my brother and my vicegerent? All of them hesitating and declining the matter, Ali (as) at length rose up and declared that he would be his assistant and threatened those who should oppose him. Muhammad (S), upon this, embraced Ali (as) with great demonstration of affection and desired all those present to listen to and to obey him as his Deputy.

Thus, at this occasion of the introduction of Islam as a religion Imam Ali (as) was declared by the Holy

Prophet (S) as his Deputy. The value of Ali's support to the Holy Prophet (S) and his designation as a vicegerent at this stage is fairly well assessed by theologians, historians and thinkers of the West and the East. Refer to:

(1) Al-Tabari's Tafsir, Vol. 19, p. 68.

(2) Tafsir Ma'alim al-Tanzil, p. 663.

(3) Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal Vol. I p. 163.

(4) Mustadrak Imam Hakim Vol. 21 p. 133.

(5) Tarikh of Tabari Vol. 2 p. 216.

(6) Al-Tarikh al-Kamil, Vol. 2 p. 26.

(7) Tarikh of Abul-Fida', Vol. I p. 116.

(ii) The second occasion was at the time of Ali's conquest of Khayber. The words of the Holy Prophet (S) quite clearly, positively and expressively give his opinion about Imam Ali (as) and his desire to leave Imam Ali (as) as the guardian and the propagator of his mission. He said, "You are from me and I am from you, you will inherit me. You are unto me what Aaron was unto Moses. You will be nearest to me on the day of Judgement and next to me on the fountain of Kawthar, enmity against you is enmity against me, a war against you is a war against me. You have as much faith in Allah as I have. You are a door to me" (refer to p. 26 the Battle of Khayber). What more can one say?! Can there be anything more forceful, more eloquent, more pregnant with clear indications and more categorical than the words which the Holy Prophet (S) has used? Do they leave any shadow of doubt? Has the Holy Prophet (S) ever used such words for anybody else?

(iii) The third instance was the occasion of the invasion of Tabuk. To understand the occasion and the cause of remarks of the Holy Prophet (S) it is necessary to know the historical background of the incident. It was the summer of 9 A.H. And the Holy Prophet (S) had received the information that the Roman King was mobilizing his forces to invade the Islamic State and many Arab tribes were gathering round him. He decided to face them in their own land and not to allow them the run of the Muslim state so that they may not lay waste to the lands through which they would pass.

The situation had become very serious because there was famine in Hijaz, Ta'if and Yemen. The Hypocrites (the munafeqeen) were carrying on an intensive propaganda campaign to try to make the people believe that the famine was the sign that Allah was angry with Muslims and wants to exterminate them with the worst form of death. And in the case of a defeat against the Roman armies, there was an imminent danger of a rebellion.

It was imperative that the state should be left in the hands of a faithful and powerful guardian; otherwise,

there was every possibility of being sandwiched between the two enemies. The Holy Prophet (S), therefore, decided that Imam Ali (as) should act as a regent in his place so the world might realize that in the opinion of the Holy Prophet (S), none could look after the temporal as well as spiritual welfare of the Muslims during his absence but Ali (as). He called Ali (as) and told him that he would have to act as the last line of defense for him and Islam, saying “O Ali! Nobody could look after the center of the Muslim state but you or I. (Imam Hakim in Mustadrak, Allama ibn Abdul-Birr in Isti’ab, Shah Waliyyullah in Izalatul-Khafa’, Sibt ibn al-Jawzi in Tadhkiratul-Khawass and Allama al-Muttaqi al-Hindi in Kanzul-Ummal). Imam Ali’s stay at Medina disappointed the Amunafiqun (hypocrites) as they constituted the majority of those left behind by the Holy Prophet (S).

They claimed that the Prophet (S) had lost faith in Imam Ali (as) and had, therefore, left him behind and that it was positively certain that the Holy Prophet (S) was going to suffer a defeat. Imam Ali (as) naturally felt anxious for the Holy Prophet (S) and annoyed at aspersions against him. He left Medina immediately, met the Prophet (S) at the place of Jerf and told him all that was said at his back. Thereupon, the Holy Prophet (S) said, “Ali! They shall lie against you as they have lied against me. They have called me an epileptic, a magician, a sorcerer and a necromantic and have always portrayed me as a liar. I have appointed you as my vicegerent and my caliph over all those whom I have left behind. Are you not satisfied to realize that you are to me like Aaron was to Moses?” (Bukhari’s Sahih, Ch. 145, p. 387 and Ch. 18, p. 89).

(IV) The fourth time was (in the wording of the Spirit of Islam): “Notably the occasion of the return journey from the performance of the Farewell Pilgrimage, during a halt at a place called Khumm, the Prophet (pbuh) had assembled the people accompanying him, using the words which could leave little doubt about his intention regarding his successor, Ali (as). He (pbuh) said, “To me, Ali (as) is what Aaron was to Moses. O Allah! Be the friend of his friends and the foe of his foes; help those who help him and frustrate those who betray him”(The Spirit of Islam, p. 292).

I would be doing a great disservice to the cause of the truth and to the history of Islam if I do not sketch at least an outline of this incident. More than fifty thousand people had gathered on that occasion, and many of them narrated all that took place there. Among those narrators we find such luminaries as Abu Bakr, Umar, Othman, al-Zubair ibn al-Awwam,

Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Mother of the Faithful Aisha, Mother of the Faithful Umm Salamah, Abdullah ibn Mas’ud and Hassan ibn Thabit. The book Arjahul-Matalib cites 100 names of the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) [who testify to the Ghadir Khumm incident].

There are about 153 historians and collectors of the Holy Prophet’s traditions and authors of Sihah books, mu’jams and musnads from the 1st Century A.H. right up to 1300 A.H. who have all narrated the entire incident in detail and have drawn practically the same inference as the author of The Spirit of Islam. The book Arjahul-Matalib again gives a list of them in chronological order of 13 centuries, from which I have quoted a few names at the end of this section.

Here is the incident in more details:

In 10 A.H./632 A.D., immediately following ijjatul-Wada' (the Farewell Pilgrimage, the last pilgrimage performed by Prophet Muammed [h]), a divine order was revealed to the Prophet to convey the remaining Islamic tenets: the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the Imamate of the Twelve Infallible Imams. The Prophet called upon the faithful to accompany him on his last pilgrimage; he knew that it would be his last and that he would soon have to leave this temporary abode for the eternal one. More than one hundred and twenty thousand Muslims responded to his call.

The Prophet and his company put on the iram garbs at the appropriate time at Masjid al-Shajara, a short distance from Mecca, his birthplace, which he entered on Dhul-ijja 5, 10 A.H./March 6, 632 A.D. The Prophet's call reached Yemen where 'Ali ibn Abu alib (as) was acting as his representative. Twelve thousand Yemenite pilgrims came out headed by Ali (as) in response to the Prophet's call to accompany him on his historic Pilgrimage, bringing the total number of those early pilgrims to more than one hundred and thirty-two thousand.

The Islamic pilgrimage starts in the month of Dhul-ijja (month of the pilgrimage), the last Islamic lunar calendar month, and continues for at least ten days. First, each pilgrim dons a special garb called iram; males' iram consists of two white sheets or towels covering the upper and lower parts of the body, whereas females wear a full white cotton outfit, simple and modest. This iram reminds the pilgrim of his/her death and of the equality of all before God. All pilgrims perform the same rituals; none receives any favourable treatment or distinction on account of his status, power, or wealth. The pilgrimage starts by the awaf: the circling of the Kaba seven times. The Kaba is identified in Islamic literature as an earthly counterpart to the Almighty's Throne ('Arsh) in heaven where the angels circle it in adoration.

Likewise, in imitation of those angels, Muslim pilgrims circle the Kaba in adoration of their Lord. The awaf is followed by the sai: the pilgrims run back and forth seven times between the afa and the Marwa in commemoration of Hagar (Hajar), mother of Ishmael, frantically searching for water for her newborn son Ishmael. After that, the pilgrims drink of the well of Zamzam which had appeared miraculously for Hagar and Ishmael, wash with it or use it to make ablution for prayers at the Kaba but never to use it in the toilet; Zamzam is too sacred for such an application.

Then the pilgrims leave Mecca for Muzdalifa, Arafa, and finally Mina to perform certain rites which fall outside the scope of this book which is intended to be a historical account of the Prophet of Islam, not one of fiqh. The author is a writer, a researcher, someone who, according to a friend of mine, "insists on finding out who the foundling's father is!" But he is not a faqih. Now let us go back to our original story after having cast a glimpse at the rite of the pilgrimage in Islam.

It was at Arafa that the divine command was received by Prophet Muammad (S) to appoint 'Ali (as) as "Amirul-Mu'minin²," the Commander of the Faithful, title of the bearer of the highest temporal and religious powers in the Islamic State, one reserved solely for caliphs, those who are supposed to be the

most knowledgeable of all people of secular and religious problems and of how to solve them. Muammad (S) was also ordered to convey to Ali (as) the knowledge which the Almighty had bestowed upon him so that it would not be lost once he is dead.

In Mina, the Prophet (S) delivered two sermons in preparation of the great announcement to come. In the first, he referred to Ali's caliphate and reminded the audience of one particular adith which he had conveyed to them on various occasions and which is identified in books of hadith as "adith al-thaqalain," tradition of the two weighty things (the first being the Holy Qur'an and the second being the Prophet's Progeny, the "Ahl al-Bayt" mentioned in verse 33 of Chapter 33 [al-Azab] of the Holy Qur'an). He delivered his second sermon at Masjid al-Khaif, also located in Mina in the Meccan valley. In it, the Prophet reminded his audience of Ali's Imamate, emphasizing the necessity of disseminating the contents of his sermon, announcing that those present were duty-bound to convey it to those who were absent. In both of these sermons, the Prophet publicly vested upon Ali (as) both powers referred to above.

As soon as the rituals of the pilgrimage were completed, and to be exact on Dhul-ijja 17, 10 A.H./March 18, 632 A.D., the divine order came to the Prophet embedded in verse 67 of Chapter 5 (al-Ma'ida) quoted in the text of the Prophet's sermon to follow. The Prophet immediately ordered Bilal ibn Raba, his caller to prayers and one of his faithful aaba, to convey the following order to the faithful: "Tomorrow, nobody should lag behind but should go to Ghadir Khumm."

The word "ghadir" means "swamp," an area where rain water gathers to form a shallow lake. Ghadir Khumm is located near the crossroads of trade and pilgrimage caravans coming from Medina, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Nejd on their way to Mecca. The presence of water and a few old trees there served as a resting place for trade caravans for centuries. A mosque, called Masjid al-Ghadir, was later built on the same spot where the great gathering took place to commemorate that momentous event, an event which has unfortunately been forgotten by the vast majority of the Muslims who, by thus forgetting, forgot the most important part of their creed, one without which their faith is not complete at all according to the Prophet's sermon to follow and according to the text of the Holy Qur'an...

The announcement conveyed by Bilal was transmitted by one person to another till it reached as far as Mecca proper, and people were wondering about what it could be. They had expected the Prophet to linger a little bit longer at Mecca where the pilgrims could meet him and ask him whatever questions they had about this new institution called "ajj" and about other religious matters.

In the morning of the next day, Dhul-ijja 18, 10 A.H./March 19, 632 A.D., the Prophet and his 120,000 companions went to Ghadir Khumm, and so did 'Ali (as) with his 12,000 Yemenite pilgrims who had to change their route to the north instead of to the south where they would be home-bound. The Prophet also issued an order to four of his closest aaba, namely Selman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Miqdad ibn al-

Aswad al-Kindi and Ammar ibn Yasir, with whom the reader is already familiar, to clear the area where the old trees stood, to uproot the thorn bushes, collect the rocks and stones, and to clean the place and sprinkle it with water. Then these men took a piece of cloth which they tied between two of those trees, thus providing some shade. The Prophet told those aaba that a ceremony that would last for three continuous days would be held in that area. Then the same men piled the rocks on top of each other and made a makeshift pulpit over them of camel litters as high as the Prophet's own length. They put another piece of cloth on the pulpit which was installed in the middle of the crowd, giving the Prophet (S) an overview of the whole gathering. A man was selected to repeat loudly what the Prophet was saying so that those who stood the furthestmost would not miss a word.

The athan for the noon prayers was recited, and the congregational (jama'a) prayers were led by the Prophet (S). After that, the Prophet ascended the pulpit and signalled to Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) to stand on his right. Ali (as) did so, standing one pulpit step below the Prophet (S). Before saying anything, the Prophet (S) looked right and left to make sure that people were prepared to listen to every word of his.

The sun was so hot that people had to pull some of their outer mantles over their heads and under their feet in order to be able to somehow tolerate the heat. Finally the Prophet (S) delivered his historic sermon which he intended, as the reader will see, to be not only for the assembled crowd but for all those who were not present at that gathering and for all their offspring, one generation after another, till the Day of Judgment.

Here is the text of the Prophet's sermon. We hope it will bring the reader guidance in the life of this world and happiness and success in the life to come through the intercession of Muammed (pbuh), the one loved most by Allah, peace and blessings of the Almighty be upon him, his progeny, and true companions who obeyed him during his lifetime and after his demise and who did not forget or pretend to forget his following khuba:

Prophet's Historic Ghadir Sermaon

Here is a humble translation by our Brother Yasin T. al-Jibouri, Editor of this book, of the Prophet's historic Ghadir Khumm sermon, the English translation of which was published in book form together with the original Arabic text in Dhul-Hijjah 1419/March 1999 in the United States of America by Darul-Salam Center, Inc., P.O. Box 4355, Rockville, Maryland 20849-4355, U.S.A. The original Arabic text of this lengthy sermon was compiled from various sources by Muhammad Baqir al-Ansari, may the Almighty reward him with His Divine Unmatched

Generosity, and published by Ansariyan Publications of Qum, Islamic Republic of Iran.

All Praise is due to Allah Who is Exalted in His Unity, Near in His Uniqueness, Sublime in His Authority, Magnanimous in His Dominance. He knows everything; He subdues all creation through His might and evidence. He is Praised always and forever, Glorified and has no end. He begins and He repeats, and to

Him every matter is referred.

Allah is the Creator of everything; He dominates with His power the earth and the heavens. Holy, He is, and Praised, the Lord of the angels and of the spirits. His favors overwhelm whatever He creates, and He is the Mighty over whatever He initiates. He observes all eyes while no eye can observe Him. He is Generous, Clement, Patient. His mercy encompasses everything, and so is His giving. He never rushes His revenge, nor does He hasten the retribution they deserve. He comprehends what the breast conceals and what the conscience hides. No inner thought can be concealed from Him, nor does He confuse one with another. He encompasses everything, dominates everything, and subdues everything. Nothing is like Him. He initiates the creation from nothing; He is everlasting, living, sustaining in the truth; there is no god but He, the Omnipotent, the Wise One.

He is greater than can be conceived by visions, while He conceives all visions, the Eternal, the Knowing. None can describe Him by seeing Him, nor can anyone find out how He is, be it by his intellect or by a spoken word except through what leads to Him, the Sublime, the Mighty that He is.

I testify that He is Allah, the One Who has filled time with His Holiness, the One Whose Light overwhelms eternity, Who effects His will without consulting anyone; there is no partner with Him in His decisions, nor is He assisted in running His affairs. He shaped what He made without following a preexisting model, and He created whatever He created without receiving help from anyone, nor did doing so neither exhaust Him nor frustrated His designs. He created, and so it was, and He initiated, and it became visible. So He is Allah, the One and Only God, the One Who does whatever He does extremely well. He is the Just One Who never oppresses, the most Holy to Whom all affairs are referred.

I further testify that He is Allah before Whom everything is humbled, to Whose Greatness everything is humiliated, and to Whose Dignity everything submits. He is the King of every domain and the One Who places planets in their orbits. He controls the movements of the sun and of the moon, each circles till a certain time. He makes the night follow the day and the day follow the night, seeking it incessantly. He splits the spine of every stubborn tyrant and annihilates every mighty devil.

Never has there been any opponent opposing Him nor a peer assisting Him. He is Independent; He never begets nor is He begotten, and none can ever be His equal. He is One God, the Glorified Lord. His will is done; His word is the law. He knows, so He takes account. He causes death and gives life. He makes some poor and others rich. He causes some to smile and others to cry. He brings some nearer to Him while distancing others from Him. He withholds and He gives. The domain belongs to Him and so is all the Praise. In His hand is all goodness, and He can do anything at all.

He lets the night cover the day and the day cover the night; there is no god but He, the Sublime, the oft-Forgiving One. He responds to the supplication; He gives generously; He computes the breath; He is the Lord of the jinns and of mankind, the One Whom nothing confuses, nor is He annoyed by those who cry for His help, nor is He fed-up by those who persist. He safeguards the righteous against sinning, and He

enables the winners to win. He is the Master of the Faithful, the Lord of the Worlds Who deserves the appreciation of all those whom He created and is praised no matter what.

I praise Him and always thank Him for the ease He brings me and for the constriction, in hardship and in prosperity, and I believe in Him, in His angels, in His Books and messengers. I listen to His Command and I obey, and I initiate the doing of whatever pleases Him, and I submit to His decree hoping to acquire obedience to Him and fear of His penalty, for He is Allah against Whose designs nobody should feel secure, nor should anyone ever fear His "oppression."

I testify, even against my own soul, that I am His servant, and I bear witness that he is my Lord. I convey what He reveals to me, being cautious lest I should not do it, so a catastrophe from Him would befall upon me, one which none can keep away, no matter how great his design may be and how sincere his friendship. There is no god but He, for He has informed me that if I do not convey what He has just revealed to me in honor of Ali (as) in truth, I will not have conveyed His Message at all, and

He, the Praised and the Exalted One, has guaranteed for me to protect me from the (evil) people, and He is Allah, the One Who suffices, the Sublime. He has just revealed to me the following (verse):

In The Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

O Messenger! Convey what has (just) been revealed to you (with regard to 'Ali), and if you do not do so, you will not have conveyed His Message at all, and Allah shall protect you from (evil) people; surely Allah will not guide the unbelieving people. (Qur'an, 5:67)

O people! I have not committed any shortcoming in conveying what Allah Almighty revealed to me, and I am now going to explain to you the reason behind the revelation of this verse: Three times did **Gabriel command me on behalf of the Peace, my Lord, Who is the source of all peace, to thus make a stand in order to inform everyone, black and white, that: Ali ibn Abu alib (as) is my Brother, Wai, and successor over my nation and the Imam after me, the one whose status to me is like that of Aaron to Moses except there will be no prophet after me, and he is your master next only to Allah and to His Messenger**, and Allah has already revealed to me the same in one of the fixed verses³ of His Book saying, ***"Your Master is Allah and His Messenger and those who believe, those who keep up prayers and pay zakat even as they bow down"* (Qur'an, 5:55)**, and Ali ibn Abu alib is the one who keeps up prayers, who pays zakat even as he bows down, seeking to please Allah, the Sublime, the Almighty, on each and every occasion.

I asked Gabriel to plead to the Peace to excuse me from having to convey such a message to you, O people, due to my knowledge that the pious are few¹¹¹ while the hypocrites are many, and due to those who will blame me, and due to the trickery of those who ridicule Islam and whom Allah described in His Book as saying with their tongues contrarily to what their hearts conceal, thinking lightly of it, while it is with Allah magnanimous, and due to the abundance of their harm to me, so much so that they called me "ears" and claimed that I am so because of being so much in his (Ali's) company, always welcoming him,

loving him and being so much pleased with him till Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime One, revealed in this regard the verse saying:

"And there are some of them who harm the (feelings of the) Prophet and say: He is an ear (uthun; i.e. he always listens to Ali). Say: One who listens (to Ali) is good for you; He believes in Allah and testifies to the conviction of the believers and a mercy for those of you who believe; and those who (thus) harm the Messenger of Allah shall have a painful punishment" (Qur'an, 9:61).

Had I wished to name those who have called me so, I would have called them by their names, and I would have pointed them out. I would have singled them out and called them by what they really are, but I, by Allah, am fully aware of their affairs. Yet despite all of that, Allah insisted that I should convey what He has just revealed to me in honor of Ali.

Then the Prophet (S) recited the following verse:

O Messenger! Convey what has (just) been revealed to you (with regard to 'Ali), and if you do not do so, you will not have conveyed His Message at all, and Allah shall protect you from (evil) people. (Qur'an, 5:67)

O people! Comprehend (the implications of) what I have just said, and again do comprehend it, and be (further) informed that Allah has installed him (Ali) as your Master and Imam, obligating the Muhajirn and the Anar and those who follow them in goodness to obey him, and so must everyone who lives in the desert or in the city, who is a non-Arab or an Arab, who is a free man or a slave, who is young or old, white or black, and so should everyone who believes in His Unity. His decree shall be carried out. His (Ali's) word is binding; his command is obligating; cursed is whoever opposes him, blessed with mercy is whoever follows him and believes in him, for Allah has already forgiven him and forgiven whoever listens to him and obeys him.

O people! This is the last stand I make in such a situation; so, listen and obey, and submit to the Command of Allah, your Lord, for Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime One, is your Master and Lord, then next to Him is His Messenger and Prophet who is now addressing you, then after me Ali (as) is your Master and Imam according to the Command of Allah, your Lord, then the Imams from among my progeny, his offspring, till the Day you meet Allah and His Messenger.

Nothing is permissible except what is deemed so by Allah, His Messenger, and they (the Imams), and nothing is prohibitive except what is deemed so by Allah and His Messenger and they (the Imams). Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime One, has made me acquainted with what is permissible and what is prohibitive, and I have conveyed to you what my Lord has taught me of His Book, of what it decrees as permissible or as prohibitive.

O people! Prefer him (Ali) over all others! There is no knowledge except that Allah has divulged it to me, and all the knowledge I have learned I have divulged to Imam al-Muttaqin (leader of the righteous), and

there is no knowledge (that I know) except that I divulged it to Ali, and he is al-Imam al-Mubin (the evident Imam) whom Allah mentions in Sruat Ya-Sin:

"... and everything We have computed is in (the knowledge of) an evident Imam" (Qur'an, 36: 12).

O people! Do not abandon him, nor should you flee away from him, nor should you be too arrogant to accept his authority, for he is the one who guides to righteousness and who acts according to it. He defeats falsehood and prohibits others from acting according to it, accepting no blame from anyone while seeking to please Allah. He is the first to believe in Allah and in His Messenger; none preceded him as such. And he is the one who offered his life as a sacrifice for the Messenger of Allah and who was in the company of the Messenger of Allah while no other man was. He is the first of all people to offer prayers and the first to worship Allah with me. I ordered him, on behalf of Allah, to sleep in my bed, and he did, offering his life as a sacrifice for my sake.

O people! Prefer him (over all others), for Allah has preferred him, and accept him, for Allah has appointed him (as your leader).

O people! He is an Imam appointed by Allah, and Allah shall never accept the repentance of anyone who denies his authority, nor shall He forgive him; this is a must decree from Allah never to do so to anyone who opposes him, and that He shall torment him with a most painful torment for all time to come, for eternity; so, beware lest you should oppose him and thus enter the fire the fuel of which is the people and the stones prepared for the unbelievers.

