

The attributes of Ali

Out of the persons who have narrated the attributes of Imam Ali son of Abu Talib the author of *Zakha'ir al-Uqba* writes thus: "His stature was moderate and slightly short. His skin was of wheaten colour and his beard was white and long. His eyes were large and black. He had a cheerful face and was good-natured. His neck was long like a goblet made of silver. His shoulders were broad. The joints of his hands were like those of a roaring lion, because his hands and wrists were completely joined with each other and distinction could hardly be made between them. His hands and fingers were strong, moderately fat and fleshy. His calves were fleshy and their lower part was thin. His arms were also fleshy in a similar manner.

He walked calmly like the Prophet. However, as and when he proceeded to give a fight he walked briskly and did not turn his head to see anything else. His bodily strength was unimaginable. He usually picked up the fighters whom he laid his hands on and threw them on the ground without any difficulty or effort, as if they were small children. And if he held the arm of any warrior in his hand the latter could not even breathe. It is well-known that he did not fight with anyone whom he did not vanquish, even though he might have been very strong and a renowned champion.

At times he picked up a big gate which a number of strong persons could not even close or open, and used it as a shield to defend himself. On some occasions he threw away with one hand, a stone, which could not even be shaken by a number of men. At times he roared in the battlefield so loudly that the bravest men got frightened although their number might be quite large. He possessed such a great power to bear hardships that he did not fear any harm from heat or coldness. He used to wear summer clothes in winter and winter clothes in summer".

Once a man lodged a complaint against Ali with Umar who was then the caliph. Umar summoned both of them and said: "O Abu'l Hasan! Stand side by side with the other party. Signs of displeasure appeared on the face of Ali. Thereupon Umar asked him whether he did not wish to stand by the side of the other person. Ali replied: "No. That is not so. However, I have observed that you have not maintained equality between me and my opponent. You have addressed me with my Kuniyah and thus shown me respect whereas you have not meted out the same treatment to him". [1](#)

It is very difficult to explain fully the nature and habits of human beings and especially of great personalities because personal qualities of men are related with one another and everyone of them influences others. Every quality is related with another quality and every habit is the cause of another habit and the result of a third one, or two of them are effect of another and so on and so forth.

Hence, I propose to study a few of the personal qualities of Ali from different angles and to compare them within one and the same personality so as to arrive at some conclusions by means of this intellectual analysis. In the first instance I shall briefly present the various qualities of Ali by deducing them from his simple dealings and well-known actions so that his nature, habits and disposition are known and our detailed discussion in the following chapters may be limited to those qualities and characteristics.

We now commence the discussion with reference to his acts of worship.

Ali was well-known for his piety and continence. He did many things for his own self as well as for his own people and others, as he was extremely pious. I believe that Ali's piety was not the outcome of circumstances like that of other pious persons, who engage themselves in worship on account of the weakness of their souls, or to escape the vicissitudes of life and to keep aloof from the people, or in imitation of their ancestors, and the effects of the events of life confirm it, because as a rule people accord respect to ancestral customs and traditions.²

The fact is that the piety of the Imam Ali was based on a firm footing and was linked with the mutual tie which exists in all parts of the creation and has bound the sky and the earth with each other. His worship was in fact a continuous effort and a campaign against mischief for the sake of human life and prosperity. He fought against all aspects of evil and wickedness. On the one hand he fought against hypocrisy and selfishness and on the other hand against dastardliness, abjectness meanness, helplessness and other bad qualities which had been acquired by the people during those evil days. According to Ali the essence of piety is to sacrifice one's life for the sake of truth and justice. He has said: "Your faith should be at such a level that you should prefer truth to falsehood even though it may cause you loss and falsehood may bring you gain".

His piety was of the same type as defined by him. He was martyred on account of this very truthfulness, and if it be possible to give the title of "Martyr" to living persons it may be said that even while alive he was a martyr in the path of truth and righteousness.

