

Introduction

In the Name of God, The Merciful, The Compassionate

It is necessary, at the beginning, to provide our brothers and sisters with a brief introduction to the *Nahjul Balaghah*. As you know, the *Nahjul Balaghah* is a collection of Sermons, Letters and miscellaneous Sayings left as a memorial from the Master of the Pious, the Commander of the Faithful, All, peace be upon him. This book is divided into three sections of Sermons, Letters and short Sayings or 'wise Sayings' (*hikam*), as they are usually called, some of which have been selected from among the Sermons and Letters.

The Nahjul Balaghah dates back to about one thousand years ago when the late Sayyid Radi compiled these Letters and Sermons at the end of the third and the outset of the fifth century (400A.H.) the Hejra after. It is, thus, a one thousand year old book. It is to be noted, however, that before Sayyid Radi made efforts in compiling All's Sermons and Sayings, they were scattered in the books of the Traditions' and history. Other scholars had also begun to perform this task in one way or another, but no one succeeded in accomplishing what Sayyid Radi did. Therefore, we are indebted to the endeavors and initiatives of this great scholar who left the *Nahjul Balaghah* for us.

Another point to be noted here is that, in addition to the contents of the *Nahjul Balaghah*, a number of Sermons, Letters and short Sayings of 'Ali, peace be upon him, can be found in different books which recent scholars have tried to compile and introduce as appendices to the *Nahjul Balaghah*. Therefore, in addition to the *Nahjul Balaghah*, which is, in itself, a rich and invaluable treasure, here are some other books of All's Sayings which shall later be introduced to the readers in detail so that they may obtain a general acquaintance with the bibliography of the *Nahjul Balaghah* and its related books.

Another point to note about the *Nahjul Balaghah* concerns the invalidity of this book, a claim made by some people over the years. The motive behind such a claim can easily be surmised, that is, the subject matter of the *Nahjul Balaghah* threatened the interests of some groups or classes of people who therefore found the best device, to be discrediting the book itself. It is also true of the personality of individuals, and for this same reason those who considered the personality of Imam 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be upon him, to be against their personal or group interests, naturally tried to distort it. In the

same manner, they claimed that the *Nahjul Balaghah* was invalid on the grounds that they said it was without any authority (*sanad*).

It is clear that the *Nahjul Balaghah* is in the category of Traditions upon which we depend for the understanding of Islamic teachings, as well as the Traditions of the Prophet and the Book (the Holy Qur'an). There is no doubt as to the authority of the Holy Qur'an, but as to the Traditions, valid authorities are needed to remove any doubts, i.e., the narrators of a certain Tradition, including the Imams and the Prophet, should be known and trustworthy. This has always been the main concern of our great narrators and jurists in eliciting and understanding the divine ordinances.

Thus, we have the 'science of *rijal*', which deals with the recognition of narrators of Traditions and the 'science of *diraya*' which concerns the recognition and analysis of Traditions and which determines the correct and the unreliable Traditions. Thus, this attention to detail that a Tradition must have an authority and that authority must be valid, is necessary. It is because of this that today great emphasis is put on expertise in understanding Islamic sciences. An individual, who is not an expert, accepts the Traditions, which accord with his own intellect, understanding and mental background and rejects all others. This leads to the weakening of the religion.

When an expert wants to rely on a Tradition, he first tries to acknowledge its authority and validity through his special expertise. This necessity has been taken care of by our jurists in their recognition and understanding of Islamic laws and regulations. Now, some people asserted that the *Nahjul Balaghah*, as a collection of Traditions, which should be based on valid authorities, was without any authority and, therefore, was invalid and unreliable.

As a matter of fact, in one way these people were telling the truth for no chain of narrators are mentioned in the *Nahjul Balaghah* in any of the Sermons so that they can be attributed to the Commander of the Faithful and the truthfulness of such narrators could be sought. However, in the books of Traditions such as *Vasa-al-Shi'a*, *al-Kafi* and the like, as well as in the old history books. such as those of Tabari, ibn Athir and Ya'qubi, no chain of authorities can be found concerning the contents of the *Nahjul Balaghah*.