O people! By Allah! All past prophets and messengers conveyed the glad tiding of my advent, and I, by Allah, am the seal of the prophets and of the messengers and the argument against all beings in the heavens and on earth. Anyone who doubts this commits apostasy similar to that of the early jahiliyya, and anyone who doubts anything of what I have just said doubts everything which has been revealed to me, and anyone who doubts any of the Imams doubts all of them, and anyone who doubts us shall be lodged in the fire.

O people! Allah, the most Exalted and the Almighty, has bestowed this virtue upon me out of His kindness towards Ali (as) and as a boon to Ali (as), and there is no god but He; to Him all praise belongs in all times, for eternity, and in all circumstances.

O people! Prefer Ali (as) (over all others), for he is the very best of all people after me, be they males or females, so long as Allah sends down His sustenance, so long as there are beings. Cursed and again cursed, condemned and again condemned, is anyone who does not accept this statement of mine and who does not agree to it. Gabriel himself has informed me of the same on behalf of Allah Almighty Who he said (in Gabriel's words):

"Anyone who antagonizes Ali (as) and refuses to accept his wilayat shall incur My curse upon him and My wrath." "... and let every soul consider what it has sent forth for the morrow, and be

careful of (your duty to) Allah" (Qur'an, 59:18),

"And do not make your oaths a means of deceit between you lest a foot should slip after its stability" (Qur'an, 16:94),

"Allah is fully aware of all what you do" (Qur'an, 58:13).

O people! He (Ali) is janb–Allah mentioned in the Book of Allah, the Sublime One: The Almighty, forewarning his (Ali's) adversaries, says,

"Lest a soul should say: O woe unto me for what I fell short of my duty to Allah, and most surely I was of those who laughed to scorn" (Qur'an, 39:56).

O people! Study the Qur'an and comprehend its verses, look into its fixed verses and do not follow what is similar thereof, for by Allah, none shall explain to you what it forbids you from doing, nor clarify its exegesis, other than the one whose hand I am taking and whom I am lifting to me, the one whose arm I am taking and whom I am lifting, so that I may enable you to understand that: Whoever among you takes me as his master, this Ali (as) is his master, and he is 'Ali ibn Abu alib (as), my Brother and wai, and his appointment as your wali is from Allah, the Sublime, the Exalted One, a commandment which He revealed to me.

O people! Ali (as) and the good ones from among my offspring from his loins are the Lesser Weight, while the Qur'an is the Greater One: each one of them informs you of and agrees with the other. They shall never part till they meet me at the Pool (of Kawthar). They are the Trustees of Allah over His creation, the rulers on His earth.

Indeed now I have performed my duty and conveyed the Message. Indeed you have heard what I have said and explained. Indeed Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, has said, and so have I on behalf of Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, that there is no Amirul– Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful) save this Brother of mine; no authority over a believer is permissible after me except to him.

Then the Prophet patted Ali's arm, lifting him up. Since the time when the Messenger of Allah ascended the pulpit, Amirul–Mu'minin was one pulpit step below where the Messenger of Allah had seated himself on his pulpit, while Ali (as) was on his (Prophet's) right side, one pulpit step lower, now they both appeared to the gathering to be on the same level; the Prophet lifted him up. The Prophet then raised his hands to the heavens in supplication while Ali's leg was touching the knee of the Messenger of Allah. The Prophet continued his sermon thus:

O people! This is Ali, my Brother, Wai, the one who comprehends my knowledge, and my successor over my nation, over everyone who believes in me. He is the one entrusted with explaining the Book of Allah, the most Exalted One, the Sublime, and the one who invites people to His path. He is the one who does whatever pleases Him, fighting His enemies, befriending His friends who obey Him, prohibiting

disobedience to Him. He is the successor of the Messenger of Allah and Amirul-Mu'minin, the man assigned by Allah to guide others, killer of the renegades and of those who believe in equals to Allah, those who violate the Commandments of Allah. Allah says,

"My Word shall not be changed, nor am I in the least unjust to the servants" (Qur'an, 50:29),

and by Your Command, O Lord, do I (submit and) say, O Allah! Befriend whoever befriends him (Ali) and be the enemy of whoever antagonizes him; support whoever supports him and abandon whoever abandons him; curse whoever disavows him, and let Your Wrath descend on whoever usurps his right.

O Lord! You revealed a verse in honor of Ali, Your wali, in its explanation and to effect Your own appointment of him this very day did You say,

"This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour on you, and chosen for you Islam as a religion" (Qur'an, 5:3);

"And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers" (Qur'an, 3:85).

Lord! I implore You to testify that I have conveyed (Your Message).

O people! Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, has perfected your religion through his (Ali's) Imamate; so, whoever rejects him as his Imam or rejects those of my offspring from his loins who assume the same status (as Imams) till the Day of Judgment when they shall all be displayed before Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, these are the ones whose (good) deeds shall be nil and void in the life of this world and in the hereafter, and in the fire shall they be lodged forever, "... their torture shall not be decreased, nor shall they be given a respite" (Qur'an, 2:162).

O people! Here is Ali, the one who has supported me more than anyone else among you, the one who most deserves my gratitude, the one who is closest of all of you to me and the one who is the very dearest to me. Both Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, and I are pleased with him, and no verse of the Holy Qur'an expressing Allah's Pleasure except that he is implied therein, nor has any verse of praise been revealed in the Qur'an except that he is implied therein, nor has the Lord testified to Paradise in the (Qur'anic) Chapter starting with ***"Has there not come over man a long period of time when he was nothing (not even) mentioned?" (Qur'an, 76:1)*** nor was this Chapter revealed except in his praise.

O people! He is the one who supports the religion of Allah, who argues on behalf of the Messenger of Allah. He is the pious, the pure, the guide, the one rightly guided. Your Prophet is the best of all prophets, and your wai is the best of all wais, and his offspring are the best of wais.

O people! Each prophet's progeny is from his own loins whereas mine is from the loins of Amirul-Mu'minin Ali.

O people! Iblis caused Adam to be dismissed from the garden through envy; so, do not envy him lest your deeds should be voided and lest your feet should slip away, for Adam was sent down to earth after having committed only one sin, and he was among the elite of Allah's creation. How, then, will be your case, and you being who you are, and among you are enemies of Allah?

Indeed, none hates Ali (as) except a wretch, and none accepts Ali's wilayat except a pious person. None believes in him except a sincere mu'min, and in honor of Ali (as) was the Chapter of Ar (Ch. 103) revealed, I swear to it by Allah: **"In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. I swear by time that most surely man is in loss" (Qur'an, 103:1-2)** except Ali (as) who believed and was pleased with the truth and with perseverance.

O people! I have sought Allah to be my Witness and have conveyed my Message to you, and the Messenger is obligated only to clearly convey (his Message).

O people! "Fear Allah as He ought to be feared, and do not die except as Muslims" (Qur'an, 3:102).

O people! "... Believe in what We have revealed, verifying what you have, before We alter faces then turn them on their backs or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath" (Qur'an, 4:47).

By Allah! He did not imply anyone in this verse except a certain band of my aaba whom I know by name and by lineage, and I have been ordered (by my Lord) to pardon them; so, let each person deal with Ali (as) according to what he finds in his heart of love or of hatred.

O people! The noor from Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, flows through me then through Ali ibn Abu alib (as), then in the progeny that descends from him till al-Qa'im al-Mehdi (as), who shall effect the justice of Allah, and who will take back any right belonging to us because Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, made us ujjat over those who take us lightly, the stubborn ones, those who act contrarily to our word, who are treacherous, who are sinners, who are oppressors, who are usurpers, from the entire world.

O people! I warn you that I am the Messenger of Allah; messengers before me have already passed away; so, should I die or should I be killed, are you going to turn upon your heels? And whoever turns upon his heels shall not harm Allah in the least, and Allah shall reward those who are grateful, those who persevere. Ali (as) is surely the one described with perseverance and gratitude, then after him are my offspring from his loins.

O people! Do not think that you are doing me a favour by your accepting Islam. Nay! Do not think that you are doing Allah such a favour lest He should void your deeds, lest His wrath should descend upon you, lest He should try you with a flame of fire and brass; surely your Lord is ever-watchful.

O people! There shall be Imams after me who shall invite people to the fire, and they shall not be helped

on the Day of Judgment.

O people! Allah and I are both clear of them.

O people! They and their supporters and followers shall be in the lowest rung of the fire; miserable, indeed, is the resort of the arrogant ones. Indeed, these are the folks of the saifa; so, let each one of you look into his saifa!

This reference to the saifa has been overlooked by most people with the exception of a small band, and we will, Insha–Allah, shed a light on this saifa later on. The Prophet continued his historic sermon thus:

O people! I am calling for it to be an Imamate and a succession confined to my offspring till the Day of Judgment, and I have conveyed only what I have been commanded (by my Lord) to convey to drive the argument home against everyone present or absent and on everyone who has witnessed or who has not, who is already born or he is yet to be born; therefore, let those present here convey it to those who are absent, and let the father convey it to his son, and so on till the Day of Judgment.

And they shall make the Imamate after me a property, a usurpation; may Allah curse the usurpers who usurp⁴, and it is then that you, O jinns and mankind, will get the full attention of the One Who shall cause a flame of fire and brass to be hurled upon you, and you shall not achieve any victory!

O people! Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, is not to let you be whatever you want to be except so that He may distinguish the bad ones from among you from the good, and Allah is not to make you acquainted with the unknown.

O people! There shall be no town that falsifies except that Allah shall annihilate it on account of its falsehood before the Day of Judgment, and He shall give al–Imam al–Mehdi (as) authority over it, and surely Allah's promise is true.

O people! Most of the early generations before you have strayed, and by Allah, He surely annihilated the early generations, and He shall annihilate the later ones. Allah Almighty has said,

"Did We not destroy the former generations? Then did We follow them up with later ones. Even thus shall We deal with the guilty. Woe on that Day to the rejecters!" (Qur'an, 77: 16–19).

O people! Allah has ordered me to do and not to do, and I have ordered Ali (as) to do and not to do, so he learned what should be done and what should not; therefore, you should listen to his orders so that you may be safe, and you should obey him so that you may be rightly guided. Do not do what he forbids you from doing so that you may acquire wisdom.

Agree with him, and do not let your paths be different from his.

O people! I am al–ira al–Mustaqeem (the Straight Path) of Allah whom He commanded you to follow,

and it is after me 'Ali (as) then my offspring from his loins, the Imams of Guidance: they guide to the truth and act accordingly.

Then the Prophet (S) recited the entire text of Surat al-Fatia and commented by saying:

It is in my honor that this (Sura) was revealed, including them (the Imams) specifically; they are the friends of Allah for whom there shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve; truly the Party of Allah are the winners.

Indeed, it is their enemies who are the impudent ones, the deviators, the brethren of Satan; they inspire each other with embellished speech out of their haughtiness.

Indeed, their (Imams') friends are the ones whom Allah, the Exalted One, the Great, mentions in His Book saying,

"You shall not find a people who believe in Allah and in the latter Day befriending those who act in opposition to Allah and to His Prophet, even though they may be their own fathers or sons or brothers or kinsfolk; these are they into whose hearts He has impressed conviction" (Qur'an, 58:22).

Indeed, their (Imam's) friends are the mu'mins (believers) whom Allah, the Exalted One, the Sublime, describes as:

"Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with iniquity, those are the ones who shall have the security, and they are the rightly guided" (Qur'an, 6:82).

Indeed, their friends are those who believed and never doubted. Indeed, their friends are the ones who shall enter Paradise in peace and security; the angels shall receive them with welcome saying, "Peace be upon you! Enter it and reside in it forever!"

Indeed, their friends shall be rewarded with Paradise where they shall be sustained without having to account for anything..

Indeed, their enemies are the ones who shall be hurled into the fire.

Indeed, their enemies are the ones who shall hear the exhalation of hell as it increases in intensity, and they shall see it sigh. Indeed, their enemies are the ones thus described by Allah:

"Whenever a nation enters, it shall curse its sister..." (Qur'an, 7:38).

Indeed, their enemies are the ones whom Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, describes thus:

"Whenever a group is cast into it, its keepers shall ask them: Did any warner not come to you? They shall say: Yea! Indeed, there came to us a warner but we rejected (him) and said: Allah has

not revealed anything; you are only in a great error. And they shall say: Had we but listened or pondered, we would not have been among the inmates of the burning fire. So they shall acknowledge their sins, but far will be (forgiveness) from the inmates of the burning fire" (Qur'an, 67:8-11).

Indeed, their friends are the ones who fear their Lord in the unseen; forgiveness shall be theirs and a great reward.

O people! What a difference it is between the fire and the great reward!

O people! Our enemy is the one whom Allah censures and curses, whereas our friend is everyone praised and loved by Allah.

O people! I am the Warner (nathir) and Ali (as) is the one who brings glad tidings (bashir).

O people! I am the one who warns (Mundhir) while Ali (as) is the guide (hadi).

O people! I am a Prophet (nabi) and Ali (as) is the successor (wai).

O people! I am a Messenger (rasul) and Ali (as) is the Imam and the Wai after me, and so are the Imams after him from among his offspring. Indeed, I am their father, and they shall descend from his loins.

Indeed, the seal of the Imams from among us is al-Qa'im al-Mehdi. He, indeed, is the one who shall come out so that the creed may prevail. He, indeed, is the one who shall seek revenge against the oppressor. He, indeed, is the one who conquers the forts and demolishes them. He, indeed, is the one who subdues every tribe from among the people of polytheism and the one to guide it.

He is the one who shall seek redress for all friends of Allah. He is the one who supports the religion of Allah. He ever derives (his knowledge) from a very deep ocean. He shall identify each man of distinction by his distinction and every man of ignorance by his ignorance. He shall be the choicest of Allah's beings and the chosen one. He is the heir of all (branches of) knowledge, the one who encompasses every perception. He conveys on behalf of his Lord, the Exalted and the Sublime, who points out His miracles. He is the wise, the one endowed with wisdom, the one upon whom (Divine) authority is vested.

Glad tidings of him have been conveyed by past generations, yet he is the one who shall remain as a ujjah, and there shall be no ujjah after him nor any right except with him, nor any noor except with him.

None, indeed, shall subdue him, nor shall he ever be vanquished. He is the friend of Allah on His earth, the judge over His creatures, the custodian of what is evident and what is hidden of His.

O people! I have explained (everything) for you and enabled you to comprehend it, and this Ali (as) shall after me explain everything to you.

At the conclusion of my khuba, I shall call upon you to shake hands with me to swear your allegiance to him and to recognize his authority, then to shake hands with him after you have shaken hands with me.

I had, indeed, sworn allegiance to Allah, and Ali (as) had sworn allegiance to me, and I on behalf of Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, I require you to swear the oath of allegiance to him:

"Surely those who swear (the oath of) allegiance to you do but swear allegiance to Allah; the hand of Allah is above their hands; therefore, whoever reneges (from his oath), he reneges only to the injury of his own soul, and whoever fulfills what he has covenanted with Allah, He will grant him a mighty reward" (Qur'an, 48: 10).

O people! The pilgrimage (Hajj) and the umra are among Allah's rituals;

"So whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House or pays a visit (to it), there is no blame on him if he goes round them [afa and Marwa] both" (Qur'an, 2: 158).

O people! Perform your pilgrimage to the House, for no members of a family went there except that they became wealthy, and receive glad tidings! None failed to do so except that their lineage was cut-off and were impoverished.

O people! No believer stands at the standing place [at Arafa] except that Allah forgives his past sins till then; so, once his pilgrimage is over, he resumes his deeds.

O people! Pilgrims are assisted, and their expenses shall be replenished, and Allah never suffers the rewards of the doers of good to be lost.

O people! Perform your pilgrimage to the House by perfecting your religion and by delving into fiqh, and do not leave the sacred places except after having repented and abandoned (the doing of anything prohibited).

O people! Uphold prayers and pay the zakat as Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, commanded you; so, if time lapses and you were short of doing so or you forgot, 'Ali (as) is your wali and he will explain for you. He is the one whom Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, appointed for you after me as the custodian of His creation. He is from me and I am from him, and he and those who will succeed him from my progeny shall inform you of anything you ask them about, and they shall clarify whatever you do not know. alal and aram things are more than I can count for you now or explain, for a commandment to enjoin what is permissible and a prohibition from what is not permissible are both on the same level, so I was ordered (by my Lord) to take your oath of allegiance and to make a covenant with you to accept what I brought you from Allah, the Exalted One and the Sublime, with regards to 'Ali (as) Amirul-Mu'minin and to the wais after him who are from me and from him, a standing Imamate whose seal is al-Mehdi till the Day he meets Allah Who decrees and Who judges.

O people! I never refrained from informing you of everything permissible or prohibitive; so, do remember

this and safeguard it and advise each other to do likewise; do not alter it; do not substitute it with something else.

I am now repeating what I have already said: Uphold the prayers and pay the zakat and enjoin righteousness and forbid abomination.

The peak of enjoining righteousness is to resort to my speech and to convey it to whoever did not attend it and to order him on my behalf to accept it and to (likewise) order him not to violate it, for it is an order from Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, and there is no knowledge of enjoining righteousness nor prohibiting abomination except that it is with a ma'oom Imam.

O people! The Qur'an informs you that the Imams after him are his (Ali's) descendants, and I have already informed you that they are from me and from him, for Allah says in His Book,

"And he made it a word to continue in his posterity so that they may return" (Qur'an, 43:28)

while I have said: "You shall not stray as long as you uphold both of them (simultaneously)." O people! (Uphold) piety, (uphold) piety, and be forewarned of the Hour as Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, has said,

"O people! Guard (yourselves) against (punishment from) your Lord; surely the violence of the Hour is a grievous thing" (Qur'an, 22: 1).

Remember death, resurrection, the judgment, the scales, and the account before the Lord of the Worlds, and (remember) the rewards and the penalty. So whoever does a good deed shall be rewarded for it, and whoever commits a sin shall have no place in the Gardens.

O people! You are more numerous than (it is practical) to shake hands with me all at the same time, and Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, commanded me to require you to confirm what authority I have vested upon 'Ali (as) Amirul-Mu'minin and to whoever succeeds him of the Imams from me and from him, since I have just informed you that my offspring are from his loins.

You, therefore, should say in one voice: "We hear, and we obey; we accept and we are bound by what you have conveyed to us from our Lord and yours with regard to our Imam Ali (as), Amirul-Mu'minin, and to the Imams, your sons from his loins. We swear the oath of allegiance to you in this regard with our hearts, with our souls, with our tongues, with our hands.

According to it shall we live, and according to it shall we die, and according to it shall we be resurrected. We shall not alter anything or substitute anything with another, nor shall we doubt nor deny nor suspect, nor shall we violate our covenant nor abrogate the pledge. You admonished us on behalf of Allah with regard to Ali (as), Amirul-Mu'minin, and to the Imams whom you mentioned to be from your offspring from among his descendants after him: al-assan and al-Hussain (as), and to whoever is appointed (as such) by Allah after them. The covenant and the pledge are taken from us, from our hearts, from our

souls, from our tongues, from our conscience, from our hands.

Whoever does so by his handshake, it shall be so, or otherwise testified to it by his tongue, and we do not seek any substitute for it, nor shall Allah see our souls deviating therefrom. We shall convey the same on your behalf to anyone near and far of our offspring and families, and we implore Allah to testify to it, and surely Allah suffices as the Witness and you, too, shall testify for us."

O people! What are you going to say?! Allah knows every sound and the innermost of every soul; "Whoever chooses the right guidance, it is for his own soul that he is rightly guided, and whoever strays, it is only to its detriment that he goes astray" (Qur'an, 17:15).

O people! Swear the oath of allegiance to Allah, and swear it to me, and swear it to Ali (as), Amirul-Mu'minin, and to al-assan and al-ussain (as), and to the Imams from their offspring in the life of this world and in the hereafter, a word that shall always remain so. Allah shall annihilate anyone guilty of treachery and be merciful upon everyone who remains true to his word:

"Whoever reneges (from his oath), he reneges only to the harm of his own soul, and whoever fulfills what he has covenanted with Allah, He will grant him a mighty reward" (Qur'an, 48:10).

O people! Repeat what I have just told you to, and greet Ali (as) with the title of authority of "Amirul-Mu'minin" and say:

"We hear, and we obey, O Lord! Your forgiveness (do we seek), and to You is the eventual course" (Qur'an, 2:285),

and you should say:

"All praise is due to Allah Who guided us to this, and we would not have found the way had it not been for Allah Who guided us" (Qur'an, 7:43).

O people! The merits of 'Ali ibn Abu alib (as) with Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, the merits which are revealed in the Qur'an, are more numerous than I can recount in one speech; so, whoever informs you of them and defines them for you, you should believe him.

O people! Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger and Ali (as) and the Imams to whom I have already referred shall attain a great victory.

O people! Those foremost from among you who swear allegiance to him and who pledge to obey him and who greet him with the greeting of being the Commander of the Faithful are the ones who shall win the Gardens of Felicity.

O people! Say what brings you the Pleasure of Allah, for if you and all the people of the earth disbelieve, it will not harm Allah in the least.

O Lord! Forgive the believers through what I have conveyed, and let Your Wrath descend upon those who renege, the apostates, and all Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

The Holy Prophet (S) was returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage and had reached the place Khumm, (which in the words of the famous historian and geographer Ibn Khallikan is a valley lying between Mecca and Medina and in the neighborhood of Juhfa). It contains a pond, Ghadir, near which the Prophet (S) pronounced his invocation. This took place on the 18th of Dhul-Hijja and the 18th of this month of the year 10 which coincided with March 18, 632 A.D., and this date has been ever since the anniversary of the Feast of Ghadir (Eidul-Ghadir).

There, the Holy Prophet (S) suddenly stopped his camel and said that just then a message from Allah was revealed to him which must immediately be conveyed to the Muslims. He dispatched messengers towards those who had gone ahead and those who were following him leisurely to come back or to hurry up and join him at once. When all of them were gathered he performed the noon-prayers in that blazing hot summer sun. A pulpit was erected for him and from this eminence he preached a sermon which is rightly considered as a masterpiece of Arabic literature and a brief survey of what the Holy Prophet (S) had taught and achieved for the Muslims.

Then he said that he had just then received the revelation which said, "O Messenger! Proclaim the whole of what which hath been sent down to you from Your Master, for if you dost it not, it will be as if you hast not all performed the duty of His Prophethood. And Allah will protect you (thy mission) from evil men, verily Allah guides not the unbelievers," and he was standing there to convey that message to the Muslims and to perform the duty he was ordered to perform.

Continuing the sermon, he said, "O people! Shortly I shall be called (to Heaven), and if I go back, I shall have to give an account as to how I have conveyed His Message to you and you (in your turn) will also be asked as to how you have accepted and carried out my teachings. Now tell me what you will say." All the gathering as one man declared, "O Messenger of Allah! We testify and declare that you have conveyed the message of Allah in full details, you have striven your utmost to guide us to the right path and taught us to follow it.