If a person studies the piety of the Imam carefully it will become known to him that even in politics and government, he had a special method in the matter of worship which he pursued firmly. When he stood before the Almighty God he made his supplications with full attention, just as a poet is lost in the beauties of nature. The following remark of Ali is very instructive for those who worship God and observe piety: "One group worships God to be favoured with His blessings. This is the worship of the tradesmen. Another group worships Him on account of His fear. This is the worship of the slaves. A third group

worships Him by way of thanksgiving. This is the worship of the free man".

Unlike many persons the Imam's worship was not on account of fear, and it was also not a tradesman-like worship with the hope of acquiring Paradise. On the other hand when great men stand before the Almighty God they find themselves meek and obliged to consider themselves His worst slaves. The basis of this worship is reason, conscience, and spiritual perfection.

One who accords the same position to worship as was accorded by Ali will certainly view life in the same manner in which it was viewed by Ali. Such a person does not seek life for worldly gains and transient pleasures. On the other hand he seeks it to attain high morals and to achieve the ends which are compatible with his nature. It was for this reason that Ali chose piety in the world and did not seek fame and ostentation. He was true in the matter of piety in the same way in which he was true in the matter of his actions, words and intentions. He was disinclined towards the pleasures of life in the same way in which he was disinterested in rulership, and other things, which were so much coveted by others. He lived with the members of his family in a hut which was also his seat of government. His rulership was not in the form of kingship but in the form of caliphate.

He ate barley bread prepared from the flour ground by his wife. Of course his governors and officials availed of the luxuries which became available from Syria, Egypt and Iraq. Often he did not make his wife take the trouble of grinding the mill and did this job himself. Although he was the Commander of the Faithful he ate bread which was so dry and hard that it could be broken by pressing it with the knee. When it was very cold during winter he did not have any clothes for that season and contented himself with thin summer clothes.

Haroon son of Antara relates thus from his father: I went in the presence of Ali in Khurnaqa Palace in winter season and saw that he was wearing an old cloak and was trembling with cold. I said to him: "O Commander of the Faithful! God has fixed a share for you also in the public treasury and in spite of that you are living in this condition". He replied: "I swear by God that I do not take anything out of your (i.e. public) property and this cloak is the same which I brought from Madina".

He spent his days in the small house with perfect contentment till he was martyred at the hands of Ibn Muljim. Although he was the caliph there was none amongst the Muslims who lived as simple and contented a life as he did.

In fact this lack of interest on his part in worldly comforts was related with his valour. Some persons think that these two qualities are apart from each other, but this view is not correct. Really speaking his valour consisted of the greatness of his soul and his efforts to achieve great objects and to help the poor and the needy without caring for his own benefit. The fact is that he was not prepared to enjoy the pleasure of life while living in a city in which many helpless and indigent persons were also residing.

Umar son of Abdul Aziz was a caliph of the family of Bani Umayyah. This family was inimical towards Ali, slandered him and abused him from the pulpit. In spite of this he was obliged to remark thus keeping in

view the sublime conduct of Ali: "The most chaste and pious person in the world was Ali son of Abu Talib".

It is said that Ali did not place either a stone on a stone or a brick on a brick and did not also join a reed with a reed. In other words he did not construct for himself even a house made of reeds. Although the White Palace had been constructed for him he did not occupy it because he did not wish to live in a house which was better than the huts made of wood occupied by the poor people. The manner in which Ali led his life is reflected in his well-known remark: "Should I content myself with this that the people call me the Commander of the Faithful and I should not share the vicissitudes of life with them?"

Ibn Athir has narrated that when Ali married the Prophet's daughter Fatima their bed consisted only of the hide of a sheep. They used it as a mattress during night and placed fodder on it during the daytime to feed their camel. They did not have more than one servant. During the caliphate of Ali some property was received from Isfahan. It was divided by him into seven parts. It also included a loaf of bread and he broke that also into seven pieces.

Manliness was incarnated in Ali in all respects and included every quality necessary for it. Broad mindedness and forgiveness are the necessary concomitants of manliness and they were ingrained in the Imam's nature. It was on this account that he did not even think of harming any person although he might have harmed him, and did not oppress a person about whom he knew that he wanted to kill him.