Firstly, although the *Nahjul Balaghah* itself does not mention the chain of authorities and narrators, this can be checked in the Shi'ite and Sunni books of Traditions where from the Sermons, Letters and Sayings of this book have been extracted and compiled. Several years ago, one of the Arab writers wrote a book entitled *Madarik Nahjul Balaghah wa Masanidu* (*The Documents and Authorities of Nahjul Balaghah*) which may later be introduced to the readers in an analysis of the books written about the *Nahjul Balaghah*.

In this book, the writer has quoted the authentic authorities of the Sermons, Letters and Sayings of the *Nahjul Balaghah* from the books of the Traditions. it is therefore, concluded that the content, of the *Nahjul Balaghah* should not be considered to be without authority on the mere ground that the book itself

does not mention any authority.

Secondly, although the authorities of Traditions are proper means of reliance or vice versa, the text of Traditions can also be a means of obtaining confidence for one who undertakes research, i.e. when you study a text and find its contents miraculous (as you will, God–Willing, observe when interpreting “Ali’s words), when you see that in one sentence the writer has referred to something beyond the prevailing mentality of his own time, which others have been able to understand only in the course of centuries, when you are faced with a saying that predicts future events which cannot be presaged except by the likes of Amir al–Muminin who are in contact with endless divine knowledge and, in addition to all these merits, when you observe the highly eloquent words and expressions of the writer, it becomes quite clear to you that he is not an ordinary human being and that his saying cannot be but those of an immaculate Imam.

Based upon this, Sayyid Radi states that certain words and expressions of the *Nahjul Balaghah*, are matchless in human expression, something which has never been opposed, in the course of one thousand years, by eloquent writers, Islamic thinkers and even the adversaries of Islam. These people have always accepted that some statements of the *Nahjul Balaghah* are superior to human expression and beyond the ordinary level of the human being's knowledge at that time. The conclusion is therefore drawn that, despite the absence of the chain of authorities and narrators in the *Nahjul Balaghah*, this book is undoubtedly that of the Commander of the Faithful and reliable as such.

Thirdly, as you know and as we mentioned previously, *the Nahjul Balaghah* consists of the Sermons (i.e. lectures, not the sermons delivered in the Friday ritual prayers, although the book may have included some of these sermons as well), Letters and short Sayings of ‘Ali, peace be upon him, which he expressed and wrote as a teacher, ruler and an Islamologist. Thus, in addition to reflecting the general lines of Islamic thought, these Sermons and Letters also cover daily matters, i.e. the current problems and difficulties of Amir al Muminin's life.

In our own time, that is, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, many similar aspects can be found between our social situation and that of Amir al–Muminin's time, although our situation is more similar in many respects (i.e. enemies, enmities and other problems) to the Medina social situation at the time of the Prophet's migration. The difference, however, between the social situation of “Ali’s rule and that of the Prophet lies in the fact that under the Prophet's rule, the enemy had a clear and well–known position, that is, not even one single group of the adversaries of Islam shared an aspect common to the Prophet.

The atheists among the Quraish, the Jews of Medina, the western and eastern superpowers of the time and the Christians of Najran, each had slogans of their own. In fact, there was no organized group to cry the same slogan as that of the Prophet and, at the same time, to stand openly against him in fight. Accordingly, the Prophet suffered a great deal but never felt the heavy sorrows that ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib tolerated during his reign.

There were hypocrites at the time of the Prophet as well but, first of all, they were not organized; secondly, they did not have a manifest position against the Prophet and they did not use the same slogans as those of the Prophet so that the people might doubt as to whether the Prophet was truthful or his rivals. Thirdly, the hypocrites were more or less known to all the people. For instance, everyone, including his own son, knew that Abdullah ibn Ubaid was the head of the hypocrites and even his son suggested to the Prophet to kill his father or prevent him from entering Medina if the Prophet permitted.