You were most kind to us and you never wished for us but our good, may Allah repay you for all that." Thereupon, he asked the gathering, "Do you not testify that there is no god but Allah, that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger, that there is Heaven and Hell? Do testify that death will overtake every one of you, that you will be brought back from your graves, that the day of resurrection will surely dawn and human beings will be resurrected from their graves to account for their deeds?" The gathering declared, "We believe and testify to all of this. Hearing this declaration he said, "I am leaving among you two of the most important things worthy of obedience, the Holy Qur'an and my trat, progeny. Take care how you treat them; they will not separate from each other till they reach me on the Fountain of Kawthar."

Then said he, “The Almighty Allah is my Master (mawla) and I am the master of all Muslims and have more right and power on their lives than they themselves; do you believe in this assertion of mine?” In one voice, they all replied, “Yes, O Messenger of Allah!” Thrice he asked the same question and thrice he received the same reply.

On this solemn affirmation he said, “Hear and remember that to whomever I am a Master (mawla), Ali (as) is his master (mawla). He is to me what Aaron was to Moses. O Allah Almighty! Be the friend of his friends and the foe of his foes! Lord! Help whoever helps him and frustrate those who betray him.” Having said all of this, he raised Imam Ali (as) so that the gathering could have a look at the man who would be master of those who believe in the Holy Prophet (S) as their master. There upon, the Holy Prophet (S) received the following congratulatory Qur’anic revelation: “This day have I perfected your religion for you, filled the measure of my blessings upon you, and I am pleased with your submitting to His Will alone (Islam) as your religion.”

Having performed this ceremony and received the above revelation, the Holy Prophet (S) came down from the pulpit, prostrated before Allah in prayers and ordered a tent to be put up. In this tent, Imam Ali (as) was took his seat and people were ordered to pay homage to him and to address him as Amir al-Mu’minin (as) (Commander of the Faithful). The first person to congratulate and to swear the oath of allegiance was ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab who said, “I congratulate you, O Ali! Today, you have become my mawla (Master) and Master of every Muslim man and woman.”

For more details, refer to the following references:

- 1) The Musnad of Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal (Vol. 5, p. 281)
- 2) Imam al-Ghazali in Siyar al-lamin

In addition to these two references, allama al-Amini wrote 11 volumes on this incident, choosing Al-Ghadir as the title of his encyclopedia.

The remarks of Imam al-Ghazali about this event and the inferences which he has drawn are instructive readings. If I have room in this book at my disposal, I shall add them as a separate index; otherwise, Siyar al-lamin may suffice as a reference.

Here is a list of some of the famous 153 authors and books which contain details of the above historical event:

- 1) Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (125 A.H.)
- 2) Muhammad ibn Ishaq (152 A.H.)
- 3) Ibn Rahooya (238 A.H.)

- 4) Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal, Musnad, Vol. 5, p. 281 (243 A.H.)
- 5) Jarir al-Tabari (310 A.H.)
- 6) Al-Tirmidhi (320 A.H.)
- 7) Imam Hakim (Mustadrak) (400 A.H.)
- 8) Imam al-Ghazali (Siyar al-lamin) (505 A.H.)
- 9) Sibt ibn al-Jawzi (654 A.H.)
- 10) Ibn Subbaq al-Malekee (855 A.H.)
- 11) Sayyuti (1011 A.H.)
- 12) Shaikh Abdul-Haqq muhaddith Dahlawi (1052 A.H.)
- 13) Shah Waliyullah muhaddith Dahlawi (1176 A.H.)
- 14) Allama Muhammad Mu'in (1280 A.H.)

A Brief Narrative Of Imam Ali's Life From The Hijra To The Death Of The Holy Prophet (S)

1 A.H. To 40 A.H.

When the Holy Prophet (S) left his house at Mecca in the night and Ali (as) was found in his bed, the tribesmen of Quraish at first thought of killing him, but when they found him ready to defend himself they gave up idea and dispersed in search of the Holy Prophet (S).

Ali (as), as per orders of the Holy Prophet (S), stayed three days at Mecca and handed back to their owners all the articles which were entrusted to the Holy Prophet (S) for custody. Most of their owners were his enemies. He left the city in broad daylight.

He was entrusted by the Holy Prophet (S) for the safe transport of the Holy Prophet's daughter, Fatima (as), the daughter of Hamzah, another Fatima, his own mother, a third Fatima and his aunt, the daughter of Abdul-Muttalib, a fourth Fatima (as). The tribesmen of Quraish wanted to prevent the departure of these four ladies. Eight prominent people came out to fight. Ali (as) fought single handed with them.

He killed Junah with a stroke of his sword and scattered the rest and continued the journey. On account of scarcity of mounts he had to travel on foot and thus he reached Medina with bleeding feet. Awaiting the arrival of Imam Ali (as) the Holy

Prophet (S) was staying at Quba', two miles away from Medina, when he reached Quba', on the 12th of Rabi' al-Awwal (probably the end of June) the Holy Prophet (S) embraced him, dressed his bleeding feet and entered Medina along with him.

Before his migration to Medina, the Holy Prophet (S) had created a bond of brotherhood between the immigrant Muslims and their Medina supporters. He had fraternized Abu Bakr to the Imam (as) Umar, Othman to Abdul-Rahman ibn Awf, the Imam (as) Hamza to Zaid ibn Haresa and Talhah to al-Zubair. On that occasion he had fraternized Imam Ali (as) to himself, saying, "O Ali! You are my Brother in this world as well as in the next (Tarikh al-Khamis Vol. I p. 398).

1 A.H

During the five months following his arrival at Medina, as indicated above, the Prophet (k) created a fraternity between the Muhajirun (the immigrants) with the Ansars (the supporting citizens of Medina). On that occasion, he again called Ali (as) and said, "O Ali (as) you are my brother in this world and hereafter. The historian ibn Hisham says, "The Holy Prophet (S) caught the hand of Imam Ali (as) and said, "he alone is my brother. Thus the Messenger of Allah, who was actually the leader of all the prophets as well as of all the pious men of the world and who had no parallel among human beings by fraternizing with Imam Ali (as), showed that Ali (as) also had no parallel among mankind except the Holy Prophet (S). (Seerath al ibn Hisham Vol. 2, Abul-Fida' Vol. I p. 127, Mustadrak of Imam Hakim Vol. 21 and Fath al-Bari, commentary of Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 7, p. 211).

2 A.H.

During the 2nd year of Hijra Imam Ali's marriage took place with the Holy Prophet's daughter Fatima (as). The Holy Prophet (S) was receiving many offers for his daughter from very rich people of Medina, from some of the Muhajirun and from chiefs of mighty clans of Arabia. He had refused even to consider these offers and sometime felt annoyed at them. At the end he closed the door by saying that he was awaiting the orders of Allah. The book Usd al-Ghaba fi Tamyeez al-Sahaba, gives a detailed account of these offers and the way of refusal by the Holy Prophet (S). Some of the Ansars suggested to Imam Ali (as) to place a proposal for himself before the Holy Prophet (S).

Imam Ali (as) went before him feeling shy and modest. This was the first time in his life that he talked reservedly to a man who was like a father unto him and to whom he was like a dear son. When the Holy Prophet (S) heard the proposal he was so pleased that he smiled and said (it is a welcome and happy proposal) Tarikh al-Khamis, Vol. I p. 407, Ibn Sa'd, Vol. 8, pp. 11, 12 and Usd al-Ghaba).

The Holy Prophet (S) took the consent of Fatima (as) for this proposal. The marriage ceremony was very simple and without pomp and ostentation. There was a sermon from the Holy Prophet (S) in which he praised Allah mentioning some of His attributes and citing verses of the Holy Qur'an and concluding with the remarks that he was ordered by Allah to give Fatima (as) into marriage with Imam Ali (as).

This was followed by a khutba from Imam Ali (as), praising Allah and the Holy Prophet (S) and desiring the gathering to witness his marriage with Fatima (as), the daughter of Holy Prophet (S). After this happy ceremony somebody reminded the Holy Prophet (S) of his late companion in life the mother of Fatima (as), Khadija and he said, “Khadija! Where is Khadija?! Who can be like Khadija?! She testified for me when the world was falsely accusing me as a liar. She relieved me of much of my weight, she was my partner in my work and she helped me when others were creating obstruction in my mission.”

After reaching Medina, the Holy Prophet (S) stayed in the house of Kulthum ibn Hadam for seven months and Imam Ali (as) was staying with him. When the Holy Prophet (S) finished the construction of mosque he built houses for his wives around it and in the center of them he built a house for Imam Ali (as) (Bukhari’s Sira, Ch. 14 p. 387).

Following his example, many of his companions except Abu Bakr built their houses around the mosque. Abu Bakr was staying in the locality of Banu Abd Awf where the marriages of both of his daughters took place and later on he shifted to Sukh (Bukhari, Vol. 1). The doors of all the houses built around the mosque opened into the mosque. One day, the Holy Prophet (S) ordered that except the doors of his houses and that of Ali (as) all the other doors should be closed. Some of the companions requested him to allow them to keep a small window open. He replied, “No, not a pin hole, Allah so willed it” (refer to: Imam Ahmed’s Musnad, the Mustadrak of Imam Hakim, the Khasa’is of al-Nisa’i).

In the year 2 A.H. the Battle of Badr took place.

3 A.H.

In the year 3 A.H. the first child to Imam Ali (as) and Fatima (as) was born and he was named Hassan (as) by the Holy Prophet (S).

In the same year (3 A.H.), the Battle of Uhud took place (Refer to Section 15, p. 22) which was followed by the dispatch of an expeditionary force to Hamra’ul-Asad under Imam Ali (as).

4 A.H

In the year 4 A.H. Imam Ali (as) and Fatima (as) had the second child Hussain (Imam Hussain [as]) who was also named by the Holy Prophet (S). In the same year a battle took place with Banu Nazir and Imam Ali (as) brought it to a successful end and Banu Nazir were forced to vacate their fortress.

5 A.H.

In the year 5 A.H. three battles took place, the Battle with Banu Mostaliq, the Battle of Khandaq (moat) and the Battle with Banu Anzah. In all of them, Ali (as) was the Commander of the army. The most important of them was the Battle of Khundaq (which I have narrated in Section 15 p. 23).

6 A.H.

In the year 6 A.H. an expedition to Fadak was sent under the command of Imam Ali (as) and without a battle or skirmish he brought the whole province under control of the Holy Prophet (S).

In Dhul-Qi'da of this year, the Holy Prophet (S), along with fourteen hundred Muslims left for Mecca with the intention of hajj (pilgrimage). He had no desire to fight anybody and had left all the armaments at Medina. When the tribesmen of Quraish came to know about this intending pilgrimage they refused to allow the Holy Prophet (S) to enter Mecca. Khalid ibn al-Walid came out with a force of two hundred well-equipped cavalry men to obstruct the Holy Prophet (S) and if necessary to fight over the issue. At an oasis called Hdaybiya the opponents faced each other. A chieftain named 'Urwa from Quraish came out to discuss the situation with the Holy Prophet (S) and instead of a battle, a treaty was arranged and it was written by Imam Ali (as). The last clause of the treaty was that the present intention of the pilgrimage would be given up until the following year although the Holy Prophet (S) and Muslims could come for Umra.

7 A.H

In the year 7 A.H. two battles took place, the Khayber and the Wadi al-Qura. The more important of them was Khayber which I have accounted in section 15 p. 25.

In the same year the Holy Prophet (S) along with Muslims went to perform the umra, it was very peaceful mission. The Holy Prophet (S) and many of the Muslims had their wives and children with them. The umra was performed without incident.

8 A.H.

In Islamic History, the year 8 A.H. held some important events in its unfolding.

The first of them was the Liberation of Mecca. The terms of the treaty of Hdaybiya were dishonored by the tribesmen of Quraish. Within two years of the treaty, they killed twenty persons from Banu Khuza'a's clan without any justifiable reason. Representatives of the clan came to the Holy Prophet (S), asking for his promised support. He was annoyed at this flagrant dishonoring of the treaty and said, "I am not helped if I do not help them".

The arrangement for the invasion of Mecca was being carried on by the Muslims. In the meanwhile, Hatib, a companion of the Holy Prophet (S) who was with him in the battle of Badr, wrote a letter to his family, informing them of the intention of Muslims. This espionage, under the orders of the Holy Prophet (S) was detected by Imam Ali (as) and he brought this letter to the Holy Prophet (S). It was being sent through an Abyssinian slave girl. Hatib confessed his crime and was mercifully pardoned by the Holy Prophet (S) (Bukhari).

When all the arrangements were ready, the army of invasion, numbering ten thousand, marched towards Mecca. The command of the army this time was given to Sa'd ibn Abadah al-Ansari, with orders to enter Mecca as the advancing party. Sa'd entering Mecca, saying, "Today is going to be a big day, a day of retaliation, a day when Mecca will be looted." Hearing this, Abbas, uncle of the Holy Prophet (S), came to the

Holy Prophet (S) and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Sa'd has very serious intentions against Quraish. He may carry on a massacre." The Holy Prophet (S) called Imam Ali (as) and said, "O Ali (as)! Go and take the command from Sa'd and do what is needed. He will not be unhappy in handing over the command to you and to you in particular." Imam Ali (as) took over the command of the expedition and entered the city, declared perfect amity and peace and waited for the Holy Prophet (S). When the Holy Prophet (S) entered Mecca, he went straight to the Ka'ba and started removing the idols placed there. Some of them were placed on a very high platform where his hands would not reach, he asked Ali (as) to mount on his back and remove the idols. Ali (as) obeyed the order, mounted on his back and was removing the idols when the Holy Prophet (S) asked "O Ali (as)! how do you find yourself? Imam Ali (as) replied,

"O Messenger of Allah! I find myself on such an eminent place that I feel as if my head is resting on the Empyrean of Allah the Almighty. Thereupon, the Holy Prophet (S) replied "O Ali (as), how fortunate you are, doing the work of Allah and how fortunate I am that I am bearing your burden (Imam Ahmed's Musnad, Vol. I p. 151).

At the occasion, a poet presented a praise in praise of Imam Ali (as).

I am asked to praise Ali (as) in verses,
Because recital of his praises will
Release a man from Hell.
I replied to them, how can I praise
A man whose attributes are so sublime
That men got confused over these attributes
And started apotheosizing him.
He has placed his foot at such an eminent
Place, that according to the Holy Prophet (S),
It is the place on which, on the night of Mi'raj,
Allah has placed His hand of Grace and Mercy.

Hearing this praise, the Holy Prophet (S) rewarded the poet handsomely.

The second important event was the massacre of Banu Jazimah at the hands of Khalid ibn al-Walid and reparations carried by Imam Ali (as) under orders of the Holy Prophet (S) (Refer to section 15 p. 28).

During the month of Shawwal of that year, the Muslims faced certain powerful tribes of Arabs on the battlefield of Hunain. Ali (as) again secured a victory for them (Refer to section 15 p. 28). Hunain was

followed by an expedition to Thaef under the command of Imam Ali (as).

Those who had run away from Hunain had gathered there and wanted to measure their strength once again. The commander of their army who was the chiefs of Banu Zaigham clan was killed by Imam Ali (as), which broke the back of resistance and various parties of hostile clans started dispersing. Seeing the Holy Prophet (S) raised the siege and brought the expedition to an end.

In the same year Imam Ali (as) was sent to Yemen on a missionary service. He carried on this work so successfully and his speeches there proved so effective that the tribe of Banu Hamdan embraced Islam as one entity (refer to Section 15, p. 29 of the same reference).

9 A.H.

The 9th year of the Hijra relates four important incidents of Imam Ali's life.

The first was the expedition to Thatul-Salasil. Ali (as) brought it to a successful end, defeated the clans gathered there to invade Medina and brought the happy news to the Holy Prophet (S). The Messenger of Allah came out of Medina to welcome the warrior. Ali (as) was riding a horse at the head of his army, saw the Holy Prophet (S) walking towards him and jumped from his horse. The Prophet (S) told him, "Keep on riding, do not dismount, Allah and His Prophet (S) are really pleased with your services." The Prophet (S) made him remount his horse and he walked along with the horse (refer to Hamra'ul-Ashira and Ma'arijul-Nubuwwa).

The second event was the Holy Prophet's expedition in person to Tabuk, which I have narrated in Section 16, p. 30.

The third important event in the life of Ali (as) and in the history of Islam was the reading of the Chapter (Sura) Bara'at before the infidels of Mecca. This Sura declares that Allah and his Messenger in the future will have nothing to do with the infidels and polytheists. All the treaties which existed till then were now annulled and cancelled. No polytheist or infidel would, in the future, be allowed to enter the city of Mecca or the precincts of Kaba.

Imam Hakim in his Mustadrak, Vol. 3, p. 32, Al-Riadul-Nadira, Vol. 2, p. 203, the Musnad of Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal, Vol. I p. 331, Al-Isaba fi Ma'rifatil-Sahaba, Vol. IV, p. 270 and Izalatul-Khafa', Section 2, p. 261 say that the Holy Prophet (S) first ordered Abu Bakr to convey this Sura to Mecca and to read it at the Kaba. But immediately after him he sent Imam Ali (as) to replace Abu Bakr on the mission. When Abu Bakr complained about this change, the Messenger of Allah replied, "I have done it under orders of Allah which came explicitly that either I should perform this duty or somebody who is like me."

The fourth event took place in Najran, a city in the province of Yemen. It was center of the Christian Missionary activities in Southern Arabia. The Holy Prophet (S) had written to the Chief priest of the city

to realize the blessings of Islam. In reply he wrote that he would like to personally discuss the teachings of this new religion.

His name was Harith. He was invited and came with a retinue of fourteen priests. The priests stayed at Medina as guests of the Holy Prophet (S). Long discussions about monotheism versus trinity took place and it was realized that these priests were not open minded. On the contrary, they were prejudiced against Islam.

The Almighty ordered the Holy Prophet (S) to explain to them that Verily Jesus is as Adam in the sight of Allah. He created him out of dust. He then said unto him, “Be!” and he was. This is the truth from Your Master; be not, therefore, one of those who doubt, and whoever shall dispute with you after the knowledge which hath been given you, say unto them, come let us call together our sons and your sons, our women and your women and ourselves and yourselves. Then let us make imprecations and lay the curse of Allah upon those who lie. (Surat Ali Imran, Chap. III).

According to Aamir ibn Sa’d and Ummul-Mu’minin Aisha, when the above verses were revealed to the Messenger of Allah he called Ali (as), Fatima (as), Hassan and Hussain (as) and said, “Master! This is my family and progeny (Ahl al-Bayt).” (Bukhari’s Sira, Parts VII p. 77, Saree Muslim, Vol. 2 p. 278, al-Tirmidhi, P. 421, Misquath Vol. 8, p. 129)

Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi (in Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, Vol. 2, p. 701, printed in Egypt) says that when the above verses were revealed the Prophet of Allah (k) covered himself with a black coverlet, took in it Ali (as), Fatima (as), Hassan and Hussain (as) and said, “Master! This is my progeny, my household and my family (Ahl al-Bayt).” There upon, the Messenger of the master received the following revelation: “

Verily! Allah desires to remove from you every abomination, you the Household of the Prophet, and to purify you with a perfect purification”(33: 33). (Tafsir Khshshaf, Vol. I, p. 308 agrees with Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi).

Hearing the glad news of the Divine Purification, Sanctification and Consecration, the Holy Prophet (S) decided to take only these four persons along with him for the ceremony of trial by imprecations as ordered by Allah. That is, Ali (as) representing the selves as mentioned in the above verses, Fatima (as) representing women, Hassan and Hussain (as) representing sons.

The Christian priests were then informed of these orders of Allah and said, “They agreed next morning to abide by the trial as a quick way of deciding which of them were in the wrong. Muhammad (S) met them accordingly accompanied by his daughter Fatima (as), his son-in-law Ali (as) and his two grandsons Hassan and Hussain (as) and desired them (the Christian priests) to wait till he had said his prayers. But when they saw him kneel down their resolution failed them and they dared not venture to urse him and his party, but agreed to sign a treaty and pay tribute to him” (Rev. George Sale).

Ahl al-Bayt (as), people of the Household (of Muhammad [h]), is the designation usually given to Fatima

(as), Ali (as) and their children and descendants. This is the name by which ibn Khaldun invariably designates them and followers and disciples, Shi'as or adherents of the "People of the House." Sanai (the famous Sufi poet whom Rumi praises) represents the general feeling with which the descendants of Muhammad (S) were regarded in the following verses of poetry:

Excluding the book of Allah and his family (Descendants),
Nothing has been left by Ahmed the Prophet (S),
Memorial such as these can never be obtained
Till the day of Judgment.

See The Spirit of Islam, p. 313; note, Kanzul-Ummal Vol. VI, p. 159, Tafsir al-Kushshaf, Vol. 1, p. 308, al-Hamadani in Mawaddat al-Qurba and Allama Ibn Hajar al-Makki in Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, while discussing this event and the verses referred above, have given their opinion that the Holy Prophet (S), by translating the word "selves" as himself and Ali (as), the word "women" as Fatima (as) and the word "sons" as Hassan and Hussain (as) have shown to the Muslim the estimation in which these four persons are held by Allah and by himself. They and they alone are his Ahl al-Bayt (as) who deserve the Divine purification, sanctification and consecration.

10 A.H.

During this year, Ali (as) was sent once again on a propagation mission to Yemen then on an expedition against Amr ibn M'adi Karb. He performed both the duties successfully. Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Vol. V, p. 356, Imam Nisa'i in Khasa'is and Allama ibn Hajr al-Makki in Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, p. 2, say that from the later expedition Khalid ibn al-Walid sent a letter containing complaints of Imam Ali (as) to the Holy Prophet (S).

This letter was carried by Buraydah, a companion of the Holy Prophet (S). On receipt of this letter, the Messenger of Allah was annoyed and got angry and said, "You are fabricating lies and fictitious complaints against Ali (as); he is from me and I am from him; he is your master (wali) after me. Whoever annoys him actually annoys me, and whoever forsakes him forsakes me. He is made of the same mold that I am made of, and I am made of the same mold that Abraham is made of, and my status with Allah is superior to that of Abraham."

The end of the 10th A.H. saw the Holy Prophet (S) perform the Farewell Pilgrimage. Returning from there, for the last time he designated Imam Ali (as) as his Vicegerent.

11 A.H.

The year 11 A.H. was the saddest year of Imam Ali's life. He lost two of his best friends. One of whom he loved and venerated like a father, like a master and like the dearest friend, the Holy Prophet (S) who died during the early months of the year. His death was followed by the death of Imam Ali's dearest companion, his wife, Fatima (as), the lady of the Light.

The last year of Holy Prophet's life was spent at Medina. An envoy of his was killed by the Syrians and he had ordered an expedition against the Byzantines under Usamah ibn Zaid and he had ordered all his companions except Imam Ali (as) join this expedition and had ordered the troops to be encamped outside the city (al-Tabari's Tarikh, Tarikh al- Kamil ibn Athir. Tabaqat al ibn Sa'd and Al-Sira al-Halabiyya, Madarij al-Nubuwwah, Vol. 2, p. 766). Although he was ill, and in spite of his weakness, he came out, arranged the flag (the Insignia of the command) with his own hands and handed it over to Usamah.