Bani Umayyah abused and slandered him but he did not retaliate in the same manner because magnanimous persons do not abuse a person who abuses them. Imam Ali prohibited his own companions from abusing Bani Umayyah. At the time of the Battle of Siffin he was informed that some of his companions were abusing Bani Umayyah. Upon this he said: "I do not like that you should be one of those who use abusive language. However, if you mention their misdeeds and their behaviour you will be justified in doing so and will be pronouncing an ultimatum.

In reply to their abuses you should say: "O Lord! Protect our blood as well as theirs. Relieve our and their hearts of deviation, and guide us so that he who has not recognized the truth should recognize it, and he who is involved in injustice and deviation should forsake it".

He has no peer in history in the matter of forgiveness and chivalry, and there are innumerable incidents which throw light on these qualities of his. It is said in this connection that on the occasion of a battle he gave inter alia the following instructions to his soldiers: "Don't kill an enemy who runs away. Don't withhold assistance from one who is helpless and wounded. Don't strip any one. Don't take the property of anyone by force".

At the conclusion of the Battle of the Camel he offered funeral prayers for the enemies who had been killed and prayed to God for their forgiveness. When he gained control over his fallen enemies like Abdullah son of Zubayr, Marwan son of Hakam, and Sa'id son of Aas, he forgave them, behaved with them kindly and prohibited his companions from punishing them although he was in a position to give

them a harsh treatment, and they too did not hope that they would be set free.

Another example of his chivalry is this that when he gained the upper hand on Amr Aas he turned his face aside and let him go, although he was by no means a lesser danger for Ali than Mu'awiya and remained inimical towards him even after this kindness. When he saw Zulfiqar (Ali's sword) on his head he committed a particular act and hoped that if he did so Ali would shut his eyes and leave him.³ If Ali had killed Amr bin Aas at that time, cunning and deception would have been eliminated and Mu'awiya's army, too, would have been destroyed.

In the Battle of Siffin Mu'awiya and his supporters decided to overcome Ali by subjecting him and his companions to thirst. For some days, therefore, they blocked his way to the Euphrates and threatened that they would not allow his army to utilize the water and would make them die of thirst. However, Ali's army launched an attack and gained control of the bank of the river. But Ali behaved with Mu'awiya in a different manner. Notwithstanding the fact that he could stop supply of water to the Syrian army as a measure of retaliation he allowed them to utilize water in the same way in which his own men were utilizing it.

Once he was given to understand that two persons were accusing Ayesha of having started the Battle of the Camel and of plotting to kill him. He ordered that each of them might be administered one hundred lashes by way of punishment.

After achieving victory in the Battle of the Camel he sent Ayesha back to Madina with due honour and respect. He accompanied her upto a few miles distance and also sent some persons with her so that they might serve her on the way, and she might reach Madina comfortably.

In spite of his being so brave Ali avoided being oppressive. The narrators and historians are agreed that he hated warfare and did not resort to it except when no other alternative was left. He always tried that matters might be settled with the enemies without bloodshed and fighting. He used to advise his son Hasan not to invite anyone to fighting. He was always sincere in what he said and followed the policy which he recommended to his son till he was obliged to act otherwise.

For example when Kharijites were equipping themselves for warfare the companions of Ali suggested to him that he should attack them (i.e. Kharijites) before they became ready to wage a war. Ali, however, replied: "I shall not start fighting till they begin the battle themselves". His faith and human attributes compelled him to keep the people from deviation by means of advice. One day he was delivering a sermon to a gathering and many Kharijites who considered him to be an infidel were also present and were hearing him. One of them who was wondering at his sweet language and eloquence said: "May God kill this infidel! How wise and intelligent he is!" The followers of Ali wished to kill that man. He, however, said to them: "He has done something wrong with his tongue. You should, therefore, either take revenge from him with the tongue or forgive him":

We have already mentioned above that Mu'awiya's army blocked the path of Ali's army to the Euphrates

so that they might surrender on account of thirst but when Ali gained control of the bank of the river he did not stop Mu'awiya's army from utilizing the water. Many other similar incidents took place so far as Mu'awiya was concerned, but it is not possible to give their details here.