On the contrary, at the time of the rule of Amir al Muminin, those who fought him used exactly the same slogans as his. Moreover, they were among the distinguished personalities of the time, with long, past records. For example, the group of the Nakithin (the breakers of allegiance or the front in the 'Battle of the Camel' comprising Talha, Zubair and Ayesha) fought the Commander of the Faithful with his own slogans – slogans in favor of Islam and the truth.

The group of Qasitin, (the front of Mu'awiya, the Damascus front), too, pretended in such a way that the impartial observers fell in a state of doubt as to which group was telling the truth. When you study Mu'awiya's letters to 'Ali, you find exactly the same words as those of 'Ali to him. For example, 'Ali addresses, „From the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib to Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan”, and Mu'awiya writes, „From the Commander of the Faithful, Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan to All ibn Abi Talib”.

Mu'awiya does not introduce himself as 'the commander of the faithless' or 'the commander of the polytheists' but, exactly like 'Ali, as the Commander of the Faithful. Then 'Ali advises Mu'awiya, for instance, to be pious to fear God and to refrain from wasting the blood of Muslims, and Mu'awiya uses the same advice for 'Ali.

Therefore, the problem of 'Ali is that his enemy is not a manifest enemy in the eyes of the people, for the enemy also offers whatever he offers and, as a result, he cannot show the real character of the opposing front to the people. It is true, of course, that 'Ali had a great deal to say but not all the words spoken can necessarily be understood by those who hear and this was “Ali's constant sorrow.

Perhaps this was the reason why he used to sit beside a well and speak into it about his grievances. In fact, other than a group of people who were completely faithful to 'Ali for a special reason, and not because they observed his doings and prayers or they heard about Mu'awiya's evil deeds, others were always in doubt as to which side was telling the truth, for they witnessed, as an example, that in the Battle of Siffin, both sides performed the congregational ritual prayer with humility and modesty.

Thus, a hypocritical atmosphere was characteristic of society during the time of 'Ali. This does not imply, however, that all the people were hypocrites. Even the followers of Mu'awiya were a group of honest, tribal Arabs, from the area around Damascus, who had, from the very outset of their conversion to Islam, seen and known no governors except Mu'awiya and his family.^{[1](#)}

They knew Islam through the words of these people. They had heard so many good things about them – that they were scribes of the divinely revealed Book, that since Mu'awiya's sister was the Prophet's wife

and thus called 'Umm al-Mu'minin (mother of the believers), Mu'awiya was Khal al-Muminin (maternal uncle of the believers)² – that they supported Mu'awiya and fought against Ali with the best of intentions. So they were not hypocrites.

However, unlike the time of the Prophet, society enjoyed an air of hypocrisy, about which more explanation may, God-willing, be provided when discussing the words and sayings of the Commander of the Faithful.

This atmosphere of hypocrisy is also a peculiarity of our own time, although from the point of view of social conditions, enmities, manner of opposition, hostile parties and so forth, our time is more comparable to the time of the Prophet. Today, the so-called followers of 'progressive Islam' in our society are those groups who oppose each other quite openly. Also, those who claim to be followers of the 'line of the Imam' sometimes draw swords against one another.

Those who claim to act for the benefit of the Islamic Republic or to follow the policy of 'neither East nor West' are often so divided among themselves that nothing but a hostile relationship can be attributed to them. In fact, it cannot be said that they have differences of opinion, for they are exactly at the opposite side of one another. Therefore, taking into account that each of these groups finds some followers for itself, we see that our society resembles the society at the time of 'Ali.

The importance of the *Nahjul Balaghah* then lies in two dimensions. First, it speaks about the fundamental of Islam such as the matters concerning God, the human being, Islamic views of humanity, prophethood and its position in human history, the dignity and prophethood of the Prophets and other matters which are today, a means of understanding Islam and thus necessary for us to study. Secondly, the *Nahjul Balaghah* refers to the social problems of a hypocritical society with which we deal today.