He felt that people were not willing to join this expedition because of the young age of Usamah. He got annoyed and said, "May the curse of Allah be on those who forsake the army of Usamah." (Al-Milal wal-Nihal of allama Shahristani and Sharh al-Mawahib al-Laduniyya).

The cause of this illness was the poison which had been given to him and which had slowly penetrated into his system and had now begun to show its effect. It became evident that he had not long to live. The news of his approaching end led to the stopp. of the expedition (The Spirit of Islam).

At the last stage of illness the Holy Prophet (S) was staying at the house of Ummul Mu'minin Aisha. From there he came out for the last time to lead the prayers. He was so weak that he was actually carried there by the sons of Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib. He, himself, led the prayers (Fath al-Bari, Sharah Sirat al-Bukhari, Ch. 3, p. 372).

This exertion proved too much for the messenger of the master and when he returned home from the mosque he fainted. His condition was very serious at that time and the fainting fit was of long duration. His children and members of family and his companions started weeping and lamenting. He came out of the swoon and looked at those tear sprinkled faces around him and said, "Bring a pen, some ink and paper so that I may write a will for you that will keep you on the straight path."

Some of his companions wanted to offer him the pen and paper while 'Umar was of the opinion that he was talking insanelly on account of the intensity of his illness. He argued that they had the Holy Qur'an with them which would suffice them. This discussion took a serious turn and people started arguing in loud voices. The Messenger of Allah got annoyed at this and asked them to go away and to leave him alone. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Ch. 12, p. 126, Ch. 8, p. 100, Ch. 23, p. 384, Minhaj al-Sunna of allama Ibn Taymiyyah, Sharh Sahih Muslim of Allama Noodi, gives a detailed account of this event).

This was Sunday the 27th Safar. After the above incident the Messenger of Allah called Ali (as) and said, "Ali! You will be first to meet me on the fountain of Kawthar. After me, when hardship and reverses face you, do not lose patience, and when you find people running after worldly gains, then you should busy yourself in the way of disseminating the truth and serving Allah. (Rawzat al-Ahbab, Vol. I, p. 559, Madarij al- Nubuwwah, Vol. 2, p. 551). On the next day, Monday the 28th of Safar, the Messenger of Allah passed away to the realm of His Grace, Blessings and Majesty.

[The Last Moment and Burial Rites of the Holy Prophet \(S\)](#)

Allama Muhammad ibn Sa'd, in his famous book *Tabaqat* (Vol. 2, Section 2, pp. 51, 61) relates that during the caliphate of 'Umar, the famous Jew Ka'b al-Ahbar (who later embraced Islam), asked once the caliph: "Sir, please tell me what the last words of the Holy Prophet were." The Caliph told him to ask Imam Ali (as) about it. Ka'b went to Ali (as) and asked him the same question. The Imam (as) replied, "During the last moments of the Holy Prophet (S) his head was resting on my shoulder and his words were: Salat! Salat! (Uphold prayers, prayers!)." Ka'b declared, "Verily, the last moments of all prophets have always been thus; they are ordained for it, and they carry the message even with their last breath."

Then Ka'b went to 'Umar and asked him: "Who performed the ghusul for the body of the Prophet after his death?" The caliph told him to ask Imam Ali (as) about that, too. He again went to Imam Ali (as) and repeated the question. Imam Ali (as) replied, "The Messenger of Allah had willed that none but I should perform those ablutions because if any other person looked at his naked body he would get blind. A curtain was hung and from the other side of the curtain Fazl ibn Abbas and Usamah, blind-folded, were handing water to me and I was performing the ghusul."

These facts, that Imam Ali (as) was the only person to be with the Holy Prophet (S) at his last moments and to have performed the last rights, are also acknowledged by the authors of these books: *Tadhkirat Khawass al-A'imma*, Ch. II, p. 16, *Kanzul Ummal*, Vol. 4, p. 55, *Mustadrak of Imam Hakim*, Vol. 3, p. 139, *Riad al-Nadira*, printed in Egypt, p. 80 and *Mu'jam al-Kabir of al-Tabrani*.

After the last ablutions and after shrouding the sacred body of the Messenger of Allah as per his will, first Imam Ali (as) performed the A Death prayers' alone. Then the parties of the Muslims came and offered the death prayers without any leader (Imam). Allama ibn Abdul Birr in *Al-Isti'ab* says that after Imam Ali (as) offered his A Death prayers' alone then Banu Hashim offered the prayers, then the Muhajirun then the Ansar.

[Burial of the Holy Prophet \(S\)](#)

After the death, prayers were performed. Imam Ali (as), Abbas, Fazl ibn Abbas and Usamah ibn Zaid got busy with the arrangements of the burial of the Messenger of Allah. At the request of the Ansar, Aws ibn Kholee al-Ansari, who was also a Badri (a participant in the Badr campaign), was allowed to join them. Usamah dug the grave in the house of Ummul Mu'minin (mother of the faithful) Aisha. Aws got into the grave and Imam Ali (as) lifted the sacred body in his hands and lowered it into the grave. He stayed in the grave for some time weeping bitterly. Usamah says, "I have never seen Ali (as) weeping like that before or after this occasion."

Then Ali (as) came out of the grave and, lifting his hands, said, "Lord! He was Your first creation; his death is not a sign of mortality; he lifted the gloom prevailing before the creation started; he was a proof of Your Glory and Benevolence. He had come to us from the realm of Your Love and Glory and was our

guide towards that Realm. His soul was the Emblem of Your Supreme Might, his body was the masterpiece of Your Creation and his mind was Your Treasure house.” Then he covered the grave (Irshad of Shaikh al-Mufid).

When Ali (as) and Banu Hashim were busy with the last rites of the burial of the Messenger of Allah, some Muhajirun and Ansar gathered at the saqifa of Banu Sa’ida and decided [with the persuasion of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab] that Abu Bakr should be the first caliph [forgetting, or pretending to have forgotten, their oath of allegiance to Ali (as) as the successor of the Prophet (k)].

Imam Ali (as) was asked to accede to this decision. He refused. Abu Sufyan came to Medina and went to Abbas (uncle of the Holy Prophet (S) and said to him, “People have taken away the caliphate from Banu Hashim. You are the uncle of the Messenger of Allah and the oldest among the tribesmen of Quraish. You have been kind to them also. They will accept your leadership. Let you and I swear the oath of allegiance to Ali (as). If anybody opposes us, we shall kill him.”

They both went to Ali (as). Abu Sufyan said to him, “Ali! If you like, I shall overflow Medina with infantry and cavalry; do accept our proposal. Stretch your hand and let us swear the oath of allegiance to you.” Hearing this, Ali (as) replied, “Abu Sufyan! I swear by Allah Almighty that you, through this proposal, want to create serious dissension among the Muslims. You have always tried to harm Islam. I do not need your sympathy or your help.”

A detailed account of this event may be found in

1. Tabari, Vol. 21, pp. 202, 303
2. Tarikh al-Khulafa, p. 45
3. Kanzul-’Umml Vol. 21, p. 140.

Imam Ali (as) realized that any serious dissension at this stage would harm the cause of Islam considerably. He had before him the example of the Holy Prophet (S) and treaty of Hdaybiya and had been foretold by the Holy Prophet (S) of all that would happen. Allama Ali ibn Muhammad (630 A.H.) in *Usd al-Ghaba fi Thamyiz al-Sahaba* (Vol. IV, p. 31) says,

“The Holy Prophet (S) had said to Imam Ali (as), ‘Your status is like that of the Ka’ba. People (Muslims) approach the Ka’ba, but this holy house never approaches anybody. Therefore, after my death, if people come to you and swear the oath of allegiance to you, accept it, and if they do not come to you, then you should not go to them.’”

Allama Shaikh Abdul Haqq, the traditionist al-Dehlawi, in *Madarij al-Nubuwwa* (Vol. 2, p. 511) says that the Holy Prophet (S) had advised Imam Ali (as) saying, “After me, you will have to face the extremes of suffering. Do not get disheartened and do not lose patience, and when you find people craving for and trying their utmost to secure worldly power and wealth you mold your life for the hereafter.”

Imam Ali (as) loved Islam as intensely as the Holy Prophet (S) had loved it. He could not, therefore, for the sake of worldly kingdom endanger Islam. He knew that a civil war at that stage would give chances

to the Jewish clans of Banu Nazir and Banu Quraiza on one side and the Christian tribes of Najran and Syria by the Byzantine armies on the other. The munafiqun (hypocrites) and fresh converts on the third would simply take advantage of the situation.

When they found the Muslims busy killing each other, they would literally cut them into pieces and Islam would totally disappear as a message of peace. He wanted the Arabs to remain in the fold of Islam even with the desires of making their worldly status good and wanted the enemies of Islam to realize that Islam was powerful enough to defend itself even after the sad demise of the Messenger of the master. Therefore, he was willing to accept every wrong for the Islam and to retire to the seclusion of his house. The advice he gave to his uncle Abbas is to be found in Nahjul-Balagha wherein he told him not to join the turmoil.

According to the famous Arab philosopher, mathematician and physician Avicenna (Abu Ali Ibn Sina), Imam Ali (as) and the Holy Qur'an were the two miracles of Muhammad (S), the Messenger of Allah. The life of Imam Ali (as) at every stage was a mirror like the reflection of the life of the Holy Prophet (S).

The days of Badr, Uhud, Khayber and Hunain were not long passed and their hero still had the same courage, valor, bravery and strength with him. He could have jumped at the proposal of Abu Sufyan, but had he done so he would not have been Ali ibn Abu Talib, the man who loved Allah and His Messenger and was loved by Allah and His Messenger (Ma'arij al-Nubuwwa).

Death of Fatima (as)

Unfortunately, his feelings were not reciprocated. The following books provide an account of very serious events which happened at Imam Ali's refusal to accede to the decision at the saqifa:

1. Tabari, Vol. 3, p. 198.
2. Al-Iqd al-Farid of Ibn Abd Rabbih, Vol. 2, p. 179, printed in Egypt.
3. History of Abul-Fida' Vol. 1, p. 156 printed in Egypt.
4. Kitab Imama wal Siyasa of Allama Ibn Qutaybah, Vol. I, p. 20, printed in Egypt (this book gives a very detailed account)
5. Muruj al-Dhahab by al-Mas'udi, p. 159
6. Al-Milal wal-Nihal of al-Shahristani, Vol. I, p. 25 printed in Bombay, India
7. Al-Faruq of al-Shibli al-Nu'mani, printed in India
8. Ibn Abul-Hadid in his Commentary on Nahjul-Balagha.

What one could gather, from various accounts which these books have given, is a sad and pathetic

episode. It appears that though Imam Ali (as) decided to retire to the seclusion of his house and not to take any part in power politics, his house was burned down on his family and him. And either the burning door or a hard hit from the hilt of a sword or a heavy push or all together broke the ribs and hand of Fatima (as) (daughter of the Holy Prophet (S)).

This caused her such a serious injury that the baby she was carrying was a still- birth. Allama Shahristani, in *Al-Milal wal-Nihal* (Vol. I, p. 25), says that there was nobody in the house but Ali (as), Fatima (as) and their children (who were between the ages of 4 to 8). Apparently, the assault was sudden and unexpected; nobody was ready for it. The resulting confusion could be better imagined than narrated.

The lady of the house was seriously hurt and had fainted, the house was full of smoke, the children were frightened. As Ali (as) was attending to his wounded wife and suffocating children he was overpowered and dragged from the house. Later Fatima (as) was refused her heritage. The physical injury and themental shock laid her low and after a short illness she passed away on the 14th of Jamadul-Awwal, 11 A.H. She was buried in the dead of the night.

Besides Banu Hashim only the following companions of the Holy Prophet (S) attended her funeral: Salman, Abu Dharr, Ammar and Miqdad. Before the death she had expressed her sufferings in a poem, a verse of which has come down in the Arabic language as a proverb. She says, "So many calamities have descended upon me that if they had descended upon bright days, they would have been turned into dark nights."

The account of the last day of her life clearly shows what kind of a lady was this daughter of the Holy Prophet (S). She told the household that she was feeling better, the pain in her ribs and in her hand was not so severe and that her fever had come down. Then she started bathing the children. Immediately Ali (as) and Fizza came to her assistance. She got the children bathed, dressed and fed, then sent them away to her cousin.

Then she called Imam Ali (as) to her side and said, "Ali (as), my dear husband! You know very well why I did all that. Please excuse my fussiness; they have suffered so much with me and during my illness that I want to see them happy on the last day of my life. Yes, Ali (as), you know also that this is the last day of my life. I am happy and also sad. Happy I am that my troubles will shortly be over and I shall meet my father, and I am sad because I shall part with you. Please, Ali (as), make a note of what I say and do as I wish you to do. After me, you may marry anybody you like, but you must marry my cousin Yamama; she loves my children and Hussain is very much attached to her. Let Fizza remain with you even after her marriage, if she so desires; she was more than a mere servant to me. I loved her like my daughter. Ali, bury me in the night and do not let those who have been so cruel to me attend my burial. Let not my death dishearten you. You have to serve Islam and humanity for a long time to come. Let not my sufferings embitter your life, promise me Ali." Imam Ali (as) said, "Yes, Fatima, I promise." "Ali," she continued,

“I know how you love my children, but be very careful about Hussain (as). He loves me dearly and will miss me sadly, be a mother to him as well. Till my recent illness, he used to sleep on my chest; he is already missing it.”

Ali (as) was by then caressing the broken hand, his hot and large tears dropped on her hand. She looked up and said, “Do not weep, Ali. I know that despite an outwardly tough appearance, the heart you possess is quite tender. You have already borne too much and will have to bear more. Farewell, my Imam, farewell my dear husband; farewell Ali. Bid Fatima farewell.” Hearing his farewell, she said, “May the merciful Master help you bear these sorrows and sufferings patiently. Now let me be alone with my God.” Saying this, she turned towards her prayer mat and prostrated before Allah.

After a short while, Imam Ali (as) entered the room. He found her still in prostration but her soul had already departed to join her Holy father in the realm of His Grace, Mercy and Might. She died very young as Imam Ali (as) says, “... a flower nipped in the bud; she was a flower from Paradise, and she went back to Paradise, leaving the fragrance of Paradise behind her in my mind.”

From 12 A.H. To 24 A.H.

From that time onward till 35 A.H. Imam Ali (as) led a reclusive life. In the beginning, he spent his days compiling the Holy Qur’an in the chronological order of chapters and verses as they were revealed to the Holy Prophet (S). He presented this to the Muslims, but when its acceptance was refused, he advised his companions to accept the Holy Book as compiled officially, saying that his compilation would not be seen by anybody, so that there might not come into existence more than one version of the Holy Qur’an and might not create doubts about the authenticity of this sacred Book.

When Abu Sufyan found that Imam Ali (as) was not paying attention to him, he tried to get in the good books of the government and his eldest son Yazid was appointed as the governor of Syria and on Yazid’s death, his brother Mu’awiyah was appointed on the same post.

During the caliphate of Abu Bakr and more often during the time of Umar, whenever Ali’s advice was asked for, he, like a true Muslim, offered his sincere advice.

Although the people of Banu Hashim were never given any place of honor within the government, Ali (as) did not mind this indifference and whenever a serious problem arose and his counsel was sought, he cooperated whole-heartedly.

The Spirit of Islam says, “From the commencement of the Islamic preaching, Imam Ali (as) had extended the utmost consideration and friendship to the conquered. After the battle of Qadisiyya, Ali (as) used to devote his share of prize money to freeing of captives and repeatedly with his counsel and persuasive interference, he persuaded Umar to lighten the burden of subjects and captives.”

Imam Hakim, in his Mustadrak, and Ibn al-Athir in his history say that until the year 17 A.H. there was no

calendar fixed by the Muslims. Sometimes, Amul-Feel (year of the Abyssinian invasion of Mecca) was considered as the beginning of an era. At other times, the battle of Fijjar (a pre-Islamic encounter between Arab clans) was chosen. Still, others considered a time when repairs on the Ka'ba were done as the year to mark the era. When this confusion was brought to the attention of Umar, he asked the advice of Imam Ali (as) who told him to begin the Muslim era from the year of the Hijra (migration of the Holy Prophet [h]) from Mecca to Medina.

On another occasion, the people went to Umar saying that a lot of jewels and valuable articles and attachments in the Ka'ba could be converted into currency and be used for arming the armies, proving to be a very useful asset. When Imam Ali's advice was sought he said, "These articles were there during the times of the Holy Prophet (S) but he did not touch them. Although Muslims were poorer then than now, and although they were more in need of arms and mounts then, but the Holy Prophet (S) still did not make use of those ornaments for such purposes. It shows that the Messenger of Allah did not care much about such things. You also do not do it. Hearing this, 'Umar said, "O Ali! Had you not been here, we would have suffered a disgrace" according to Rai'ul-Abrar of Allama Zamakhshari.

On the occasion of the invasion of Rome, when Umar sought his counsel as to the advisability of heading the army as the Commander-in-Chief, he advised him to be at the helm and to send some experienced general as a commander. This advice is narrated in a sermon in Nahjul-Balagha. Similarly, at the time of invasion of Iran, he counselled 'Umar not to leave the capital and to send somebody else.

The books Izalatul Khafa' (subject II, p. 268 and 269), Al-Riaz al-Nadira Vol. 2, pp. 194 to 197), Musnad Imam Ahmed Vol. 2, p. 231 (Margin), Mustadrak Imam al-Hakim Vol. I, pp. 438 to 460, Al-Isti'ab of Allama Abdul Birr Vol. 2 474) and Ihya'ul-'Ulum of Imam Ghazali, cite several such cases where the Imam's counsel was asked for and he sincerely gave his advice.

Only one case I want to relate shows in what high esteem Ali (as) held the value of the knowledge acquired, collected and preserved by man in the fields of philosophy, science, history, geography and ethics.

The following authors give a detailed account of the famous library of Iskandariyya (Alexandria) in Egypt:

1. Judge Abul-Qasim Sa'd ibn Ahmed al-Andalusi (462 A.H.) in Tabaqat al-Umam.
2. Haji Khalifa Chulpee in Khashf al-Zunun, Vol. I, Preface, p. 24, printed in Egypt.
3. The famous biographer Ibn Nadim in Al-Fahrist, p. 334, printed in Egypt.
4. The historian Jamal ud-Din, known as Ibn al-Qifti, in Akhbarul-Ulema' wa Akhbar al-Hukama', pp. 232, 233, printed in Egypt and also in Liepzig, Germany.
5. Imam Hafizud-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Shahal, known as Ibnul-Bazzaz al Kurmi (827 A.H.), in Kitab Imam al-A'zam, Vol. I, p. 37, printed in Hyderabad, India.

6. Allama Ahmed ibn Mustafa, known as ATashul-Kubra Zada (962 A.H.) in Miftahul-Sa'ada and Misbahul-Siyada, Vol. 1, p. 241, printed in Hyderabad, India.

They are unanimous in saying that there was a fairly large library at Alexandria, Egypt. It contained between five to seven thousand books on papyri, pal, leaves and parchments, a very large library indeed when compared with the standard of literacy and education of those days.

It contained books on chemistry, astronomy, irrigation, engineering, physics, philosophy and various religions etc.

When Amr ibn al-As conquered Egypt, he inquired as to what was to be done with those books. Orders were issued from the Center that All of these books are according to the Holy Qur'an (i.e. They say the same things which this Holy book has said), then we do not need them, and if they say anything contrary to the Holy Qur'an, then we do not want them. Therefore, in either case, they ought to be burnt according to Akhbarul-'Ulema' wa Akhbar al-Hukama' of Ibn al-Qufti, pp. 232 and 233, printed in Cairo and Leipzig.

The history of Muhammad ibn Abdo edited by Allama Rashid Rida, Editor, Al-Manar, Cairo, Egypt, Vol. 1, p. 535, Tabaqat al-Umam of Judge Sa'id al-Andalusi, as well as Al-Ayat al-Bayyinah of Muhsinul-Mulk, say that when Imam Ali (as) heard the news of this, he tried to persuade them to refrain from issuing such an order.

He said, "Those books are treasures of knowledge and they cannot say anything against the Holy Qur'an. On the contrary, the knowledge contained therein would act as commentaries of this Holy Book and would assist and help in further explanations of the knowledge as presented by the Holy Prophet (S). Knowledge is an asset for human beings and a birthright of a man. It should not be destroyed. Akhbarul-Ulema' further states that his suggestion was not accepted and those books were distributed among one thousand hot water bath houses of Alexandria to be burnt as fire wood.

From 11 A.H. To 33 A.H.

Shortly before his death, Abu Bakr nominated Umar as his successor to the caliphate and, upon his death, appointed a board of six members to select his successor; the board considered (1) Abdul Rahman ibn A'raf, (2) Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas (3), Othman ibn Affan (4), Talhah ibn Abdullah (5), al-Zubair ibn al-Awwam and (6) Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as). The terms of reference for this council were as follows:

1. If they unanimously selected a person, he would be designated as the caliph.
2. If there was no unanimity, then that person would be caliph for whom Abdul-Rahman ibn 'A'raf and his party voted.

3. If any five of them agreed on one man and the sixth disagreed, then the dissenter should immediately be killed.
4. If any four of them agreed on one man then two disagreed, then those two should be killed.
5. If there was a tie, then the casting vote would be that of Abdullah ibn 'Umar (his son). Abdul-Rahman ibn 'Awf was a cousin of Othman and husband of the aunt of Sa'd ibn Abi-Waqqas and al-Zubair was the son-in-law of Abu Bakr. Abdu-Rahman ibn 'Awf withdrew his candidacy to the caliphate.

(Refer to Kitabal-Imama walSiyasa of Muhammad ibn Qutaybah al-Daynuri (270 A.H.), p. 26, History of Ibn Khaldun, second part, pp. 134 to 136, printed in Egypt).

In the council, the opinions were equally divided in favor of Imam Ali (as) and Othman. Abdul-Rahman ibn Oaf asked Imam Ali (as), "If you are selected as a caliph, do you promise that you will act according to the Holy Qur'an and the traditions and orders of the Holy Prophet (S) and according to the rulings and decisions of the previous two caliphs?"

Imam Ali (as) replied, "So far as the Holy Qur'an and the orders and traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) are concerned, I agree to abide by them and follow them faithfully and sincerely, but so far as the rulings and decisions of the previous two caliphs are concerned, if these are according to the Holy Book and the traditions of the Holy Prophet who could dare refuse them. If they are against the orders of Allah or the Holy Prophet (S), who would dare accept and follow them? I refuse to bind myself with those rulings and decisions. I shall act according to my knowledge and my discretion."

Then Abdul-Rahman asked the same question of Othman. The latter agreed not only to act according to the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) but also to implicitly follow the rulings and the decisions of the previous two caliphs. Abdul-Rahman declared 'Othman as a caliph. Refer to 1. Tabari, Vol. 5, pp. 35 to 38, Vol. 16, p. 590) 2. Ibn Khaldun, p. 134 to 136, 3. Abul-Fida', p. 34, 4. Rawzatul-Safa, Vol. 2, p. 98.

Muharram 1, 24 A.H.