All these events show that as demanded by his angelic soul he was kind even to his enemies and was just and magnanimous to all. A historian narrates thus with reference to the Battle of Siffin: "A man named Kareez son of Sabah Humeri came out of Mu'awiya's army into the battlefield and said standing between the armies: Is there anyone who may come and fight with me? One of the soldiers of Ali's army went to combat with him and was killed. He again asked for an adversary. Another man went but he too was killed and still another person also met death at the hands of Kareez.

When he demanded an adversary for the fourth time none went to oppose him. The men in the first row stepped back. Ali felt that there was a danger of his army becoming demoralized. He, therefore, went himself to give a fight to Kareez and killed him. Then he killed another man and thereafter a third man also met the same fate. After having killed three warriors Ali said loudly these words which were heard by all: 'If you had not started the battle we would not have fought with you'. Having said this he returned to his place".

It is also related in connection with the Battle of the Camel that when the enemies gathered for an attack, Ali also arrayed his troops but said to them: "Don't throw an arrow nor make an attack with a spear or a sword until we have first invited them to peace". He did not wish that a battle should take place resulting in bloodshed and loss of life. After a moment someone belonging to the opposite army shot an arrow which struck a companion of Ali and killed him. Ali said: "O Lord! Bear witness". Then another arrow came and killed another man. He said again: "O Lord! Bear witness". Then an arrow struck Abdullah son of Badil and his brother brought him before Ali. Ali again said "O Lord! Bear witness". And then the battle started.

To shun cruelty and oppression was a moral principle of Ali and formed part of his nature and disposition. He never broke covenants and was not inimical towards his former friends unless they themselves broke the covenants and showed enmity in reply to kindness.

The best form of friendship and the meaning of fidelity is that a warrior, while standing in the battlefield should look at the former friends who may have come to fight in the capacity of enemies, with the same brotherly eye, should invite them to peace and remind them of former love and friendship, so that they may possibly refrain from breach of covenant and treachery, or should take away the arms from their hands and solve the difficult problems by negotiations and peace talks. Fighting with a former friend should not be started all at once, because it is possible that he may be reminded of former relations and may refrain from fighting and opposition. If keeping promises and regard for former friendship had not dominated the spirit of Ali he would not have depended on them for warding off the enemies.

The Imam's firmness in keeping the promises is evident from the treatment which he meted out to

Zubayr son of Awam and Talha son of Ubaidullah. These two persons separated the Imam's friends and helpers from him and took them to his enemies. They also misguided Ayesha and made her come up as opponent of Ali.

Those who were present on the spot whether they were friends or enemies, have reported that when Talha and Zubayr decided to fight against Ali, broke the oath of allegiance and displayed their evil intentions in the Battle of the Camel, Ali went to them bare-headed and without wearing any armour or coat of mail, meaning thereby that he had come with peaceful intentions. He then called Zubayr saying: "O Zubayr! Come to me". Zubayr came fully armed. When Ayesha heard about it she cried: "What a pity it is that there should be a combat"!

She said this because she knew that whoever went to fight against Ali would be killed, however brave and strong he might be. And it may be said with certainty that Zubayr could not have saved himself if he had fought with Ali. However Ali embraced Zubayr. Ayesha and her supporters were very much upset to see this. Ali said in a tone of love: "O Zubayr! Why have you come to fight against me?" Zubayr replied: "To avenge the murder of Uthman". Ali said: "May God kill that person who has been responsible for the murder of Uthman".

Then Ali reminded Zubayr of past companionship and brotherhood and wept a number of times while talking. However, Zubayr was bent upon fighting and opposed the Imam till he (i.e. Zubayr) was killed. Ali, who attached great importance to the tie of friendship, was very much grieved when Zubayr met his death. Ali did not withhold his suggestions from the former caliphs and assisted them in their words and actions. [4](#)

Although this magnanimous person was steadfast in his friendship, his friends did not accord due respect to his friendship, because they did not expect that he would act contrary to his nature and let their hands loose to usurp the rights of others.

