



Mulla Asghar Memorial Series

NAHJUL
BALAGAH
REVISITED

INTRODUCING

IMAM ALI IBN ABI TALIB (AS)

Mulla Asgharali M. M. Jaffer

NAHJUL
BALAGAH
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Introducing
Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS)

An Encomium
By
MULLA ASGHARALI M M JAFFER



*Special Commemorative Edition
To mark the 25th Anniversary of
The World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri
Muslim Communities
Sep 15 2002*

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Mulla Asghar Memorial Series of Books -
The Legacy lives on.....

*Jab tak mai' jiu', kihdmate qaum karta rahu' mai',
Maut aa'e to ya rab, esi khidmat me maru' mai'.*

Marhum Mulla Asghar has left an unforgettable mark on the entire Shii Community in this era. A multifaceted person of this caliber, with such an impact, only emerges but once in a lifetime. As a brilliant communicator, he eloquently presented the teachings of Ahlul Bait (A.S.) to the masses at large.

Acclaimed by his contemporary scholars, his deep insight into the subjects of *Fiqh*, theology, philosophy, theosophy as well as contemporary issues was legendary. As an educator par excellence, his ability to inform and educate his students on Islamic concepts was truly enlightening. Through his thought provoking writings and inspiring speeches countless minds have been set thinking, and many lives have been changed. His impact on our society is nothing short of phenomenal and one that has been instrumental in shifting paradigms.

I hope that this Commemorative series of books, marking the 25th Anniversary of the World Federation, will continue to radiate the teachings of Ahlul Bait (A.S.) to the world at large through the words of this great scholar. By supporting the *Mulla Asghar Memorial Fund*, which, amongst other educational projects, has made this series of publications possible, you will help ensure that his passion for disseminating the teachings of Ahlul Bait (A.S.) continues after him. Together, we can give reality to the many dreams he had and help the World Federation continue on the path of service that he blazed under his charismatic leadership. I ask you remember Marhum Mulla Saheb with a Sura e Fateha.

Hasnain Walji
President, The World Federation of KSI Muslim Communities
September 15 2002

DEDICATED TO
THE MASTER OF THE AGE - IMAM MAHDI (A.S.)
AND ALL THE MUJTAHEDEEN SINCE GHAIBAT-E -SUGHRA

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PREFACE

In the name of Allah, Most Merciful, Most Benevolent

During the last two years of my secondary education, a new book was prescribed for studies in English Literature. It was the famous joyous comedy by Shakespeare, “As You Like it.” I distinctly remember how I went through pages with a mixture of amusement and apathy. While our tutor dwelt several pertinent aspects of the book, like its literary style, beautiful expressions, apt descriptions and profundity, I must admit that I remained quite unimpressed. All through those days I was obsessed with a single belief that the book was an added burden to plod and labour under.

Our tutor, himself a keen student of English Literature, tried his best to create and instill in us a new interest in Shakespeare. At times he seemed to be completely lost in the beautiful lines of “As You Like It.” Reading it over and over again, musing and meditating over its meaning, appreciating the style and expressions, he would suddenly try to convey to us what was impossible to comprehend without the feelings of abandon and ecstasy which himself had experienced.

Till one day when we were told that a visitor had arrived from India, and he would give a talk on Shakespeare. With practically no enthusiasm, I walked to the dreary lecture room. Here was an elderly gentleman who was introduced to us as a distinguished man of letters, with a special bent and bias for Shakespeare. Patiently we sat listening to him, and as he went on, methodically developing his theme, discussing each and every character in “As You Like It,” relating their relevance to life, turning the light of the comic spirit upon the follies of mankind, a new use of literature in its various colorful dimensions began to unfold before my eyes. For the first time I realised that Shakespeare was not meant for only passing examinations. There was something much deeper in his work. It was

Shakespeare re-visited. Take for instance the following line:

*“O, how bitter it is to look into happiness
through another man’s eyes.”*

or

*“Do you know that I am a woman? When I
think, I must speak.”*

These were the lines, among many others of course, which explained the realities of life with subtlety and refinement peculiar to Shakespeare. They failed to give me a jolt at first; but as I began to understand them better and experienced some of the message later, the lines were ingrained in my mind and memory.

When the Indian visitor finally read the following lines and enlarged upon its application to life, the life which I had not yet experienced, but for which I was being meticulously prepared, I felt myself riding upon a new wave, rocking helplessly between the admiration for the speaker and for man’s mastery of his art of expression.

*“All the world is a stage
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances
And one man in his time plays many parts
His acts being seven stages*

*Then a soldier
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth.”*

But today, nearly two decades later, I have passed from a state of recognition to the state of realization. Then I knew that fire burnt, today I am a victim of burns. There is now an unmistakable change in my mood and temper. Shakespeare is now viewed from a different angle and perspective; I appreciate more his homely wisdom, his narrative skill, his style, his familiar quotations, his

homage to a common man's traits, and above all his recognition to permanent qualities in human nature.