Justice Sayyid Amir Ali, in his book titled A Short History of the Saracens, p. 46, says, "The choice of electorate fell upon Othman, a member of the Ummayyad family (Muharram, 1, 24 A.H. November 7, 644 A.D.). In the end, his election proved to be the ruin of Islam. He fell at once under the influence of his clan. He was guided entirely by his secretary and son-in-law Marwan, who had once been expelled by the Pprophet for a breach of trust. With Ali's usual patriotism and devotion to the faith, he gave his adhesion to Othman as soon as he was elected.

Othman displaced most of the lieutenants employed by Umar and appointed in their stead incompetent and worthless members of his own family. The weakness of the center and the wickedness of the unworthy favorites was creating a great agitation among the people. Loud complaints of exaction and

oppression by the governors began pouring into the capital. Ali (as) pleaded and tried to reason several times with the caliph concerning the manner in which he allowed the government to fall into the hands of the unworthy favorites, but Othman, under the influence of his evil genius Marwan, paid no heed to the Imam's advice.

Twice, Imam Ali (as) was asked to leave Medina and to go to a village near it and twice he was called back to intervene between the ruler and the ruled. A few sermons in Nahjul-Balagha has related these facts.

To continue the version of the short History of the Saracen, At last, a deputation from the provinces arrived in Medina to demand redress. They were sent back with promises. On their way home, they intercepted a letter by Marwan, purporting to bear the seal of the caliph. This letter contained directions to the local governors to behead the leaders of the deputation upon arrival of their destinations. Furious at this treachery, the representatives returned to Medina and demanded the surrender of Marwan. This demand was requested even by members of the house of Ummiyah; refer to al-Mas'udi's Muruj al-Dhahab.

The ill-fated 'Othman met this demand with a stern refusal. Enraged at what they believed to be the complicity of the caliph, they besieged him at his home (A Short History of the Saracen, pp. 47 and 48).

Narrating the details of the siege and the murder, Tarikh al-Khamis (Vol. 2, pp. 61, 262), Tarikh al-Khulafa' by al-Sayyuti, p. 108, Muruj al-Dhahab of al-Mas'udi and Al-Riaz al-Nadira, Vol. 2, p. 125, say that at this hour of peril, the Ummayyad deserted the old chief and some fled towards Syria. Mu'awiyah, though ordered by the caliph, did not come to his help.

On the contrary, the contingent which he sent to Medina was ordered to stop and stay at a place thirty miles away from Medina and wait for further orders. These orders never arrived until the caliph was killed and the contingent was called back.

But Imam Ali (as) sent water and food to the caliph during the siege and later, as per the Imam's orders, Othman was bravely defended by his sons and dependents. The insurgents had great difficulty in making any impression on the defenders; therefore, on the 18th of Dhul-Hijja 34 A.H. some of these besiegers scaled a wall of a neighbor's house, entered the house of the caliph and killed him inside his house.

The people who were furious against the caliph were:

1. **Talhah:** He played an important role in the siege and the cutting of water supply. He was commanding the group of the people who were bent upon killing Othman. On that account, Marwan killed him in the Battle of Jamal as we read in Tabari, Vol. 6, p. 154, Kamil ibn al-Athir, Vol. 4, p. 70, and in Ibn Khaldun, Vol. 2, p. 397). This very Talhah later came out as the avenger of murder of the caliph and carried out the propaganda that Imam Ali (as) was responsible for Othman's murder.

He was one of the chief instigators of the Battle of Jamal. He had instigated the people to kill Othman with the hope of succeeding the caliphate. When he was frustrated with it, he launched a rebellion against Imam Ali (as) (Refer to sermon 179 of Nahjul-Balagha).

2. **Al-Zubair ibn al-'Awwam** was considered the number one enemy of the caliph (Mustadrak of Imam Hakim, Vol. 2I, p. 118, Kitabul- Imama wal-Siyasa, Vol. VI, p. 58, Muruj al-Dhahab of Mas'udi, Vol. 2, p. 11).

Later, al-Zubair, with motives like those of Talhah, staged a rebellion against Ali (as) and was the prime initiator for the Battle of Jamal. On the battlefield of Jamal, Imam Ali (as) reminded him of the orders given to him by the Holy Prophet (S) about Imam Ali (as).

Al- Zubair left the battlefield and was riding to Medina when he was killed by Umar ibn Jernuz, who was neither in Imam Ali's army nor his own companion. Imam Ali (as) felt sad at Zubair's death and said, "Although he later turned into a bitter enemy of mine, in the early days of Islam, he was a good defender of the cause of religion (Refer to sermon 12).

3. **Amr ibn al-As** was the third bitter enemy of Othman. Tabari gives a detailed account of the way he insulted the caliph in the mosque and says, "Nobody was more pleased at the murder of Othman than Amr ibn al-As. The reason was that he had been deposed from the governorship of Egypt by the third caliph. Later, this 'Umar joined Mu'awiyah as a claimant for retribution of the murder of Othman."

When the events from year 11 A.H. To 34 A.H. were unfolding, Imam Ali (as) took no part in the affairs of the state. In the words of The History of Saracens, "He was endeavoring in Medina to give an intellectual turn to then ewly developed energy of the Saracenic race. In the public mosque at Medina, he delivered weekly lectures on philosophy, logic, history, explanation of the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) and the verses of the Holy Qur'an, as well as Muslim law and rhetoric. Thus, he formed the nucleus of the intellectual movement which displayed itself in such a great force in the later days. Those lectures and sermons were compiled during forty years following his death by Zaid ibn Wahab al- Juhni (Rijalul-Kabeer). Many of them were lost, but some of them are preserved in Nahjul-Balagha (Mas'udi).

34 to 40 A.H.

Five days after the death of Caliph Othman, by a unanimous election in which representatives from Basra, Kufa, Egypt and Hijaz took part, Imam Ali (as) was elected as the caliph. This took place on the 24th Dhul-Hijja, 34 A.H.

Eric Schroeder, in Muhammad's People, printed in England in 1955, says, "Five days after the murder of Caliph Othman, the people gathered together and decided: "We know no fitter man to be Imam than Ali (as), but will he take the burden of Imamate?" Some answered, "Pressure him at home till he consents." They all gathered at Ali's house with such eagerness that they were pushing and crushing each other. They called to Ali (as) and said, "If we go to our homes again without an Imam and caliph, such a strife

will stir as will never again be stilled. You will have to consent to be our Imam and Caliph of Allah.”

Ali (as) replied, “Small longings have I for this authority, yet the believers must have a chief and gladly will I accept temporal authority of someone else.” “Nay! You have more right than I,” said Talhah. One who stood nearby forced open Ali’s palm and Talhah swore the oath of allegiance to Ali (as). Al-Zubair did likewise and from Ali’s house, they brought him to the mosque. Everybody thronged around him to swear the oath of allegiance to him as their imam and caliph.

The Spirit of Islam says, “It might have been thought that all would submit themselves before his glory; so fine and so grand. But it was not to be. Al-Zubair and Talhah, who had hoped that the choice of people might fall on either of them for caliphate, balked in their ambitious design.

Smarting under the refusal of the new caliph to bestow on them the Governorship of Basra and Kufa, they were the first to raise the standard of rebellion. They were assisted by Ummul Mu’minin Aisha, who had taken a decisive part in the former elections. She was the life and soul of the insurrection and she, herself, accompanied the insurgent troops to the field riding a camel. Ali (as), with his characteristic aversion to bloodshed, sent his cousin Abdullah ibn Abbas to adjure the insurgents by every obligation of the faith and abandon the arbitrament of war. It was to no avail.

Al-Zubair and Talhah initiated a battle at a place called Khurayba and were defeated and killed. The battle is called the Battle of Jamal (camel) from Aisha’s presence in a litter on a camel. Aisha was taken prisoner, treated with courtesy and consideration and escorted with every marks of respect to Medina. She was sent escorted by her brother Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr.” Refer to Asam al-Kufi, p. 147; Tabari, Vol. 4, pp. 548–565, Rawzat al-Safa, Vol. 2, Tarikh al-Dhahbi, pp. 1–21; Abul-Fida’, pp. 518–520.

After the battle, Ummul Mu’minin Aisha felt that even though she had brought about this insurgence, she saw that Imam Ali (as) was treating her with utmost courtesy and kindness. She requested that her nephew, Abdullah ibn al-Zubair, who had been commander-in-chief of the rebel forces and was taken prisoner, to be forgiven and freed. Imam Ali (as) granted the request. Marwan got nervous thinking that as the two worst enemies of Imam Ali (as) (Talhah and al-Zubair) were killed and (Abdullah ibn al-Zubair) was excused and pardoned, the burden of vengeance might fall upon him. He requested Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain to plead for his cause. They requested his pardon and he was also pardoned. (Years afterward, the very same Marwan made his archers shoot arrows on the dead body and bier of Imam Hassan and later he persuaded the governor of Medina, though unsuccessfully, to immediately kill Imam Hussain on his refusal to accept Yazid as the Caliph). Then an order of general amnesty, peace and forgiveness was issued. Every opponent was forgiven and every prisoner was released (al-Mas’ud al-Zahbi, p. 28).

Ali’s officers and commanders in this battle, besides his sons Imam Hassan, Imam Hussain and Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, were the following companions of the Holy Prophet (S):

1) Abdullah ibn Abbas, 2) Ammar ibn Yasir, 3) Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, 4) Hassan ibn Thabit (for whom the

Holy Prophet (S) had said that his sole testimony would be equal to the testimony of two witnesses), 5) Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Abadah, 6) 'Ubaydullah ibn Abbas, 7) Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, 8) Hajr ibn Adiy al-Kindi, 9) Adiy ibn Hatim al-Ta'i.

The victory gave Ali (as) time to consolidate his sovereignty in Hijaz, Iraq and Egypt. According to Mas'udi, with the honesty of purpose which always distinguished him, he disregarded all advises for temporizing. Several of his advisers counseled him to defer the dismissal of the corrupt officers previously appointed until he was, himself, sure concerning who were the enemies, but this hero, without fear and reproach, refused to be guilty of any duplicity or compromise with injustice and inequity. Therefore, immediately after his accession, he gave orders for the dismissal of the corrupt and tyrannical governors, for the return of fields and states which had been previously bestowed with public revenues among the favorites of the rulers and for the equal distribution of the public revenues among the Arabs and non-Arabs, black and whites, masters and slaves, rich and poor.

These orders gave great offence to those who had enriched themselves under former administrations and his endeavors to remedy the evils which had crept into administrations, raised a host of enemies against him. No sooner was the rebellion of Talhah and al-Zubair suppressed, Mu'awiyah, an Umayyad by descent, a man who had held the governorship of Syria since the time of Umar, raised the standard of rebellion.

Abu Sufyan, his son Mu'awiyah and his clan Banu Umayyah had little sympathy and no faith in Islam. Mas'udi, in *Muruj al-Dhahab*, Vol. VI, says that when Abu Sufyan had grown old and blind, he was sitting in the mosque and there were Imam Ali (as), Abdullah ibn Abbas and many other Muslims besides them. The mu'aththin (the caller to prayers) started the adhan. He reached the part, "I testify that Muhammad (S) is the Prophet of Allah." Now Abu Sufyan said, "Look at my cousin! (meaning the Holy Prophet [h]) See where he has placed his name! Imam Ali (as) became angry and said that it was done by the order of Allah. *Tarikh al-Khamis*, Vol. 2, p. 97, printed in Egypt, says that Abu Sufyan advised Banu Umayyah to treat the caliphate like a ball and to pass it on from one to another of their clan and never let the ball out of their possession, saying, "I swear that there is neither punishment nor judgement, neither the Heaven nor the Hell and neither the resurrection nor the day of Reckoning. His son and his clan accepted his teachings, followed his faith, adopted his advice and obeyed his orders.

In the very beginning, Mu'awiyah had made fools of Talhah and al-Zubair. According to Ibn Abul-Hadid, when Mu'awiyah learned that people had sworn the oath of allegiance to Imam Ali (as), he wrote to al-Zubair that he had taken the oath of allegiance for him and for Talhah as his successor. The whole of Syria was ready to back them and they should try to overthrow Imam Ali's regime and accept the caliphate which was awaiting them in Damascus (Refer to Sermon 12 of *Nahjul-Balagha*). Thus, exciting these two old men, Mu'awiyah kept Imam Ali (as) busy with their rebellion and secured time to make his government more powerful in Syria.

Talhah and al-Zubair, with their rebellion, had done a great service to Mu'awiyah's cause but now, they

were no longer living to serve his purpose. Therefore, he approached Mughirah ibn Shu'bah (who had originally tried to converge with Imam Ali (as) but was repulsed by him), Marwan ibn al-Hakam, Walid ibn Uqbah, Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Abu Huraya and Amr ibn al-As. His best friend was Amr ibn al-As.

Although Mu'awiyah had to pay a heavy price (governorship of Egypt and more than 10 Laes of dinars) to purchase the fidelity and faith of Umar, the later events proved that it was the best investment that Mu'awiyah had made in his life. He also collected proofs that Ziyad ibn Abih was actually the son of Abu Sufyan (born in sin) and not the son of a slave Obayd. This change of fatherhood was officially (though shamelessly) proclaimed and Ziyad "proudly" became the natural brother of Mu'awiyah. Zaid proved himself to be a man without a conscience, without any remorse, without faith in Islam and without any consideration for human rights, but a very useful ally to Mu'awiyah. He was Mu'awiyah's second best friend. Histories of Tabari, Rawzatul-Safa, Asim al-Kufi, Muruj al-Dhahab, Abul-Fida', the Kamil of Ibn Athir may be referred to for details of the above mentioned facts. With these henchmen beside him, Mu'awiyah staged a rebellion against the elected caliph, Imam Ali (as).

After settling Chaldea and Mesopotamia, Imam Ali (as) was forced to march towards Syria to face Mu'awiyah's forces at a place called Siffin. The previously noted books and Simon D. Aucklay in the History of the Saracens, give a detailed account of this battle which was an extensive one.

Tabari, Vol. VI, p. 577, Rawzatul-Safa, Vol. 2, p. 425, Abul-Fida', p. 425 narrate in details the orders issued by Imam Ali (as) to his officers and soldiers before the battle. As these orders give a clear indication of the principles and methods laid down by Imam Ali (as) as to how jihad (holy war) should be carried on, I have briefly copied them here:

1. Never begin a war yourself, Allah does not like bloodshed, fight only in defense.
2. Never be the first to attack your enemy, repulse his attacks, but do it boldly, bravely and courageously.
3. While declaring yourself and your deeds (via the medium of rajaz [martial] poetry, a custom in hand to hand combatants), never waste your time. Instead of speaking about yourself, speak about Allah and the Holy Prophet (S).
4. Never follow and kill those who run away from the battle or an encounter as life is dear to them. Let them live as long as death permits them to live.
5. Never kill wounded persons who cannot defend themselves.
6. Never strip naked a dead man for his coat of arms or outfit.
7. Never cut noses or ears of dead men to humiliate them.
8. Never submit to looting and arson.

9. Never assault nor insult the modesty of a woman.
10. Never hurt a woman even if she swears at you or hurts you.
11. Never hurt a child.
12. Never hurt an old or a feeble person.

This battle started on the 1st of Safar 38 A.H. And lasted for more than two months. During this period about 18 encounters took place.

In the beginning, in his usual humanitarian nature, Imam Ali (as) endeavored to bring about a peaceful settlement. But Mu'awiyah was inflated with pride and wanted impossible conditions. To avoid unnecessary shedding of blood, Imam Ali (as) offered to end the quarrel by personal combat, but Mu'awiyah, realizing who and what Imam Ali (as) was, declined the challenge.

In spite of every exasperation, Imam Ali (as) commanded the troops to await the enemy's attack, to spare the fugitives and to respect the captives. Once, during the encounters, 'Amr ibn al-As and at another time Bisr ibn Arta'ah, faced Imam Ali (as) in the battlefield. They did not realize until the encounter started that the warrior facing them was Imam Ali (as).

One blow was sufficient to send them down from their horses. When they found no way of escaping his sword, each one of them, in his turn, immediately stripped naked and fell down turning their faces towards the earth and backs towards the sky. Both armies laughed at those life-saving antics and someone suggested that Imam Ali (as) kill them. In the case of 'Amr ibn al-As he replied, "I cannot kill timid dogs. He has begged for his life in a shameless and humiliating manner. I cannot dirty my arms with the blood of such a cowardly and shameless person.

These rebels were defeated in three successive battles. Mu'awiyah was ready to fly from the field when a trick of his accomplice, Amr ibn al-As, saved them from destruction. He made his mercenaries tear the Holy Qur'an into many pieces and to tie those pieces to their lances and standards then shout foul. Even when the sacred pages were not available, mere rags were tied to the lances. There were some persons in the army of Imam Ali (as) who were bribed by Mu'awiyah. Among them, al-Ash'ath ibn Qays was one. As per orders of 'Amr ibn al-As, they and their soldiers desisted from the battle and forced other soldiers to desist as well. They gathered around Imam Ali (as) and called upon him to refer the dispute to arbitration.

Imam Ali (as) saw through the ploy practiced by the rebels and tried to make his soldiers realize it, but the clamor of the army led him to consent to the course granted. He then wanted Abdullah ibn Abbas to represent his side in the arbitration. Again, a part of the army, under instigation of al-Ash'ath, demanded that a weak and old man named Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, who was also secretly hostile to Imam Ali (as) (according to History of the Saracens), be nominated as an arbitrator from this side. There was

immediate danger of serious factions arising in his own army, which might have developed in bloodshed.

Therefore, Imam Ali (as) acceded to the demand and Abu Musa was appointed as an arbitrator. Mu'awiyah was represented by the astute and cunning Umar ibn al-As. They both decided against Imam Ali (as), who, deprived of the fruits of victory by a section of his soldiers and faithless officers, retired in disgust with a part of his army and faithful followers to Kufa.

In the battle of Siffin, one of the famous companions of the Holy Prophet (S) Ammar ibn Yasir and another great favorite of the Holy Prophet (S), Owais al-Qurni, fought for Imam Ali (as) and were killed in the battle.

The men who had been, with ulterior motives, most clamorous at Siffin for arbitration, felt that their hopes could not be realized. They repudiated the arbitration and denounced it as sinful. They openly mutinied against Imam Ali (as); therefore, they were called Kharijites.

From Kufa, they withdrew to a place called Nahrawan, which was on the border of the desert. There, they assumed a threatening attitude, killing some officers of the government and many respectable men, women and children. They refused to listen to reasonable advice, to join duty or to return home. Their conduct at last became so serious that Imam Ali (as) was forced to attack them at Nahrawan. That encounter is called the battle of Nahrawan. The majority fought, but a few escaped to Bahrain and Ahsa [in the Eastern Province of today's Saudi Arabia, the only country in the world named after its ruling clan, Al Saud] where they formed the nucleus of a fanatical horde which later assumed various names and adopted various guises.

Abu Musa had also retired to Medina where he subsequently received a handsome yearly pension from the court of Mu'awiyah. (Refer to Tabari, Abul-Fida', Asim al-Kufi, Rawzat al-Safa, Muruj al-Dhahab, the Kamil of Ibn Athir and the Short History of the Saracens).

From the day of ascension as caliph to the last day of his life, Imam Ali (as) did not get a day's rest and peace. It is a wonder, that facing the heavy odds that he had to encounter, how and when he could get time to introduce reforms in the government; to lay out fundamentals of grammar for Arabic language; to deliver sermons on theology, rhetoric, philosophy of religion, wonders of creation and nature and duties of man to Allah and man; to advise people in the most persuasive style; to suppress the tendencies for innovation and schism, which had crept in the minds of Muslims or to introduce and bring into effect principles of a benign government.

After dealing with the rebellion of the Kharijites, Imam Ali (as) had to face the problem of consolidating his control over Egypt. He had sent Qais ibn Sa'd as a governor there, but had to call him back and send Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr in his place. Unfortunately, Muhammad, though brave and sincere, was no match to Mu'awiyah and Amr ibn al-As. He was forced by Mu'awiyah into a battle. Muhammad wrote to Imam Ali (as) who sent Malik ibn al-Ashtar for help. But Malik could not reach Egypt. He was poisoned on the way by a henchman of Mu'awiyah and died (Tabari, Vol. IV, p. 521).

Muhammad was informed of this fact. That young man faced 'Amr ibn al-As alone, was defeated in the encounter, killed and by the orders of Mu'awiyah, his dead body was burnt and his ashes were strewn (Tabari, Vol. IV, p. 592). Imam Ali's words at the news of the death of Muhammad show he loved the young man and how the youth loved him. After Muhammad, Imam Ali (as) had to send some experienced officer to Egypt.

He was busy with that problem when Mu'awiyah organized bands of guerillas with orders to loot, murder, arson and rape. These bands were to attack in waves against the provinces of Hijaz, Basra, Rayy, Mosul and Harath [Herat?]. Imam Ali (as) organized defenses of these provinces, defeated these bands and freed the country from earlier harassment.

It would have been very easy for Imam Ali (as) to divert the minds of masses towards foreign invasion and thus make them busy in murder and plunder. It had always been done by rulers and is even today considered as the best form of employing energies of a rising nation as well as the easiest way to form an empire to propagate religion.

But Imam Ali (as) hated bloodshed, did not believe in imperialism and had no faith in propagation of religion with a sword in one hand and the Holy Qur'an in the other. He believed Islam to be a message of peace and love and wanted mankind to be ruled on the basis of equity and justice. Therefore, after strengthening one province after another and fortifying their defenses, he introduced reforms to create a benign temporal state and never considered expanding his domain.

By the time he got complete control over those problems and could organize an army to liberate Syria and Egypt from the reign of terror which had held them in its sway, the fateful month of Ramadan 40 A.H. arrived.

40 A.H.

It was the 19th of Ramadan, the month of fasting of that eventful year. It was the time of morning prayers. The place was the mosque in Kufa. Imam Ali (as) had arrived in the mosque long before the time of the prayers, had roused those who were sleeping in the mosque. Among them was Abdul-Rahman ibn Muljim al-Muradi. He was lying on his face and had hidden under his garment a sword, the blade of which had been poisoned.

Imam Ali (as) roused him and told him that it was an unhealthy way of sleeping as it hinders free breathing. He also told him that he had hidden a sword in his garment and an evil intention in his mind. Imam Ali then called the Muslims to morning prayers and led the service. It was the first part of the prayers and he was rising from the kneeling posture when the sword of Abdul-Rahman ibn Muljim descended on his head, giving him a very deep cut.

It was the same sword that Imam Ali (as) had pointed out only half an hour earlier. The prayers were disturbed. Abdul-Rahman started running and people went after him. Nobody was attending the

prayers. There was confusion everywhere. But Imam Ali (as) finished his two prostrations then reeled into the hands of his sons Hassan and Hussain. The wound which was bleeding profusely was attended to. His blood-drenched lips parted into thanks-giving prayers as he said, "Master! I thank You for rewarding me with martyrdom; how kind are You and how Gracious. May Your Mercy further lead me to the realm of Your Grace and Benevolence.