Imam Ali has been reported to have said: "Even if all the seven regions of the world and whatever is under the sky is offered to me so that I may disobey God and take away unjustly the husk of barley from an ant I shall not do so. In my eyes this entire world is inferior to a leaf which may be pressed in the mouth of a locust". In this matter Ali's words and actions conformed with each other. He was not like others who indulge in tall talk which their actions belie. He was prompted to say these words by his nature which formed the basis of his character.

Ali was more kind to the people than anyone else and refrained from harming any person. He became oblivious of his own self in order to assist others and considered this self-abnegation to be a part and parcel of his life. His entire life was dedicated to the support of the oppressed and the helpless so that he might realize their rights from the tyrants who considered themselves entitled to usurp the rights of others on account of noble descent and racial discrimination.

Ali opposed the Quraysh and fought with them, because they coveted the caliphate for the sake of

personal gain and in order to acquire position, wealth and rulership. He renounced the caliphate and even the worldly life and forsook everything because he could not act like worldly persons and could not agree to allow them to exploit the weak and the helpless.

Ali was so kind to the common man that when his brother Aqeel requested him to give him something more from the public treasury than his due share, he turned down his request and as a consequence thereof Aqeel went away to Mu'awiya. Ali tolerated separation from his brother but did not agree to give him anything from the public treasury of the Muslims without entitlement.

Ali was like a kind father for all human beings. He gave directions to the officers and governors to behave with the people gently. He behaved harshly with those who oppressed the people and warned them of severe consequences. The following directions given by him reached the ears of the governors continuously: "Redress the grievances of the people and meet their needs because you derive your capital from them. Do not deprive anyone of what he needs, and do not obstruct him from attaining his object. Do not sell the summer or winter dress of anyone to realize revenue. Do not take away from any person a quadruped which is required by him for his business and do not whip a person for even a penny".

Ali was the person who wrote an excellent testament for Malik Ashtar Nakha'i at the time of appointing him the governor of Egypt and the adjoining areas. He wrote: "Do not live with people like ferocious animals, and do not treat their sustenance to be war booty, because the Egyptians fall under one of the two categories: either they are your brethren-in-faith from the point of view of religion or your equals because of their being human beings. Ignore their shortcomings and forgive their mistakes, just as you hope that God will forgive your crimes and sins. Do not regret your forgiving a person and do not insist upon awarding punishment".

He added: "Prohibit hoarding". Ali strictly forbade hoarding, which was the main reason for Mu'awiya and his party opposing him, because they wanted the country, the wealth and the war booty for themselves whereas Ali wanted them for all human beings.

Ali was so kind to human beings that, as we shall mention in detail later, he ordered that his murderer, the wicked Ibn Muljim might be treated kindly.

In the recommendations made by him to his sons Hasan and Husayn he said: "Be enemies of the oppressors and supporters of the oppressed". He also said: "Be enemies of the oppressor even though he may be your near relative and support the oppressed person even though he may not be related to you and may be a stranger". He always endeavoured to punish the oppressors and relieve the people of their wickedness. To achieve this purpose he used his heart, tongue, sword and blood. He always remained a helper of the oppressed and an enemy of the oppressors. Following this path he never relaxed till the end of his life.

One should not be surprised that Ali was just. It would have been a matter of surprise if he had not been

just. The instances of his justice which have been narrated are the most valuable assets in human history and man should be proud of them.

His brother Aqeel asked him to grant him a special pension out of the public treasury, but he refused to accede to his request saying: "It is not my personal property that I may give it to anyone I like. There are also other helpless and needy persons, who are more deserving than you are, and I must be mindful of them". Aqeel said: "If you do not allow me a pension out of this property I shall go to Mu'awiya". However, Ali did not care for what he said, and did not revise his decision.

His brother went away and joined Mu'awiya and used to say: "Mu'awiya is better for my world", Mu'awiya's treatment satisfied him, because the public treasury was a tool in his hands with which he strengthened his kingdom, achieved his objects and wanted to revive the past politics and importance of Bani Umayyah.

The Imam did not claim any privileges vis-a-vis his subjects and appeared in the courts as their equal. This was so because the spirit of justice had penetrated into the depth of his heart.