Accordingly, this book can be a source of Inspiration for us as regards the social and political problems of life and the possible solutions to them.

The fourth point about the *Nahjul Balaghah* is that a great number of its sermons are unfortunately incomplete, i.e. either from the beginning or from the end of each sermon some statements have been omitted. Even, in some cases, Sayyid Radi has omitted statements from the middle of a sermon and then continued the rest of it with the phrase "and from that", which is what the journalists and reporters do repeatedly today.

Now, we know nothing about the omitted parts and this creates some difficulties in interpreting the content of the *Nahjul Balaghah*. The reason why Sayyid Radi has made these omissions is that the *Nahjul Balaghah* (*The Peak of Eloquence*), as its name indicates, has been compiled from an artistic point of view, i.e. eloquence of expression.

This does not mean, however, that he has been heedless of the subject matter and has merely paid attention to the artistic aspects of "Ali's Sayings. Yet', this eloquent man, one of the great Arab poets of

his own time, has dealt with the *Nahjul Balaghah* with a poetic outlook. He has endeavored to pick out All's most beautiful and eloquent words and statements just as one tries to choose the best distich of a sonnet. This is why a type of semantic disconnection is observed among the statements of some Sermons.

It is to be noted, of course, that both the highly eloquent and non-eloquent Sayings of 'Ali carry very magnificent purports, and it is these purports which make us appreciate *the Nahjul Balaghah*, now, in the fourteenth century (A.H.) more than a great scholar of the fourth century (Sayyid Radi) did. As a matter of fact, the human being has naturally faced so many hardships in the course of centuries that he or she understands "Ali's words and message and the call of Islam from his tongue more easily than those who lived centuries ago.

It is important, as well, to know that when Sayyid Radi was compiling "Ali's words and sayings, there were few people who valued All and his words as much as you value them today. Thus, a minority only followed "Ali's lines of thought.

On the other hand, those people who took care of 'Ali's Sayings and tried to compile them, attached more (or at least equal) importance to the form and beauty as to the content of his statements and omitted some parts which they considered less beautiful than others. If you were Sayyid Radi you would definitely not treat "Ali's words in this way. You would instead, try to benefit more from the contents of "Ali's sayings. This is why we believe that today 'Ali and his words are more appreciated than in the fourth century, and this is why history is moving towards All and his message, something that we should accelerate.

The main subjects of the *Nahjul Balaghah*, which we are going to discuss in this book, are as follows.

Fundamental Beliefs

A part of *Nahjul Balaghah* is about monotheism, humanity, the Last Day, prophethood, Imamatus and other fundamental principles of Islam. Of course, contrary to the manner of the dialecticians in the third and the fourth centuries, these subjects have been discussed in the *Nahjul Balaghah* with a kind of mystical and spiritual approach. Thus, the words of all about monotheism, for instance, are quite different from the words of Nasir al-din Tusi and other Islamic philosophers and theologians.

Social and Political Matters

These matters consist of both general and specific social affairs including the administration of or Islamic country, the relation between governors and subordinates, letters to the rulers of different states (the famous letter to Malik Ashtar, for instance), the way of facing the enemy, decisiveness free from improper hate and revenge, treating both friends and enemies exactly as they deserve, being not subjected to credulity and naivety and many other social matters of that time and of the whole history.

Morality

The training and purification of the human being's soul are among other subjects discussed in the *Nahjul Balaghah*, which we shall, God-willing talk about in the coming pages.

- [1.](#) When Damascus was conquered by 'Umar, the second Caliph, he appointed Yazid bin Abu Sufyan the governor of that region and when Yazid died, his brother Mu'awiya took over. Thus, the people of the region came to know only Mu'awiya and his family from the very beginning when they embraced Islam.
- [2.](#) This title is still found in many books of our Sunni brethren.

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