Abdul-Rahman was caught by Sasa ibn Sohan and was brought before Imam Ali (as). The hands of the murderer were tied behind his back. The Imam (as) saw that the ropes were cutting into the flesh of the murderer. He forgot the wound of his head, the blow which was to end his life and to cut his career in its prime. He forgot that Abdul-Rahman was a murderer. All that he saw was a human being subjected to inhuman torture. He ordered the Muslims to loosen the ropes on Abdul-Rahman's hands and treat the man humanely. This kindness touched the murderer and he started weeping. A smile played on those lips and, in a faint voice, Imam Ali (as) said, "It is too late to repent now; you have done your deed. Was I a bad Imam or an unkind ruler?"

People carried the Imam to his house. When he saw the bright day, he said, "O daylight! You can bear testimony to the fact that during the life time of Ali, you have never, not even once, dawned and found him sleeping."

He lived two days after this event and in that interval, whenever he found time, he delivered a few sermons (sermon No. 152 is one of them). In those sermons and with his dying breath, he expressly ordered that no harshness should be used towards his murderer, who should be executed if the heirs of Imam Ali (as) so desired, with one blow.

He should not be tortured before death, his dead body should not be mutilated, members of his family should not suffer on account of his crime and his property should not be confiscated. He designated his son Imam Hassan (as) as his vicegerent.

Thus, the last chapter closed on the history of a life which from beginning to end was filled with noble deeds, pious thoughts and sublime words and every filled hour of a glorious life. "Had Ali (as) been allowed to reign in peace," says Oeslner, "his virtues, firmness and ascendancy of character would have perpetuated the basic principles of a good government and its simple manners.

The dagger of an assassin destroyed the hope of Islam." "With him," says Osborne, "perished the truest-hearted and the best Muslim of whom the Mohammedan history has preserved the remembrance." "Seven centuries before," says Justice Amir Ali, "this wonderful man would have been apotheosized and, thirteen centuries later, his genius, talents, virtues and valor would have exerted the admiration of the civilized world. Chivalrous, humane and forbearing to the verge of weakness, as a ruler he came before his time. He was almost no match by his uncompromising love of truth, his gentleness and his merciful nature to cope with Umayyads' treachery and falsehood" (The Spirit of Islam). Justice Amir Ali further says, "To quote the language of the modern French historian, 'But for his assassination,

the Muslim world might have witnessed the realization of the prophet's teaching, in actual amalgamation of the first principles of true philosophy into positive action. The same passionate devotion to knowledge and learning which distinguished Muhammad (S) breathed in every word of Ali (as). With a liberality of mind, far beyond the age in which he lived, was joined a sincere devotion of spirit and earnestness of faith. His sermons, his psalms, his litanies portray a devout outlook towards the source of all good and an unbounded faith in humanity.”

According to his will, he was buried at Najaf, a place about two miles from Kufa.

About Ali (as), his character, his wisdom, his teaching, his services to Islam, his love of mankind, his respect to duty, his adherence to piety, truth and justice, more than eight thousands books have already been written. They are in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, English,

Spanish, Italian, German, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Telugu and Tamil, a sincere homage to the sincerity of his faith in the greatness and nobility of character inherent in man and in the possibility of human beings developing these traits by good thoughts and good deeds.

Imam Ali (as): Ruler And Statesman

Before Imam Ali (as) took charge of the state, the condition of the country was in hopeless turmoil. All of the most important people and the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) had lost sympathy with the government and were openly hostile to it. Rank, favoritism and the short-sighted greed of Marwan and his clan were responsible for this chaos. People were emboldened to rise in arms against the mismanaged and malevolent rule. Their uprising had succeeded. They had lost all respect for authority and had no desire to see the ruling junta back in power again. On the other hand, the members of the overthrown regime had sinister designs to gain back the control which had benefitted them for so long, while some influential persons were hoping to gain the caliphate for themselves.

For three days after the murder of the caliph, there was anarchy in the capital and on the fifth day, Imam Ali (as) was unanimously elected. He neither claimed nor contested for the temporal kingdom. It was forced upon him. But when he accepted it, in his first speech, he openly declared they had elected him as their temporal ruler and he would remain so as long as they kept on obeying him. He had grave doubts about the sincerity of their desire as twice, he had refused to accept their request to act as their ruler.

Yet, seeing their hopeless plight and their repeated solicitations moved him to assent to their entreaties; yet he was under no obligation to them for their election, on the contrary, he had done them a service by agreeing to rule over them. He knew well, the reasons of their persistent supplications for his rulership. They had been badly treated by the malevolent, cruel and oppressive regime and the ruling class had insulted them and had always refused to listen to their grievances or come to their relief. The masses had been kept under complete ignorance of the true teaching of Islam and were made to feel that such

ignorance was the best thing for them.

They had been made to concentrate on worldly benefits at the cost of religion and piety, the result being a rule of brutal force of which they were tired and wanted the kind of benign government which had been introduced by the Holy Prophet (S). That desire had made them look for somebody who could reintroduce that type of government they realized that Imam Ali (as) was the man in whom the Holy Prophet (S) had confided and intrusted more than in anybody else and that he had been the trustee to every secret of the Holy Prophet (S). Therefore, they unanimously elected him as their ruler.

Ironically, they had not realized the responsibilities and obligations under which they had brought themselves by making him their Amir (ruler). He knew their weaknesses and also knew that they would lose their confidence in him when they would find that he attached more importance to general welfare than to personal good, when he would make them follow the path laid down by the Holy Prophet (S), when, with the introduction of equality and equity he would make them accept the principles of brotherhood of man and general amity towards their fellow beings and when he would try to lead them toward selfless discharge of duties as laid down by Allah and the Holy Prophet (S), thus making them a model subject of the kingdom of Allah, a model to be adopted by those who desire peace and prosperity under a benign rule. He was afraid that with the introduction of such a revolutionary (Islamic) system of government and society, the uninitiated would rebellion against him, continuing to clamor for unwarranted and unreasonable personal benefits as usual and crave vicious pleasures that would no longer be possible in a fairness-to-all and a godly system of government which he had envisioned in Islam.

Those who would rebellion did not realize that the previous, traditionally exploitive secular regimes, by allowing them cheap and simple pleasure, granting them limited power and keeping them in the darkness of ignorance their rulers, had actually turned them into automata to work for them as kinds of slaves deprived of vision and foresight without hope for a good prospect of a future life.

On the other hand, Imam Ali (as) would try to make them follow the true part of religion at the behest of their own free will, make them develop the habit of simple living and high thinking and teach them to give up the desire of seeking undue favors and unjustifiable pleasures. That was the kind of men that Allah wanted them to be and the Holy Prophet (S) had tried to model them into. The task had not been easy then and the lapse of a quarter century had made it even more difficult, but Imam Ali (as) would try to achieve it, according to Al-Karrar of mawlana Riad Ali.

Whatever shadow of hope was lurking in the minds of persons expecting wealth, prosperity and governorship disappeared with this very first speech of Imam Ali (as). They knew that they could not expect unholy and ungodly concessions from Ali ibn Abu Talib (as). Their unreasonable claims on public wealth, their fiefs and their unjustifiable holdings of public property would not remain with them. The result was three rebellions against Imam Ali (as) and a restless period of rulership for about four years.

His Reforms

But Ali (as), with the sincerity of purpose, tried to do what he had promised and raise the mental uplift of the masses. The first thing was the consolidation of the state which he successfully carried out against very heavy odds. The second thing was to create a central bureau where he distributed the work of training the crude Arabs into educated and civilized people.

To Abul-Aswad al-Du'ali [the renown poet], he dictated basic principles and rules of grammar for the Arabic language with special instruction to concentrate on the syntax of that language. Abdul- Rahman al-Salami was made to look after the art of reading the Holy Qur'an correctly. Kumail ibn Ziyad was made responsible for mathematics, engineering and astronomy, Umar ibn Sulma for the Arabic language and literature (prose), Abadah ibn al-Samit for poetry and logic, Abdullah ibn 'Abbas for principles of administration and rhetoric and he himself, for philosophy of religion, ethics, commentary of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S).

Actually, he was hub of the whole activity. Although every hour of his glorious life was filled, he still found time to teach his assistants, what to say, when and how to say it, what to teach and when and how to teach it. Long after his death, everyone of his above pupils proved a shining star in the sky of Muslim civilization and have been considered as Imams.

Introduction of New System of Government

The next subject which engaged his immediate attention was the improvement of administration. To make due arrangements for security of the state from external attacks, to preserve law and order, to control corruption and bribery, to provide equality of opportunities and equal distribution of public wealth among his subjects, to appoint honest and pious officers, to chastise and remove from service dishonest ones, to maintain a powerful army, to avoid enrollment of mere mercenaries in it, to take care of traders and treat non-Muslims with deserving leniency and respect, were apparently the items of his program which he successfully carried out.

How He Organized Public Service Departments

- 1) He divided the state service into following sections:
- 2) Public finance
- 3) Army
- 4) Central administrative bureau
- 5) Judiciary,
- 6) Provincial offices

The department of Public Finance was divided into two sections:

- a) Collection section and
- b) Distribution sections.

The collection section was subdivided into three heads and only three kinds of taxes were allowed to be collected by Imam Ali (as):

i) Land Revenue: It was usually collected in coins of silver and gold or in bullion. Officers to collect this revenue were sometimes appointed by the center, but the Imam (as) had also authorized the governors to appoint such officers themselves.

ii) Zakat (poor rate) and sadaqa (poor fund): These were usually collected in kind or in live-stock. Officers to collect this revenue were always appointed directly by the Imam (as) and he took great care to appoint honest and pious persons on these posts and to keep a sharp look out on their activities and behavior.

iii) Jizya: This was a tax from non-Muslims in lieu of zakat, etc. And in return for the security and amenities provided to them. Collection of no other kind of tax, from non Muslims, was allowed by him.

Land surveys were carried out by him wherever necessary. Every taxpayer had the right to appeal and an appellate jurisdiction was brought into force. Officers for this court of appeal were directly appointed by the Imam (as).

He was the first man to introduce a budgetary system for the collection of revenues and expenditure. Every province had to present its budget direct to him for approval. The incomes were divided into two heads; provincial and central. Zakat and sadaqa were items of the central revenues, land revenue and jiziya were provincial revenues.

The schedule of rate for land revenue was fixed by him as follows:

- 1) 1st Class (most fertile) land 1.5 dirham per Jareeb
- 2) 2nd class fertile land 1 dirham per Jareeb
- 3) 3rd Grade land .5 dirham per Jareeb
- 4) Vineyards and orchards 10 dirhams per Jareeb and date palm groves

Note: 1 Jareeb equals 2268 $\frac{3}{4}$ sq. yd.

Sadaqa and zakat were the taxes [the first being optional] which only Muslims had to pay. It was a tax levied on personal income, landed property, hoarded bullion and currency and on livestock. Its rate was

that which was fixed by tenets of the Muslim law.

Jizya was an annual, personal tax, collected per head of a person irrespective of his income or property. But such persons were divided into classes. The division of classes follows:

1st class: very rich persons and landlords: 48 dirhams per head

2nd class: middle class people: 42 dirhams per head

3rd class: businessmen: 42 dirhams per head 4th class: general public: 12 dirhams per head

There were positive orders that no jizya was to be collected from beggars or persons falling in following categories:

- 1) Those who were above 50 years of age
- 2) Those who were below 20 years of age
- 3) All women
- 4) All paralyzed persons
- 5) All disabled persons
- 6) All blind persons
- 7) All mentally disabled persons

Income from the source of zakat and sadaqa was reserved for the following heads:

- A) Administration of the departments of collection and distribution.
- B) Grants, donations and aids to poor, have-nots, orphans, aged widows and disabled persons.
- C) Honorarium to volunteers who fought for the state.
- D) Pensions to widows and orphans of soldiers and officers of the army.
- E) To acquire and set free slaves from the bondage of slavery.
- F) Reparation of government loans.
- G) To help pilgrims whenever and wherever they were found stranded.

Items C to F were, for the first time, introduced by Imam Ali (as) and as far as F was concerned, no king had ever thought his kingdom to be morally obliged to pay back a loan taken from somebody.

Imam Ali (as) was the first man who declared that a ruler's share of income from the state was equal to

that of any commoner.

Income from jizya was earmarked for the following items of expenditures:

- i) Maintenance of the army
- ii) Construction and maintenance of forts
- iii) Construction and maintenance of roads and bridges
- iv) Well sinking
- v) Construction of rest houses

Land revenue was the provincial income to be spent on maintenance of courts, offices and other necessary items as per orders of the center. Before I bring an end to the narration of his system of revenue collection, I must mention a remark passed by him in this respect to one of his governors. He said, "As far as the collection of land revenue is concerned, you must always keep in view the welfare of the taxpayer which is primarily of more importance than the taxes themselves. And, the actual taxable capacity of the people rests on the fertility quotient of the land. More attention should, therefore, be paid to land fertility and the prosperity of the taxpayer than to the collection of revenues."

The distribution of public wealth was a subject on which Imam Ali (as) spent much time and thought and, in return, caused him to lose many adherents and followers.

The first reform that Imam Ali (as) introduced was to reorganize the treasury and the accounts department. Dishonest officers were removed from the service. A system of accounting was introduced. Othman ibn Hanif was appointed as the chief treasury officer. A principle

of equal distribution of public money was introduced. For the first time, a system of weekly distribution was adopted. Every Thursday was the distribution day or pay day so that Muslims could spend their Friday holiday happily. Every Thursday the accounts were closed and every Saturday started with fresh books of accounts.

Impartiality and equity were the keynotes of Imam Ali's policy of distribution of wealth. At the Center (Kufa), he often supervised the distribution himself and after the work was over and the accounts cleared, he would say prayers in the treasury and thank his Master that he had performed his duty faithfully.

Imam Sha'bi says that as a young boy, once he passed the treasury at the time when Imam Ali (as) was supervising the distribution. He saw African slaves standing in line with the Arab sheikhs and getting equal shares and within a short time the heaps of silver and gold coins disappeared, the treasury was cleared, Imam Ali (as) said the prayers and left the office empty-handed. That day he had given his

share to an old woman who complained that her share was not sufficing her (Kitab al- Gharat).

Once one of his most favorite and trustworthy companions, Othman ibn Hanif told him that by introduction of the principle of equal distribution of wealth and bringing important persons down to the level of commoners, by raising the status of Blacks and Persians to that of Arabs, by allotting shares to slaves equal to their masters, by depriving the rich persons of their worldly attachments and by stopping special grants apportioned to them according to their status, he had done more harm to himself and his cause than good. Continuing he said, “Look my Master, these are the reasons why influential and rich Arabs are deserting you and are gathering around Mu’awiyah. Of what use are these poor persons, disabled people, aged widows and Black slaves to you. How can they help and serve you?”

The Imam (as) replied, “I cannot allow rich and influential persons to exploit the society of this Muslim state and to run an inequitable and unjust system of distribution of wealth and opportunities. I cannot for a moment tolerate this. This is public wealth, it comes from the masses it must go back to them. The rich and powerful persons have not created any wealth, they have merely sucked it from the masses and after paying the taxes, etc. what is left to them is many times more than what they pay to the state and they are welcome to retain it. Had all this been private property I would have gladly distributed it in the same manner. As far as their desertion is concerned, I am glad they have deserted me. As far as the usefulness or services of these disabled persons and have-nots is concerned, remember that I am not helping them to secure their services, I fully well know they are unable to serve me. I help them because they cannot help themselves and they are as much human beings as you and I. May Allah help me to do my duty as He wishes me to do” (Kitab al-Gharat).

The Army

Imam Ali (as) was a born soldier and had started his military career at the age of fourteen when he acted as a bodyguard to the Holy Prophet (S). From that time onward, he was the only military talent on whom the Holy Prophet (S) would rely and all arrangements for organization of defenses and maintenance of an army of volunteers or soldiers were totally entrusted to him by the Holy Prophet (S). It was his ability and valor which brought such success to Islam in its early stage against such enormous odds. Even ‘Umar was taking his advice on military problems (Al-Sirajul-Mubin, Al-Murtada and Kitab al-Gharat).

Time had not dimmed his valor or his ability to organize such an important section of the state. At the age of sixty, in the battlefields of Jamal, Siffin and Nahrawan, he was as brave a soldier, as good a leader and as keen a marshal as he was in the prime of his life in the battlefields of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, Khaybar and Hunain.

During his short period of rulership of about four years, he organized this department very carefully.

The first liability on the state exchequer was the army department. Every governor of the province,

besides being chief finance officer of the province, was the commander of the army placed under him. When officers could not be found to look after the military as well as civil administration, then the functions were divided.

Imam Ali (as) did not tolerate mere mercenaries but did not let services of volunteers go unpaid. He hated murder and bloodshed and desired his soldiers to be soldiers in the service of Allah and religion. His strict orders to the army were, Always keep fear of Allah in your mind, remember that you cannot afford to do without His Grace. Remember that Islam is a mission of peace and love. Keep the Holy Prophet (S) before you as a model of bravery, valor and piety. Do not kill anybody unless in self-defense. Take care of your mounts and your arms, they are your best guards. Work hard while you are at it then devote some time to rest and relaxation. Rest and relaxation are as necessary for you as hard work. Do not let one overstep the time limit of the other. Do not pursue those who run away from an encounter and do not kill fleeing persons. Do not kill those who beg for life and mercy. Do not kill civilians. Do not outrage the modesty of women. Do not harm old people and children. Do not accept any gifts from the civil population of any place. Do not lodge your soldiers or officers in the houses of civilians. Do not forget to say your daily prayers.

Fear Allah. Remember that death will inevitably come to everyone of you some time or other, even if you are thousand of miles away from a battlefield, therefore, be always ready to face death. He did not appreciate heavily armed and clad soldiers. He liked lighter swords, lighter bows and arrows, lighter coats of arms and lighter chains of armor. He preferred to have an agile and a noble army.

I wish I had space at my disposal to translate parts from the books Al-Gharat, Al-Sir aj al-Mubin, Al-Murtada and Kitab al-Siffin (as quoted by ibn Abul-Hadid). They have discussed and narrated at some length his system of reorganizing the army, his principles of strategy and his tactics of war: how he divided the army into six units, beginning from the vanguard and ending it at the rear guards (Rawdah and Saqqah); how he arranged to cover every possibility of a retreat with the help of these units; how he sub-divided the cavalry into horse and camel units, and infantry into archers, swordsmen and Mata'een (soldiers armed with short lances which they throw with precision, skill and force); how he made the vanguard responsible for scouting, pioneering and performing duties of army engineers and miners; how he used to arrange the army in a battlefield; how he never suffered a defeat in his life; how bold he was; how he used to fight without protecting his body with armor or shield; how he never delivered more than one blow (mostly his one blow was sufficient to kill his opponent, if not he would give the opponent a chance to get up and run away) and how nobody ever dared stand before him for his second blow. To him war was a pious duty to be performed only for the purpose of defense.

He often declared, "Muslim's life is a battlefield, where he is seldom required to defend his self or his cause and country at the point of sword, which is Jihad al-Asghar (holy war on a minor scale), however formidable be the forces he is to face, while in every day of his life he is to fight against evil desires, vicious cravings and inordinate wishes, which is al-jhad al-akbar (a holy war on a major scale), take

care and do not suffer a defeat in this battle; remember it is life-long struggle; a success here will be honored with martyrdom, even if one dies in his bed surrounded by his relatives.”

Judicial Procedure

The principle of keeping independent of and over and above the executive, administrative and military sections of the state was the main factor of the reforms introduced by Imam Ali (as). He was very particular about this, so much so that historians narrate that once he appeared before his Chief Justice (Judge Shuraih) as a complainant and the Chief Justice wanted to give him a place of honor in the court and to treat him like a king or caliph. He reproached the judge for such a behavior, saying that he was there as plaintiff and not as a king or a caliph then he cheerfully accepted the decision of the court against him.

The effect of upholding the prestige of the court of justice and his adherence to the principles of equality and equity were so impressive that the person, against whom he had filed the case and had lost it, ran after him, kissed the hem of his garment and said, “Master! Teach me Islam, I am a Christian and I want to convert to Islam.” Why?,” inquired Imam Ali (as), “Did anyone force you to do that?” “No, Master,” the Christian said, “But your behavior of treating even a non-Muslim subject as your equal, the prestige which you have granted to justice and fair play and your abstention from use of power and authority made me feel that Islam is indeed a great religion. You are a ruler and a caliph, you could have easily ordered me to be killed and my property looted and nobody dare ask reasons of your actions, but you took the case against me to the court and cheerfully accepted the decision against you; I have never heard of such a ruler before you. What is more, what you claimed as yours is actually yours and not mine, but I know the persons who could provide proof of this are out of Kufa, therefore, I boldly said that it was mine and not yours. That was a lie and now I am ashamed to feel that I lied against such an honorable person. You have heard me. Will you not allow me to enter the fold of Islam?”

The Imam (as) again inquired: “Are you, of your own free-will, entering our fold?” “Yes,” the Christian replied. “Under your regime,” he went on, “I have nothing to lose by remaining in my religion and no worldly benefit to gain by embracing Islam and by confessing my guilt and sin.”

The code which he laid down for selection and enrollment of judges shows he took care of even minute requirements of the post and status. It says,

1) Only such persons should be selected who are well versed in Muslim law and know enough of the Holy Book and traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) to decide according to the principles laid down the rein. Besides, they must have knowledge of personal laws of other religions followed in their provinces.

2) They must be men of some standing and status.

3) They must not lose their tempers or patience and treat litigants harshly and insultingly. The litigants must feel that their interests are well-guarded and well looked after and that the doors of justice are

always open to them.

- 4) If they feel that they have made a mistake, they should not obstinately stick to it, but try to undo the injustice done by them.
- 5) They should be able to probe deeply before them and to reach the truth.
- 6) They must be able to reach decisions quickly and must not unnecessarily prolong a case.
- 7) They must not accept recommendations and must not be influenced.
- 8) Their salaries should be fixed so that they are not tempted by bribes and gifts.
- 9) In audiences and levees of the governors they should be given seats of honor.
- 10) Greedy and various persons and those who are open to flattery and cajolery should also be avoided.
- 11) The door of appeal to the public should not be closed. The caliph should always hear appeals against the decisions of the courts and should decide as per orders of Allah and the Holy Prophet (S).

Central and Provincial Secretariat and Subordinate Offices

The Imam (as) has laid down a code for the officers of the State which covers every aspect of their duties and obligations. It is embodied in the form of a letter (Letter No. 53, Nahjul-Balagha) written to one of his governors. Abdul-Masih al-Antaki, the famous Christian jurist, poet and philosopher of Beirut who died in the beginning of the 20th century says, "It is by far a superior and better code than the ones handed down by Moses and Hammurabi. It explains what a humane administration should be like and how it is to be carried on and it justifies the claims of Muslims that Islam wants to introduce a godly administration of the people, by the people and for the people. It decrees that a ruler should not rule to please himself but to bring happiness to the ruled. No religion before Islam tried to achieve this end. Ali (as) must be congratulated for having introduced these principles in his government and for having written them down for posterity.

I quote here just a few points to illustrate what Abdul-Masih meant by saying that it was a better code than the codes handed down by Moses or Hammurabi.