Once Ali saw his coat of mail in the possession of a Christian. He took him in the court of a judge named Shurayh so that he might give a decision regarding its ownership. When both of them appeared before the judge, Ali said: "This coat of mail is mine. I have neither sold nor gifted it to anyone". The judge asked the other person: "What have you to say about the claim made by the Commander of the Faithful?" The Christian said: "This coat of mail is mine. In spite of this, however, I do not consider the Commander of the Faithful to be a liar". Then the judge Shurayh turned to Ali and said: "Can you produce any witness who should depose that this coat of mail is yours?" Ali smiled and said: "Shurayh is right. I cannot produce any such witness".

The judge gave a judgment in favour of the Christian who took the coat of mail and departed. The Commander of the Faithful kept looking at him from behind. After having gone a few steps, however, he returned and said: "I testify that such an order resembles the order of the Prophets, because one who is the Commander of the Faithful has appeared along with a person like myself in the court of the judge who is also his subordinate and the judge has given a judgment against him". ⁵ Then he added: "O Commander of the Faithful! I swear by God that this coat of mail is yours and my claim was false".

Later the people saw that Christian serving in the army of Ali as a faithful soldier and he fought most enthusiastically against Kharijites in the Battle of Nahrawan.

Ibn Abi Rafe' has narrated thus: "I was the administrator of the public treasury during the period of the caliphate of Ali and was also his scribe. The property received from Basra for the public treasury included a pearl necklace. The daughter of Ali sent word to me saying: "I understand that there is a pearl necklace in the public treasury which is controlled by you. Send that necklace to me on loan so that I may wear it on Eid al-Azha day. Thereafter I shall return it".

I sent the necklace to her on the conditions that she would be responsible if it was lost or damaged, and that she would return it within three days. She accepted these conditions.

By chance the eyes of the Commander of the Faithful fell on the necklace and he recognized it. He asked his daughter as to where she had obtained it from. She replied: "I have taken it on loan from Ibn Abi Rafe' the in-charge of the public treasury to wear it on Eid al-Azha day and have promised to return it to him within three days".

The Commander of the Faithful summoned me and said; "Do you consider it lawful to commit breach of trust with the Muslims?" I replied: "May God forbid that I may commit treachery with the Muslims". Thereupon he said: "Then why did you lend such and such necklace to my daughter without obtaining my permission and without the concurrence of the Muslims?"

I replied: "O Commander of the Faithful! She is your daughter. She borrowed it to adorn herself and guaranteed its safe return so that I might restore it to its proper place". Ali said: "Take it back today and do not do so in future otherwise I shall punish you".

When Ali's daughter came to know about it she said to him: "O father! I am your dear daughter. Who else is more entitled to wear this necklace?"

Ali replied: "O daughter of Abu Talib! Don't deviate from the right path. Can you tell me how many Muhajir and Ansar women adorn themselves with such necklaces?" Eventually I took back the necklace from the daughter of the Commander of the Faithful and restored it to its proper place.

Ali observed justice even in small and insignificant matters. If it became necessary for him to divide something with others he gave the right of selection to the other party so that people might not think that discrimination was being made in the matter of division between the persons in authority and the subordinates.

One day he went to the shop of a draper named Abu al-Nawar accompanied by his slave and purchased two dresses. Then he asked his slave to choose one out of the two dresses. The slave picked up one of them and Ali retained the other. [6](#)

All the orders and letters which he sent to the governors and other officials rotate on the pivot of justice. Ali's near ones as well as others joined hands in opposing him. It was on account of the fact that he did not give them preference from the point of view of equity and justice, and did not grant any concession to his relatives. He was not influenced by anyone and accepted only the right things from others.

When Uthman son of Affan became caliph, he gave full freedom to his relatives, friends and associates to accumulate wealth, and he followed those who gave him wrong advice. Marwan had the greatest influence on him. He did not benefit from the wise recommendation which Abu Bakr had made to Umar. Abu Bakr had said: "Don't be in proximity to those persons who are eager to fill their bellies and acquire position and wealth. Don't be enamoured of the fact that they have associated with the Prophet and served him. Assess the nature of every person and find out what sort of man he is".

Ali hated such greedy persons. Hence when he became the caliph he decided to deal with them justly. He, therefore dismissed some of them and checked the greed of others for position and wealth.

There was a group of persons who wanted to give the principles of Islam a new form and make them a means of acquisition of position and wealth and to treat the Islamic territories as hereditary property of their family. Ali fought against them and said to them in loud words: "I know what can keep you from rebellion and mischief, but the thing which is a source of happiness for you is the means of evil for me". The stage at which Ali's dealing with such people reached is well-known. When the oppressors were defeated they resorted to deceit and the spirit of justice succeeded in the hearts of Ali and his followers, although apparently they were the sufferers.

When Ali met martyrdom at the hands of Ibn Muljim, a Nakha'i woman named Ummul Haitham wrote an elegy for him. A verse of that elegy goes to show the opinion of the people about his character and justice: "He established truth and entertained no doubt about it. He behaved justly with his kinsmen as well as strangers". Sincerity and intrepidity are the qualities of great men and they were possessed by Ali par excellence.

Sincerity, truthfulness, intrepidity and manliness and all other similar qualities are inter-connected. Hence he did not express anything which was opposed to his real intention and determination. He did not practise deceit, although he knew very well that by doing so he could get rid of the mischief of the enemies.

What has been said above about the truthfulness and character of the Imam fully proves his sincerity and intrepidity.

One of his principles and morals consisted of simplicity in everything. He hated formality very much and used to say: "The worst brother is he for whom one has to involve oneself in trouble". He also used to say: "If a believer observes formality with his brother it means that he has separated himself from him. If he expressed an opinion or tendered an advice or gave some present, then this act of his was not tainted with ostentation. This habit was so much ingrained in his nature that the selfish people could not make him act according to their wishes, and the flatterers should not hope to attract his attention. These people used to say that the Imam was hard-hearted, ill-natured and proud. However, the Imam was neither hard-hearted nor ill-natured nor proud. On the contrary, as demanded by his nature, he said whatever he had to say without any formality or deceit.

A large number of persons who gathered around him coveted personal gains. Ali became suspicious about them and did not conceal his misgiving. Expression of his views about them cannot be called pride or rudeness.

Ali hated pride and was absolutely free from egotism. He also forbade his children, companions and officials to show pride and practise egotism. While giving them advice he used to say: "Shun egotism. You should know that egotism is a bad quality and a calamity for reason". He hated formality. He also

restrained the people from going to the extreme while praising him and told them: “I am lesser than what you say”.

At times it so happened that he considered the person concerned to be his enemy. On such occasions he did not refrain from mentioning the mental condition of that person of which he was aware and told him: “I am better than what you believe about me in your heart”.

Ali disliked some of his friends exalting him too much in the same manner in which he disliked his being belittled by his enemies. He has said: “Persons of two types have been destroyed on account of their attitude towards me – the friends who have exaggerated my qualities and the spiteful enemies”. He neither showed pride nor humiliated himself unnecessarily. He presented himself as he was. He was free from affectation and hypocrisy. It is difficult to find a straightforward man like him. He purchased a bagful of palm-dates and was carrying them home. Some persons observed this and volunteered to carry the bag for him. He, however, told them frankly that the head of the family was more responsible to carry it.

It is said erroneously that artificial humility and meekness constitute good qualities. In fact it is falsehood and mere affectation that one should pose to be inferior to what one actually is. Ali was not humble in that sense and he was also not proud. He displayed himself as he actually was without any meekness or pride, because these two things are not the qualities of manly persons. The writer of “Abqariyatu'l Imam” says: “Ali entered the battlefield bare-headed to fight against the enemies whereas they were completely covered with steel and iron. How can it be said that this action of his was based on hypocrisy?”