- 1) You must create in your mind kindness and love for your subjects. Do not behave with them as though you are a voracious and ravenous beast and that your success lies in tearing them up and devouring them.
- 2) Muslims and non-Muslims should be treated alike. Muslims are your brothers and non-Muslims are human beings just like you.
- 3) Do not feel ashamed to forgive. Do not hurry over punishments. Do not quickly lose your temper over

mistakes and failures of those over whom you rule. Anger and desire of vengeance are not going to be much use to you in your administration.

4) Do not allow the (evil) force of favoritism and nepotism to violate your duties to Allah and to man and drive you towards tyranny and oppression.

5) While selecting officers take care that you do not select such people who have served tyrannous and oppressive rulers and have been responsible for atrocities and savage cruelties committed by the state.

6) Select honest and kind persons and, from among them, prefer those who speak out the bitter truth to you unreservedly without fear or favor.

7) Appointments in the first place must be on probation.

8) Keep your officers well paid so that they may not be tempted to corruption or misappropriation.

9) Appoint confidential officers to secretly watch the activities of your officers and staff and report to you about their behaviors.

10) the secretaries of your civil, judicial or military services should be of personage naturally richer in character than the average. Choose the best amongst them irrespective of age or period of service.

11) All letters or applications should be dealt with by the officers and replies or orders about them should be drafted by them only, no subordinate must be allowed to work as the eyes and minds of these officers.

12) Take your subjects into your confidence and make them feel that you are their wellwisher and friend.

13) Never break a promise or go against the terms of a treaty. It is a sin against Allah.

14) You must take care of your traders but should never allow them to resort to hoarding, black-marketing and profiteering.

15) Promote and encourage local arts and crafts, it reduces poverty and raises the standard of life.

16) Farm tillers are assets to the state and should be protected as an asset.

17) Remember that your sacred duty is to look after the poor, disabled and orphans. Let not your officers humiliate them, ill-treat them or oppress them. Help them, protect them and let them approach you whenever they are in need of your help.

18) Avoid bloodshed. Do not kill anybody unless he deserves to be killed according to the canons of Islam.

Ali (as) And The Philosophy Of Religions

A man enters a garden laid out into beautiful flower beds, artistically and aesthetically arranged. The flowers have been grown by those persons who know the art and science of it. The beauty of their colors and the delicacy of their forms and shades are pleasing to the eyes and their fragrance enchants the minds. The man knows that he has not the knowledge and capability to cultivate and grow flowers like that and the public has no time to go through the garden and enjoy the sights and fragrance of these beds at leisure. He picks up a few flowers from each of these beds and arranges them in a bouquet as a humble homage to the grandness and beauty of the garden.

With this view in mind, these chapters were written. I have drawn freely from the following books Al-Murtada, al-Karrar, Al-Sirajul-Mubin. Tahtheebul-Matin, Nafs al-Rasul, the Spirit of Islam, Islam Under the Arabs, the preaching of Islam, Khasa'is al-Nisa'i, al-Tabrisi's Ihtijaj, Bihar al-Anwar, Al-Manaqib, Sharh of Ibn Maisum, Sharh of Mirza Fathallah, the Sharh of Ibn Abul-Hadid and Irshad.

I am sure the selection is not the best, but it is the best that I can do and I am sure it will provoke minds superior to mine for better efforts.

In this last chapter, I shall try to discuss the teachings of the Imam (as) in the field of philosophy of religion.

With Imam Ali (as) and the Imams of his descent, religion was a vital and positive force of life. Their philosophy never sinks to a war of words without life and without earnestness which is the main feature of the schools under Ptolemies or the vicious circles created by the philosophers of the West and East. Their ardent love of knowledge, devotion in the evolution of the human mind, their sincere faith in Allah and His Mercy, Love and Kindness and their looking upwards for the literalness of common interpretations of law, show the spirituality and expansiveness of their philosophy of religion.

The Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (S) defines knowledge by saying, "Enlightenment of the heart is its essence, Truth is its principal object, Inspiration is its guide, Reason is its acceptor, Allah is its Inspirer and the words of man are those who utter them. To him, the evolution of the mind was the essence of life and religion was the essence of the evolution of the mind.

How correctly Imam Ali (as) taught us that a man without a mind is not a man and a mind without religion is worse even than the instinctual nature of a beast, more harmful, more dangerous and more carnivorous. Devotion without understanding will not bring the Blessing of Allah, it is useless.

He attaches so much value to the mind and its correct ways of grasping the truth that he says your first leader and guide is your mind. At other places he says that nothing is more useful to man than his intelligence, there is nothing wealthier than wisdom, there is no greater bounty of the master than the intellect granted to you, you can dispense with everything but your mind and intelligence, there is no

better guide towards truth than wisdom, one hour of deep and sober meditation is better than a life of prayers without understanding and a wise man thinks first and speaks or acts afterwards.

Next to intelligence and wisdom, he taught us to attach importance to the sincerity of purpose in life. Once explaining a certain verse to Abdullah ibn Abbas, he said, "Ibn Abbas, if you sincerely and intelligently go in search of truth or religion and if you wander out of the right path, even then there is a reward for you." There is a sermon in Nahjul-Balagha in which he says, "Do not kill the Kharijites after me because to go in search of the truth and to lose the true path is better than to spend the entire span of one's life in pursuit of vicious pleasure and wickedness."

The natural and logical sequence of the above two attributes is to take account of yourself, your knowledge, your thoughts, your intentions, your desires and your deeds. He, therefore, advises us thus: "Weigh your own souls before the time of weighing of your actions arrives. Take account of yourself before you are called upon to account for your conduct in this existence."

To obtain favorable results of such weighing and taking account of oneself, one must have done good deeds. And as far as actions and reactions are concerned, he wants us to understand that human conduct is not fortuitous, one act is the result of another; life, destiny and character means a series of incidents, events and actions which are related to each other, as cause and effect by an ordained Law.

Therefore, apply yourself to good and pure actions, adhere to truth, follow the true path to salvation, before death makes you leave this abode. If you do not warn and guide yourself none other can direct you. The master has pointed out to you the path of salvation and has warned you of the temptations of this world. Abstain from foulness though it may be fair to your sight. Avoid evil, however pleasant, for you know not how far it can take you away from him.

His discourses in Nahjul-Balagha about noble deeds are supreme reading. His warnings against sinful life are very persuasive teachings. He says, "O You servants of the Lord! Fulfil the duties that are imposed on you for in their neglect there is abasement, your good work alone will render easy the road to death and to the Heaven. Remember each sin increases the debt and makes the chain heavier. The message of mercy has come, the path of truth (haqq) is clear; obey the command that has been laid on you; live in purity and work with nobility of purpose and ask Allah to help you in your endeavors and to forgive your past transgressions. Cultivate humility and forbearance, comfort yourself with the sincere truth."

Next to sincere faith in the Unity of Allah and the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet (S), he lays a great emphasis on piety. He wants us to realize that piety is not a juicy morsel to be swallowed easily nor is it dip in the river to clean all dirt and filth from the body. Piety means those actions, which at the beginning may be sour, harsh and painful to perform. Piety means to free oneself from vicious desires and wicked deeds. This freedom cannot be obtained but by constant effort and endeavor. Such efforts are a continuous struggle and a long drawn war against the vicious cravings of the mind. Nobody can be free

from vices and sins unless he or she develops the capacity to abhor and hate them. When once this capacity develops, then to adopt a pious and sober life because a habit, a second nature. Few things are forbidden to you and so many things are allowed that no one is barred from normal relaxation, ease and comfort from sober and harmless pleasures and pursuits.

To him, asceticism was a sin against the self. History cites many instances where he admonished the persons who had given up their homes and families, had severed every connection with society, had taken to a mosque and had been praying, fasting and reciting the Holy Book morning, noon and night. He sent them back to their homes and told them that their duties lie among their fellow beings and what they had done was not piety but fanatic asceticism which is not allowed in Islam. He strongly reprobated observance of asceticism and condemned the abandonment of the affairs of this life in fanatic pursuits of rituals.

He says that he who acts with piety gives rest to his soul; he who takes warning understands the truth and he who understands it attains the perfect knowledge.

His teachings do not convey any impression of predestination; on the contrary they portray a soul animated with a living faith in Allah and yet full of trust in human development founded on individual exertion springing from human volition. One day, someone asked him the meaning of Qaza' and Qadar. He replied, "Qaza' means obedience to the commandments of Allah and avoidance of sin and qadar means the ability to live a pious and holy life, to do that which brings one nearer to Allah and to shun that which throws him away from His Perfection. Say not that man is compelled, for that attribution is tyranny against Allah, nor say that man has the absolute discretion to decide what is right and what is wrong, we achieve success through His Help and Grace in our endeavors, to act righteously and we transgress because of our neglect of His Commandments."

Explaining the meaning of the verse, "There is no power nor help but from Allah," he said, "It means that I am not afraid of Allah's Wrath, but I am afraid of His Purity, nor have I power to observe His Commandments, but my strength is in His assistance. Allah has placed us on earth to try each of us according to his endowments." Explaining the verse saying, "We will try you to see who are strivers (after truth and purity) and who are forbearing and patient and we will test your actions and we will help you by degrees to attain what you know not!," he says, "These verses prove the liberty of human volition." Explaining the verse: "Allah directs him whom He chooses and leads him astray whom He chooses," he says, "This does not mean that He compels men to evil or good deeds, or that He either gives direction or refuses it according to His caprice, for this would do away all responsibility for human action; on the contrary it means that Allah points out the road to truth and lets men choose as they will."

In a sermon in Nahjul-Balagha, Imam Ali (as) says, "The theory of compulsion, predestination or predetermination of fate is a Satanic insinuation and a doctrine of faith among the enemies of Allah. On the contrary, Allah has ordained man to obey His Commands and has given him freedom of will and action, he is at full liberty to obey His Commands or to disobey. There is no compulsion in accepting the

religions preached by His Messengers and no compulsion to obey His Commands. Even His Commands (like daily prayers, fasting, zakat, etc.) are not hard, harsh and unbearable and every leniency and ease on account of age and health is granted to man.”

The freedom of human will, based on the doctrine that man would be judged by the use he had made of his reason, was inculcated in the teachings of the Holy Prophet (S), along with an earnest belief in the Supreme Power ruling the universe. Imam Ali (as) gave this idea a more definite form and it grew into a philosophy. In reply to a question he says, “Perhaps you consider predestination to be necessary and the particular decree to be irreversible; if it were so then reward and punishment would be in vain and the promise and the threat would be of no account, and surely blame would not have come from Allah for the sinner nor praise for the righteous, nor would the righteous be more worthy of the reward of his good deeds, nor the wicked be more deserving of the punishment of his sin than the righteous. Allah has ordained the giving of choice to man and the putting of them in fear and He hath not laid duties upon men by force nor sent his prophets as farce.”

When asked, “What is predestination and the particular decree which drove us? He answered, “The command of Allah and the rein His purpose.” Then he repeated the verse, “The Lord has ordained that you must worship none but Him and to be kind to your parents.”

Morality of life is another point which Imam Ali (as) wanted men to realize fully, sincerely and rationally. He wants us to understand that death is a biological incident of all forms of life and it is unavoidable, inevitable and sudden. No one knows when and how he or she is going to cross this barrier., therefore, it is foolish to imagine that it can be avoided, sinful self deception to forget it and idiotically timid to be afraid of it.

He says, “I am as fond of death as a baby is fond of his mother’s breast. The natural sequence of the mortality of life is that everything connected with it and with this world is mundane and has no lasting value. Therefore, why concentrate on pleasure and take to vicious ways to acquire them, why not try to improve your lot in the hereafter?”

Imam Ali’s teachings are a true gospel of the work ethic. He wants man to work, to work honestly, sincerely and diligently and to work for the reward reserved in the Heaven. He says, “Work, work and do good work while you still have life, health and opportunities. Allah ordains you to work while there is still time to work. Be thankful for the time and opportunities allotted to you and work for the good of mankind and for your own good. A life without work is a life without worth.

A mind without sober thoughts and a life without a program of honest work is the most fertile soil for the seeds of wickedness and vice. Work, with the nobility of purpose is one of the forms of prayer.” His advice to his son was, “Exert yourself to earn an honest living. The worst form of folly is the wasting of opportunities. Opportunities do not repeat themselves so make use of each of them when it presents itself, but let piety guide in all of your actions.”

Thus, Imam Ali (as) guides us through the problems of men with respect to ourselves individually as he leads us towards solving problems encountered with one another. In a letter to Imam Hassan (S), he says, “My dear son, as far as your behavior with other human beings is concerned let yourself act as scales to help you judge its goodness or wickedness. Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you. Whatever you dislike to happen to you, spare others from such happenings.” At another place, he advises, “Do not make yourself a slave of anything.

Allah has created you a free man. Do not sell away this freedom in return for anything. There is no real value or benefit that you derive by selling your honor, conscience and self respect. Do not run after him who tries to avoid you. Remember that to oppress a weak or helpless person is the worst form of tyranny. Do good to your brother when he is bent upon doing harm to you. Befriend him when he ignores you. Be generous to him if he is miserly to you. Be kind to him if he is harsh and cruel to you. But be very careful that you do not behave with undeserving, mean and wicked persons.”

Imam Ali (as) had a very soft corner in his noble heart for the poor, the disabled, the aged and the orphans. To Malik he says, “I want to caution you about the poor. Fear Allah about your attitude towards them. Let it be remembered that their welfare is the first charge to a state and on the well-to-do people.”

As far as the question of man and Allah is concerned, Imam Ali (as) teaches us to believe in Allah Who has created us, Who loves us, nourishes us, helps us and is our well-wisher. He should be loved, adored and venerated.

Through many of his prayers Imam Ali (as) has implanted in the minds of those who have faith in Allah the highest devotional spirit. He teaches us to love and adore Him and to think of Him as the Lord, the Adorable, the Eternal, the Everlasting, the Cherisher, the True Sovereign,

Whose Mercy and Grace overshadows the universe. Who is the master, the Loving and Forgiving, Who bestows power and might on whom He pleases. None can lower him whom He exalted. Whose beneficence is all persuading. Whose Forgiveness and Mercy is all embracing. Who is the Helper of the afflicted, the reliever of all distressed, the Consoler of the broken hearts. Who is present everywhere to help His Creatures. Who fulfills all needs, bestows all blessings. Who is a friend of the poor and the bereaved. At another place he beseeches the master thus, “You are my Fortress; a Castle for all who seek Your Protection and Help. The Helper of the pure and true, the refugee of the weak. The Helper of those seeking Your Help. Thanks be to You, O Lord Whose Mercy extends to every sinner and who provides for even those who deny Him.”

This is how he wants us to have faith in Allah, a Creator, a Nourisher, a Helper, a Refuge, a Protection. One who loves you and One to be loved, adored, venerated and worshipped.

The other aspect of his teaching is that he has clearly and emphatically condemned all anthropomorphic (to attribute human forms, qualities or personality to Allah) and anthropathy (ascription of human passions and affections to Allah) concepts. He says, “Allah is not like any object that the human mind

can conceive. No attribute can be ascribed to Him which bears the least resemblance to any qualities which human beings have perceived of from their knowledge of material objects. The perfection of piety consists in knowing Allah; the perfection of knowledge is the affirmation of His Verity, and the perfection of verity is the acknowledgment of His Unity in all sincerity, and the perfection of sincerity is to deny all attributes to the Deity. He, who refers an attribute to Allah believes the attributes to be Allah and he who so believes an attribute to be Allah, regards Allah as two or part of one. He who asks where Allah is assimilates him with some object. Allah is the Creator, not because He Himself is created. Allah is Existent not because he was non-existent. He is with every object, not from resemblance or nearness. He is outside everything not from separation or indifference towards His creatures. He works and creates not in the meaning of motions or actions. He sees and hears but not with help of bodily organs or outside agencies. He was seeing when there was nothing created to see. He has no relationship to matter, time and space, Allah is Omniscient because knowledge is His Essence, Loving because Love is His Essence, Mighty because Power is His Essence, Forgiving because Forgiveness is His Essence and not because these are attributes apart from His Essence.”

At another place he says, “O Lord! You are the Creator, I am the created; You are the Sovereign, I am only Your servant; I am the one who beseeches, You, Lord are the refuge. You are the Forgiver, I am the sinner; You my Lord, are the Merciful, the all-Knowing, the all-Loving; I am groping in the dark; I seek Your knowledge and Love. Bestow, Lord, all Your Knowledge, Love and Mercy upon me and let me approach You, my Lord. You live in every heart and every soul. Your Knowledge is ingrained in every mind.”

Compiler And Commentators Of Nahjul-Balagha

The last compiler of the sermons, letters, orders and sayings of Imam Ali (as) was Sayyid al-Sharif ar-Radi. His was the compilation which came down to us in its entire form through ten centuries. He named this compilation Nahjul-Balagha.

Sayyid ar-Radi's name was Abul-Hassan Sayyid Muhammad ar-Radi. Al-Radi was his nicknamed, laqab. He was born in Baghdad (in 359 A.H.) in a family famous all over the country for its connections with the state, patronage of arts and literature and interest in history, philosophy and religion. It was a time when Baghdad was vying with Cairo and Cordoba for superiority over arts, sciences, philosophy and languages.

His father, “Abu Ahmed” Sayyid Hussain, was appointed five times as a naqeeb or chief of the Family of Imam Ali (as). His family was held in the highest regards by ‘Abbaside caliphs and Alawide kings.

Sayyid ar-Radi's father was a descendant of the Imam Musa al-Kazim (as) being the great grandson of the Imam (as). His mother was the great granddaughter of the Imam Zainul-Abidin (as). She was a woman famous for her piety and her literary talents.

His elder brother, Sayyid Murtada, was a great theologian and poet. Sayyid Murtada's works (poems) are still being published in Cairo and Beirut and form part of the course of Arabic literature in the universities of those two cities. Sayyid Murtada has a great place among the Shi'a theologians and is nicknamed A'lamul-huda (standards of the true path of religion).

His mother took a keen interest in educating her two sons, Sayyid Murtada and Sayyid ar-Radi. She personally took them both to the Shi'a theologian and mujtahid, Abu Abdullah Shaikh al-Mufid and requested him to educate these children under his personal supervision and care.

Sayyid ar-Radi, under the instructions of Shaikh al-Mufid, received an early education in Arabic grammar, literature and lexicology from Hussan ibn Abdullah Sairafi. At the early stage of ten he was considered a finished product of that institution and a good poet. He joined the educational institutions of Aby Ishaq-Ahmed ibn Muhammad- Tabari, Ali ibn Isa Rubace, Othman ibn Jinny and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Musa Khawarizmi; with them he studied the Holy Qur'an, traditions, theology, history of religions, philosophy and literature. Since early childhood, his keen desire of acquiring knowledge and concentrating on studies was noted and appreciated by everyone of those great scholars under whom he received his training. As a matter of fact, he was considered as a prodigy by many of them.

At the age of twenty, his merit was recognized and respected by all of them and even Shaikh al-Mufid regarded this young man as his equal.

Sayyid ar-Radi died young at the age of forty-five or forty-seven years, but during this short period he had written many books. His commentary of the Holy Qur'an is considered by the historian Ibn Khallikan to be peerless and his explanation of the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) is still respected as a great resource of the meaning of the words used by the Holy Messenger of Allah.

At the age of twenty-one, he was elected in place of his father as naqeeb of the family of Abu Talib and was appointed by the State as the amir of the pilgrimage to Mecca.

He was a man of strong character, free will and independent views. During his time the Abbaside caliphate of Baghdad was at war with the Fatimide caliphate of Egypt, and had persuaded Sunni and Shi'a dignitaries to sign a mahzar (public declaration) exposing the non-Muslims tendencies and activities of some Fatimide caliphs. Even the elder brother of Sayyid ar-Radi and his father were forced to sign it, but Sayyid ar-Radi refused to sign such a decree. This brought him onto a blacklist of the government, but he cheerfully accepted the loss of political privilege and status. Four times during his life did he refuse financial aid from the government.

In his early age he had come across sayings, sermons and letters of Imam Ali (as). He had found them scattered in various books of philosophy, religion, history, biography, literature and commentaries of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S). He had also found that the collections of Imam Ali's work as carried on by great scholars of the first four centuries because of the unsettled political condition of the centers of learning in the peninsula, were lost.

He, therefore, decided to re-collect them once again. The desire became a passion with him. He toured all over the peninsula to collect these sermons, sayings and letters, gathering all the various books containing them and classified them into sermons, letters and sayings. The letters also included orders of Imam Ali (as) to his officers and two of his wills. In fact, the classification was on the basis of what Imam Ali (as) preached, what he wrote and what he said.

Some biographers say that for years he devoted eighteen hours a day for this work. It was a labor of love for him. His health was failing yet he continued the work without an abatement of intensity.

To him this compilation was a sacred duty and he carried it out with the devotion and diligence that it deserved. He was particularly and sincerely careful not to add and not to subtract a word from the texts which he found. If he found a sermon divided into many parts he did not join them into a continuous whole but let them remain as two, three or four disjointed parts. This system of compilation annoyed the later commentators of Nahjul-Balagha, like ibn Abul-Hadid and ibn Maisum and they have complained about it. Sometimes, when Sayyid ar-Radi found the middle part of a sermon missing, he kept the two remaining parts as two separate sermons.

He collected from a pile of books and manuscripts on various subjects and had come across those books at various periods of his work. Naturally, there was not any chronological order in his collection. The sermons which are supposed to be delivered in Medina or in the early period of Imam Ali's temporal rulership are found in the later part of the book and sermons on the events of Siffin and Nahrawan in early part. Similarly, the sermon, which is considered as the last sermon of Imam Ali (as), precedes many discourses which by their test, may rightly be considered to be delivered in Medina during the periods of the first and second caliphate. At places we find that the Sayyid had copied the same sermon in different places as quoted by different authors.

All these discrepancies jar upon the readers' minds. But they stand as iron clad irrefutable proof to the honest and sincere desire of Sayyid ar-Radi to present the work as he found it and not to interfere with it in any way however essential it might be.

Some historians and biographists are of the opinion that Sayyid ar-Radi was helped in this work by his elder brother Sayyid Murtada. But, had this been a fact, the noble-minded Sayyid would have willingly mentioned it in his preface because he has tried to mention all the sources from which he found these sermons etc.

Sayyid ar-Radi died in the month of Muharram 404 A.H. at the age of 45 years. Some biographists are of the opinion that the year of his death was 406 A.H. And his age at the time of death was 47 years. His elder brother Sayyid Murtada and his teacher Shaikh al-Mufid were so grievously stricken that they could not lead the funeral service of that great man and the service was led by the Prime Minister "Abu Ghalib" Fakhru'l Mulk.

Sayyid ar-Radi has left about 40 books as his memorial, some of them are great works, they consist of

commentaries of the Holy Qur'an on religion and philosophy, yet his masterpiece was the collection of the sermons, letters and sayings of Imam Ali (as).

As soon as the noble Sayyid compiled this book (Nahjul- Balagha), his contemporaries started writing commentaries on it. The work of commenting on the text and explaining the meanings of the words used by Imam Ali (as), and the historical events mentioned therein, is still going on even nowadays. I am citing herein the names of some of the famous commentators of Nahjul-Balagha:

Sunni Commentators

- 1) Imam Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Wayri (cir. 470 A.H.)
- 2) Abul-Hassan Ali ibn Abul-Qasim al-Bayhaqi (565 A.H.). His commentary is quoted by Mu'jam al-Udaba' of Yaqut al-Hamawi, Vol. 13, p. 225, printed in Egypt.
- 3) Imam Fakhrud-Din al-Razi (606 A.H.). His commentary is quoted by:
- 4) Akhbarul-Hukama' of Ibn al-Qufi, p. 192, printed in Egypt.
- 5) Uyun al-Anbiya' of Ibn Abu Sabe'e'a, p. 25, printed in Egypt.
- 6) Abdul-Hamid Hibathullah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Abul-Hadid, the Mu'tazilite scholar (known as Ibn Abul-Hadid, 655 A.H.). His commentary is a world-famous classic covering 17 volumes, printed half a dozen times in Cairo, Beirut, Tehran and Isfahan.
- 7) Shaikh Kamalud-Din Abdul Rahman al-Shaybani (cir. 705 A.H.)
- 8) Allama Sa'dud-Din al-Taftazani (797 A.H.)
- 9) The Judge of Baghdad, Shaikh Qa'imud-Din.
- 10) Allama Shaikh Muhammad Abdoh (1323 A.H.) His commentary has been printed quite often and forms a part of the university course in Cairo and Beirut.
- 11) Professor Muhammad Hassan al-Nayer al-Mursafi of Egypt. His commentary is printed at Darul-Epistle Press Cairo, Egypt.
- 12) Professor Muhammad Mohiuddin Abdul Hamid, Professor of Lexicology of Al-Azhar University. His book was printed at Istiqamatul-Misr Press, Cairo.
- 13) Professor Shaikh Abdullah al-Bayruni of Cairo, Egypt.

Shi'a Commentators

- 1) Allama Sayyid Ali ibn Nasir (d. cir. 450 A.H.). He was a contemporary of Sayyid ar-Radi.

- 2) The famous Shi'a mujtahid, theologian and philosopher Allama Qutubud-Din al-Ravandi. His Commentary is named Minhajul- Bara'a.
- 3) Fazil al-Jalil, Allama Sayyid Ibn Tawus.
- 4) Allama ibn Maisum al-Bahrani (d. cir. 660 A.H.). He was a contemporary of Ibn Abul-Hadid. His commentary is famous and is considered of immense value on problems of the philosophy of Islam. He has not devoted as much time towards the literary and historical aspects of Nahjul-Balagha as ibn Abul-Hadid. His book is greatly valued by Shi'a theologians and philosophers.
- 5) Allama Qutubud-Din Muhammad ibn Hussain al-Iskandari. His commentary is named Al-Islah.
- 6) Shaikh Hussain ibn Shaikh Shihabud-Din Hayder Ali al-Amili al- Karki. He died in Hyderabad, India, in 1076 A.H.
- 7) Shaikh Nizamud-Din Ali ibn al-Hussain ibn Nizamud-Din al- Jilani. He named his commentary Anwarul-Fasaha and Asrarul- Balagha.
- 8) Allama Sayyid Sanad Mirza Allauddin Muhammad ibn Abu Turab, known as Fazil al-Gulistanah (1110 A.H.). His commentary covers 20 volumes.
- 9) Agha Shaikh Muhammad Raza. His commentary is called Ba'dra al-Najafia. It has been printed often and very well received throughout Iran.
- 10) Allama Sayyid Ma'jid ibn Muhammad Bahrani. He was a contemporary of Shaikh al-Baha'i and died in 1028 A.H. His commentary is greatly valued by Shi'a theologians.
- 11) Mullah Fathallah Kashani. He died in 997 A.H. He was a lexicographer, grammarian, mathematician, physicist, engineer and theologian. He had been to the court of Akbar also. He was a contemporary of the famous historian of Akbar's court,
- 12) Mullah Abdul-Qadir Badayuni. The mullah speaks very highly of him in his book Muntakhabul-Tawarikh. He says, "Adil Khan, governor of Deccan, Khan al-Khanan and Hakeem Abul-Fath of the court of Akbar, paid great respects to him and Akbar also had great regards for him. His commentary is printed very often and so far as the translation of words used by Imam Ali (as) in Persian is concerned, it is the best book ever published.

Preface By The Compiler Of Nahjul-Balagha, Allama Ash-Sharif Ar-Radi

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

All Praise is due to Allah Who has held praise as the price of His bounties, protection against His

retribution, pathway to His paradise and means for multiplication of His good treatment. May blessings be on His Messenger, the Prophet (S) of mercy, the torch of the people, the chosen one from the origin of greatness and family of longstanding honors, the plantation of all-engrossing glory and the branch of sublimity full of fruits and foliage. And, may blessing be upon the members of his family who are lanterns against darkness, protection of the people, brilliant minarets of religion and high standards of greatness. May Allah shower upon them all the blessings befitting their distinction as rewards for their actions and suitable to the chastity of their lineage so long as the morning dawns and the stars twinkle.

In my early age at the dawn of youth, I commenced writing a book on the characteristics of the Imams covering the account of their virtues and masterpieces of their utterances. The purpose of the compilation was stated in the beginning of the book. The rein, I completed the portion relevant to the account of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as) but I could not complete that part concerning the other Imams due to impediments of the time and obstacles of the days.

I divided the book into several chapters and sections, in a manner for its last section to compromise whatever had been related to Ali's short utterances such as his counsel, maxims and proverbs but not his long lectures and detailed discourses.

A number of my friends and brothers-in-faith, while wondering at its delicate and blossoming expressions, admired the contents of this particular section and desired that I complete a book which should cover all the forms of the utterances of Amir al-Mu'minin (as), including diverse materials such as lectures, letters, counsels, ethics, etc. They were convinced that because Amir al-Mu'minin (as) was the fountain of eloquence and the source of rhetoric, the entire proceedings would comprise wonders and surprises of eloquence and rhetoric, brilliant jewels of the Arabic language and shining expressions about faith that were not collected nor found together in any other book.

Through the Imam, the hidden delicacies of eloquence and rhetoric came to light and from him, its principles and rules were learned. Every speaker and orator had to tread on his footprints and every eloquent preacher availed of his utterances.

Even then, none could equal him and so the credit for being the first and foremost remained with him because his utterances are those that carry the reflection of the Divine knowledge and savor the Prophet's utterance. Accordingly, I acceded to their requests because I knew that it meant great reward, handsome reputation and a treasure of recompense.

The object of this compilation is to bring forth Amir al-Mu'minin's greatness and superiority in the are of rhetoric, in addition to his countless qualities and innumerable distinctions and to show that he had risen to the highest pinnacle of this attainment. He was singular among all those predecessors whose utterances are quoted here and the re, whereas his own utterances are such an on-rushing stream that its flow cannot be encountered and its treasure of delicacies cannot be matched. Since I proudly trace my descent from him, I have a pleasure of quoting a couplet of al-Farazdaq:

These are my forefathers O Jarir.

When we get together, can you claim forth their equals?

In my view, Amir al-Mu'minin's utterances were divisible in three categories: firstly sermons and decrees; secondly, letters and correspondence, and thirdly, maxims and counsels. Allah willing, I have decided to compile the sermons first, then the letters and finally the maxims and counsels. I then propose a separate chapter for each category, leaving blank pages in-between each so that if anything has been left out and becomes handy afterwards, it may be inserted the rein. If my utterance which is routine or in reply to some question or has some other aim does not fit in with any of my divisions, it should be included in the category for which is most suitable or to which its subject matter is most similar. In this compilation, some sections and sentences have crept in whose arrangement show disarray and disorderliness. This is so because I am only collecting the most representative brilliant utterances and do not wish to arrange or array them.

The characteristic of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) in which he is unparalleled and is shared by no one, is that his utterances on seclusion, piety, remembrance of Allah and admonition are such that when a person pursues them without bearing in mind that they are the words of a man who enjoys great and ruling status and who controls destinies of men, he can have no doubt that these are the utterances of a man who has no interest other than seclusion and no activity save worshipping; who is confined to the interior of some house or the valley some mountain where he hears nothing save his own murmur and sees no one except himself.

Would one believe that these are the utterances of one who plunges in battles with his sword drawn, severing heads and vanquishing the heroes while returning with his sword dripping with blood and the heart's fluid? And despite all of this, he is supreme among the recluse and chief among the saints. This distinction is one of those astonishing characteristics of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) with which he collected within himself contradictory qualities and patched together diverse greatness. I often mention this subject to my brethren-in-faith and cause them to ponder over it.

Within this compilation, some repetition of words or subject matter are to be expected, as the utterances of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) have been known to be related in numerous forms. Sometimes it happened that a particular utterance was found in a particular form in a tradition and was taken down in that very form. Thereafter, the same utterance was found in some other tradition either with acceptable addition or in a more attractive style of expression. In such a case with a view to further the object of compilation and to preserve the beautiful utterance from being lost it was decided to repeat it elsewhere. It has also happened that a particular utterance had appeared earlier but due to remoteness it has been entered again. This is through omission, not by intent.

In spite of all this I do not claim that I have collected Amir al-Mu'minin's utterances from all the sources and that no single sentence of any type or construction has been left out. In fact I do not rule out the possibility that whatever has been left out might be more than what has been collected and what has

been in any knowledge and use is far less than what has remained beyond my reach. My task was to strive to the best of my capacity and it was Allah's part to make the way easy and guide me to the goal if Allah so wills.

Having completed my work, both in the collection and compilation of this manuscript, Nahjul-Balagha, the pathway of rhetoric would be the appropriate title of the book, in that it would open the doors of eloquence for the reader and shorten its approach for him or her, the scholar and the student would meet their needs from it and the rhetoricians as well as the recluse would find their objectives in it. In this book will be found a wonderful discussion on Allah's Oneness, Justness and His being free from body and form, that will quench every thirst (for learning), provide a cure for every malady (of unbelief) and remove every doubt. I seek from Allah succor, protection against straying, correctness of action and His assistance. I seek His protection against mistakes of heart before mistakes of tongue and against mistakes of speech before mistakes of action. He is my Reliance and He is the best Trustee.

Notes

Al-Farazdaq, whose name was Hamman ibn Ghalib, belonged to the tribe of Banu Darim and was a notable poet. He was generally at odds with another Arab poet named Jarir ibn Atiyyah and they showed their merit only in mutual abuse and boasting over each other. The quoted couplet of al-Farazdaq is a link from that chain, wherein he addresses Jarir saying, "My forefathers were such as you have just heard, now you come forward with what your forefathers were and if there were any one like mine, name them before all of us. Reciting this couplet about his own forefathers Sayyid ar-Radi challenges everyone to bring forth their like, if any. Al-Farazdaq had addressed only Jarir but its quotation here has made it general and universal when its addressee is no more one single individual, but every person can consider himself to be its addressee. Despite this generality and universality the challenge to Aname their like remains unresponsive like the Qur'anic challenge: "... then bring forth its Like... etc."

Sayyid ar-Radi has pointed at this relationship and distinction at such an appropriate moment that there can be no better occasion because the greatness of the personality (namely Amir al-Mu'minin (as)) through whom he claims pride has already been mentioned and eyes have stood dazzled at the brilliance of his status while minds have acknowledged the sublimity of his status.

Now hearts can easily be made to bow before the height and greatness of this individual who bears relationship to him. Thus at the moment when hearts and minds were already inclined, Sayyid ar-Radi's eloquence-conscious eyes turned the sight towards himself as he was the ray of the sun whose abundant light dazzled the eye and a scion of the same lineal tree whose root is in the earth and whose branch extends up to the sky. Now who is there who would remain unaffected by this relationship and distinction and refuse to acknowledge his greatness and sublimity?

In the world, such persons are rarely found in whom besides one or two virtuous qualities other qualities might also attain prominence, much less the convergence of all contradictory qualities. Because every

temperament is not suited for the development of every quality, each quality has a peculiar tempo and each virtue needs a particular climate and they are appropriate only for such qualities or virtues with which they accord.

But where there is contradiction instead of harmony, the natural tendencies act as obstacles and do not allow any other quality to grow. For example, generosity and bountifulness demand that a person should possess the feeling of pity and God-fearing so that on seeing anyone in poverty or want, his heart would rend and his feelings would be disturbed at other's tribulations. While the dictates of bravery and fighting require that instead of pity and compassion there should be the passion of bloodshed and killing, prompting the person at every moment to enter into scuffle, ready to kill or be killed. These two qualities differ so widely that it is not possible to fuse the delicacies of generosity into the stiff manifestations of bravery just as bravery cannot be expected from Hatim nor generosity from Rustam. But the personality of Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) showed full accord with every greatness and complete harmony with every accomplishment and there was no good attribute or accomplishment which he lacked, nor any robe of greatness or beauty which did not fit his body.

Thus the contradictory qualities of generosity and bravery were found in him side by side. If he rained like the cloud in generosity, he also fought bravely standing firm as a mountain. Thus, his generosity and liberty of nature was of a degree that even during days of want and starvation, a major portion of whatever he earned as the wage of his day's toil was distributed among the poor and the starving. He would never allow a beggar to return disappointed from his door, so much so that even when in the battlefield the enemy asked him for his sword, he threw it before him being confident of the prowess of his naked arm.

An Urdu couplet says the following: The unbeliever depends on his sword But the believer fights even without it.

And his bravery and courage was such that the onslaught of armies could not shake the firmness of his foot with the result that he achieved success in every encounter and even the most brave fighter could not save his life in an encounter with him. Thus, Ibn Qutaybah writes in *Al-Ma'arif* saying, "Whomsoever he encountered bowed down to him. The heartless nature of the brave is not prone to thinking or pondering. Ali (as) had the quality of thinking of the highest degree. Thus, al-Shafi'i said as follows: 'What can I say about a man in whom three qualities existed with three other qualities that were never found together in any other man: generosity despite want, bravery with sagacity and knowledge with practical achievements?'"

It was the result of this proper thinking and correct judgement that after the death of the Prophet (S) when some people advised him to fight and promised to enlist warriors for him he rejected this advice. Although on such occasions, even a slight support is enough to encourage the heartless brave. Yet, the farsighted mind of Ali (as) saw at once that if a battle was waged at that moment, the voice of Islam would be submerged under the clatter of swords. Even then, if success was achieved it would be said

that the status was gained by the power of the sword and there was no right for it. Thus, by withholding his sword on the one hand he provided protection to Islam and on the other saved his own right from the imputation of bloodshed.

When the veins are full of daring blood and the bosom full of flames of anger and wrath, it is extremely difficult to curb the passion of vengeance by adopting the course of forgiveness and, despite authority and power, to pardon and overlook. But Ali's metal used to shine on such occasions when his forgiving nature would accommodate even his bloodthirsty foes. Thus, at the end of the Battle of Jamal he made a general proclamation that no one who left the field or sought out protection would be assaulted and he let go without any punishment, even such enemies as Marwan ibn al-Hakam and Abdullah ibn az-Subayr. And the treatment that he meted out to Aisha. Aisha was a matchless manifestation of his nobility and high character and, in spite of her open enmity and rebellion, he sent with her women in men's garb to escort her to Medina.

By giving his own personal malice the garb of fundamental differences, man not only deceives others but also tries to keep himself under deception. In these conditions such a delicate situation arises that man fails to distinguish and separate his personal malice from a fundamental difference but easily mixes them together and considers that he has followed the Command of Allah and in this way he satisfies his passion for vengeance as well.

But Amir al-Mu'minin's discerning eyes never got deceived nor did they willingly deceive themselves. Thus, on an occasion after bringing down his opponent and placing himself on his bosom the vanquished opponent then spat on his face. As a mortal man, the Imam's rage should have risen and his hand should have moved quicker. Instead of being enraged, he got off from the man's bosom lest his action would be tarnished by personal feeling and slew him only after the anger had subsided.

There is nothing in common between combat and encounter and seclusion and God-fearing because one shows valor and courage while the other supplication and submission. But Amir al-Mu'minin (as) was a unique combination of both of these qualities as his hands that were bound in devotion were equally active in the battlefield and side by side with relaxing in seclusion for devotion he was a common visitor of the field of action.

The scene of the night of Harir puts human wit in astonishment and wonder when closing his eyes to the bloody action around, he spread his prayer cloth and engaged himself in prayer with full peace of mind and heart while arrows were darting off sometimes over his head and sometimes from his right or left. But he remained engaged in Allah's remembrance without any fear or apprehension. Upon finishing, he again cast his hand on the sword's handle and the fierce battle that then followed is unparalleled in history. The status was that on all sides there was such hue and cry and fleeing activity that even voices falling on the ears could not be discerned. Of course, after every moment or so his own call of Allahu Akbar rose in the atmosphere and resounded in the ears and every such call meant death of a foe. Those who counted these calls of takbir recorded their number as five hundred and twenty-three.

The taste for learning and acquiring knowledge of Allah does not combine with material activity but Amir al-Mu'minin (as) adorned the meetings of learning and scholarship along with war-like pursuits and he watered the field of Islam with springs of learning and truth along with shedding streams of blood (in battles).

When there is perfection of learning, then even if there is not a complete absence of action, there must no doubt exist shortness of action, but Amir al-Mu'minin (as) treaded the field of knowledge and action equally, as has been already shown in al-Shafi'i's poetry.

Examples of harmony in utterance and action are quite rare but Amir al-Mu'minin's action preceded his utterance, as he himself says the following: "O people I do not exhort you to any action but that I myself first proceed towards it before you and do not desist you from any matter but that I first desist from it myself.

As soon as we think of a recluse and a pious man we visualize a face full of frowns because for piety, severity of temper and hardness of face are inseparable so much so that the thought of a smile on the lips of a pious man is regarded as a sin. But despite extreme piety and self-denial, Amir al-Mu'minin (as) always had such an appearance that his light temper and brightness of face was apparent from his looks and his lips always bore a playful smile.

He never showed frowns on his forehead like the dry recluse, so much so that when people could not find any defect in him, this very lightness of his temper was taken to be his fault, while a hard temper and a bitter face were held to be a virtues.

If a man possesses a cheerful heart and a joyous temper, he cannot command authority over others; but Amir al-Mu'minin's cheerful face was so full of awe and dignity that no eye could face it. Once Mu'awiyah tauntingly said, "May Allah bless Ali! He was a man of cheerful disposition." Then Qays ibn Sa'd retorted, "By Allah! Despite a cheerful disposition and an entertaining countenance, he was more awe-inspiring than a hungry lion, and this awe was due to his piety, not like your fear of the miscreants of Syria!"

Where there is rule and authority there is also a crowd of servants and workers, checks of grandeur and eminence with equipment of pageantry, but Amir al-Mu'minin's period of rule was an example of the highest simplicity. In him, people saw only a tattered turban in place of a royal crown, patched apparel in place of the regal robes and the floor of earth in place of the ruler's throne.

He never liked grandeur nor allowed a show of external grandiosity. Once he was passing on a horseback when Harb ibn Shurahbil started walking with him and began talking. Amir al-Mu'minin (as) said to him, "Get back because walking on foot with me by one like you is mischievous for the ruler (me) and brings an insult to the believer (you)."

In short, he was such a versatile personality in whom numerous contradictory qualities had joined

together and all the good attributes were centered in their full brightness as though his self was a collection of several selves and each self was an astounding portrait of achievement which showed forth the delineation of distinction in its untainted form and on whose accomplishment one wonders with bewilderment.

A Persian couplet says the following:

The figure of my beloved is so beautiful that when I cast my glance on the body from head to toe,
Every spot there of calls my attention claiming to be the most enchanting.

- [1.](#) There are two theories as to what brought those Jews to Medina. One says they went there from Jerusalem fleeing the persecution of the Romans. Another says they fled the persecution of fanatical rulers of Yemen who were appointed by the then Ethiopian empire, at the time fanatically Christian- Ed
- [2.](#) Linguistically, the meaning of "Amirul-Mu'minin" is: the one who bestows knowledge on the believers, the one who "mirs" (pours knowledge upon) them.
- [3.](#) Fixed verses are those which are never abrogated; the injunction(s) they contain remain valid forever.
- [4.](#) This is surely a Prophetic prediction that Ali's right to the caliphate would be usurped. The usurpers were the very first to swear the oath of allegiance to Amirul-Mu'minin Ali (as) and the very first to violate it.

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[1](#). In the atmosphere that had been created soon after the Prophet (S), Ahl al-Bayt (as) (members of his family) had no course except to remain secluded resulting in the world's continued ignorance of their real qualities and being acquainted with their teachings and attainments. To belittle them and keep them away from authority has been considered as the greatest service to Islam.

If Othman's open misdeeds had not given a chance to the Muslims to wake up and open their eyes there will have been no question of allegiance to Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) and temporal authority will have retained the same course as it had so far followed. But all those who could be named for the purpose had no courage to come forward because of their own shortcomings while Mu`awiyah was sitting in his capital away from the center.

In these circumstances there was none except Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) who could be looked at. Consequently people's eyes hovered around him and the same common people who, following the direction of the wind, had been swearing allegiance to others jumped at him for swearing allegiance. Nevertheless, this allegiance was not on the count that they regarded his Caliphate as from Allah and him as an Imam (The Divine Leader) to obey as obligatory. It was rather under their own principles which were known as democratic or consultative.

However, there was one group who was swearing allegiance to him as a religious obligation regarding his Caliphate as determined by Allah. otherwise, the majority regarded him a ruler like the other Caliphs and as regarding precedence, on the fourth status, or at the level of the common men after the three caliphs. Since the people, the army and the civil servants had been impressed by the beliefs and actions of the previous rulers and immersed in their ways whenever they found anything against their liking they fretted and frowned, evaded war and were ready to rise in disobedience and rebellion.

Furthermore, just as among those who fought in jihad on the side of the Prophet (S), there were some seekers of this world and others of the Hereafter. Now, in the same way, there was no dearth of worldly men who were, in appearance, with Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) but actually they had connections with Mu`awiyah who has promised some of them positions and had extended to others temptation of wealth. To hold them as Shi`as of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) and to blame Shi`ism for this reason is closing the eyes to facts because the beliefs of these people will be the same as of those who regarded Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) fourth in the series. Ibn Abul-Hadid throws light on the beliefs of these persons in clear words:

Whoever observes minutely the events during the period of Caliphate of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) will know that Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) had been brought to bay because those who knew his real status were very few. The swarming majority did not bear that belief about him which was obligatory to have. They gave precedence to the previous Caliphs over him and held that the criterion of precedence was Caliphate. In this matter, those coming later followed the predecessors and argued that if the predecessors had not the knowledge that the previous Caliphs had precedence over Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) they will not have preferred them to him.

Rather, these people knew and took Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) as a citizen and subject. Most of those who fought in his company did so, on grounds of prestige or Arab partisanship, not on the ground of religion or belief, as we read on p. 72, Vol. 1 of Sharh Nahjul-Balagha.

ii In the atmosphere that had been created soon after the Prophet (S), Ahl al-Bayt (as) (members of his family) had no course except to remain secluded resulting in the world's continued ignorance of their real qualities and being acquainted with their teachings and attainments. To belittle them and keep them away from authority has been considered as the greatest service to Islam.

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