Another attribute of Ali was his noble disposition. He did not entertain grudge in his heart against anybody, even though he might be his fell enemy. As we have already mentioned he directed his sons and friends not to kill his murderer (Ibn Muljim). Although Talha had come as an enemy to kill him, he wept on his dead body and recited a heart-felt elegy for him. Although the Kharijites were his deadly enemies and had fought against him, and his murderer was also one of them, and in fact they had not given him lesser trouble as compared with Mu'awiya and Amr bin Aas, but he advised his friends and followers not to fight against them. He gave this direction because he knew that those people had fallen prey to misunderstanding and had been misguided. They were seekers of truth but had been mistaken in the matter of its assessment as opposed to Mu'awiya and his companions who were seekers of falsehood and succeeded in acquiring it.

Nothing can be seen in the biography of Ali which may go to show that he was revengeful. In all circumstances he showed truthfulness, honesty, straightforwardness and swordsmanship.

Magnanimous persons are not revengeful and do not also tolerate injustice and oppression. They get annoyed with one who oppresses others. Although Ali did not entertain any grudge in his heart against anyone, he had to face a spiteful group. His meaningful words show how grieved he was. His grief was

such as arose from sympathy and kindness. He was grieved to see that people harmed themselves.

Another quality which distinguished him from others and was complementary to his other attributes was his perfect faith in his actions and beliefs, and whenever he did anything he believed in its correctness and in his being on the right path. When he decided to fight against Amr son of Abd Wudd, the famous champion of Arabia he was warned by the Prophet and his companions about the consequences. He however, decided to fight because besides being brave he possessed enthusiasm to support Islam.

We repeat that when the enemies had encircled Ali from all sides he busied himself in offering prayers without there being any guard to protect him from the mischief of those enemies, and consequently Ibn Muljim succeeded in wounding him with his poisoned sword. This very thing is a great proof of the fact that he was certain of the correctness of what he did, because a righteous person does not fear anything.

All the words and acts of Ali go to prove that he had perfect and firm faith in his actions. This was so because all his actions emanated from wisdom and capability. [7](#)

When the people were divided into two groups in their attitude towards him (i.e. friends and enemies) he did not become afraid of the enemies and did not lay down arms before them, because he had perfect faith in his own truthfulness and justice and correctness of his actions. It was in this context that he said: "Even if I strike on the nose of a believer so that he may become my enemy he will not become my enemy and even if I shower all the bounties of the earth on him so that he may become friendly towards me he will not become my friend". He has also said in this behalf. "I am not afraid of fighting against these people alone even though the entire world may join their army".

When he came to know that a group of the people of Madina had joined Mu'awiya he wrote to Sahl son of Hanif the governor of Madina: "I understand that a group of the inhabitants of your city has secretly joined Mu'awiya. However, you should not be worried on this account that some persons will leave you and will not assist you. I swear by God that these persons have not forsaken injustice and oppression and have not stuck to equity and justice".

[1](#). The Arabs did not consider it proper to address the respectable persons with their real names. In case, therefore, they wished to accord respect to someone they addressed him with his Kuniyah.

[2](#). According to the Christians 'worship' consists of sequestered and monastic life. However, monasticism is not permissible in Islam. It was for this reason that the pious Muslims neither avoided effort in life nor kept aloof from other human beings. On the other hand at times they heroically staked their very lives even when it was expedient to remain silent (and they do so even in these times).

[3](#). It is said that when Amr b. Aas came to fight against Ali in the Battle of Siffin he was very much afraid. He could think of no other alternative except that he should lie on the ground and uncover his private parts so that Ali might shut his eyes, and he himself might escape. He, therefore, did so and thus saved his life.

[4](#). Ali assisted the caliphs because every action of his was for the sake of the benefit of Islam and he did not let the interests of the religion suffer in order to acquire his own right

[5](#). In the free countries of the modern world the court and judges have been made permanent and none can remove them from their office. This has been done so that they may take decision without any fear or favour, and may give judgment

against influential persons and even against the members of government.

[6.](#) Such incidents show that the leaders of the faith were very mindful of the rights of their subordinates. Those who make a show of supporting the helpless persons, and accuse religion of being an impediment in the matter of weak persons getting their due rights have not done as much for their subordinates as Imam Ali did.

[7.](#) Its reason was that Imam Ali was infallible and he said and did everything in accordance with the inspiration and traditions of the Prophet of Islam. Hence, he did not entertain any doubt about his views and actions..

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