Such is the case with every classic in every known language. Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati or Kiswahili literatures have their own history of development, their own outstanding features and characteristics. Literature is an integral part of every civilization and its legacy to posterity. To my mind, a community devoid of propensity for literature is never a normally constituted community.

All works of literature face the same tragedy. They must be read in their original languages; when translated they invariably lose their charm, beauty, and at times even the meaning.

This is not to discourage works in translation, but just a word of warning to an unwary reader. The Holy Qur'an viewed as a literary exponent par excellence, has been translated into many languages. So has been Nahjul Balagha. Both have suffered a similar fate. While translators have earnestly strived to convey the contents, they have all, without exception, failed to transmit the beauty, charm rapture and captivation contained in the original.

I heard about Nahjul Balagha when I was a child. There was hardly a Majlis in which this famous collection of Imam Ali's sermons, letters and short sayings went unmentioned. Ulama spoke highly about it, and I decided to read it myself. Going through the text in English, Urdu, Gujarati and Persian, I am not ashamed to admit that I found nothing extraordinary in the book. It was only when I read it in Arabic, in the words spoken by Imam Ali (A.S.) himself that I felt enthralled. Suddenly there arose before me a billowing ocean of eloquence, wisdom and within me I felt unable to fathom its depth. I read a line over and over again to comprehend what my Imam meant, and as I probed I came to realize that his words were truly inspired; for a mortal may speak, but not with so much of meaning squeezed into few words.

And then I came across a work by Shaheed Murtaza Mutahhari a great Islamic scholar, martyred during the initial days after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This work entitled *Saeri Dar Nahjul Balagha* (A journey into Nahjul Balagha) proved to me how little I understood Nahjul Balagha despite my fascination.

For the first time, the words spoken by Imam Ali (A.S.) came to my mind with new meanings and messages. Mutahhari, in this introductory masterpiece, is completely at home with the language, style and contents of Nahjul Balagha; his translation of words is precise, his comments revealing and incisive. Added to this, he has given a detailed treatment to the literary aspects, exposing its beauty and splendor to a lay reader.

Interestingly enough, Mutahhari relates in the preface of this work an incident which awakened him to the worth and value of Nahjul Balagha. He says:

“As a child, I knew Nahjul Balagah by name, and I had seen a copy in my father’s collections, later, during my student days in Meshed and Qum, I often heard Nahjul Balagha being mentioned as an excellent and authentic book, second to Qur’an. Some sermons on self-denial and withdrawal from the worldly pleasures fell on my ears quite often, so often that most of them were on my tongue. But I must confess that I was a complete stranger to the world of Nahjul Balagha, till when I chanced to go to Isfhehan one summer and met a godly scholar who initiated me into the realm of the sacred Book. I have always wished for a similar encounter so that I could be introduced to the Holy Qur’an in the same manner ...

He was an expert jurist (Faqeeh), sagacious, well versed in literature and a competent student of traditional medicine. In these subjects he excelled, and his lectures were well attended. But when he spoke on Nahjul Balagha, one could sense a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, something inexpressible. He lived and breathed with Nahjul Balagha, his

pulse and heartbeats were in rhyme with Nahjul Balagha He was the Great Aqae Haj Mirza Ali Aqa Shirazi.”

Arabic has its own characteristic and singular features. It has a grammar and morphology, which is intricate and elaborate. But a student, who wishes to learn the Arabic grammar, lovingly and objectively, not grudgingly or for the sake of merely learning one more language, finds laws therein which surprisingly conform with common sense and are truly representative of human behavior in life. This, in itself, is a vast subject, and falls outside my immediate concern. But suffice it to say that Arabic expressions, eloquence, rhetoric and even simple usage of words do not have suitable equivalence in English and for that matter in most of the spoken language today. Words like *Adl, Abd, Taqwa, Aql, Iman, Islam, Qadar* emanate from roots, which have diverse meanings and connotations, and by the time they are transformed into nouns, verbs or adjectives, they assume further more meanings. When used in religious form and context, they acquire different meanings altogether.

Imam Ali (A.S.) has employed such words in their various meanings and as such a person proposing to translate his words ought to be conversant with Imam's intent and style, besides being a scholar of Arabic language and literature. *Nahjul Balagha* has two distinctive features.

ELOQUENCE AND RHETORIC

Sentences are short but pregnant with meanings. Words used are appropriate, at times metaphoric, with a purpose to encompass the meanings and implications fully. At times they are cryptic to the uninitiated.

Arabs were known for their literary achievements and excellence before the advent of Islam. Therefore, when the Holy Qur'an was revealed or when Imam Ali (A.S.) spoke from the pulpit of Kufa (Iraq), there already existed a society conversant with the finery and finesse of literature. They found, however, a striking difference

between the literatures they knew and the one they now heard and read. This difference was in the substance and content. The Pre-Islamic Arabic literature was visionary and romantic. The Islamic literature, with all its excelling qualities, dealt with the abstract as well as the tangible. The second distinctive feature of Nahjul Balagha is, therefore, its substance and matter. It tells us about Allah, His Attributes, His Oneness, about the Prophet, the Holy Qur'an, the Ahlul Bait, the Resurrection, the Day of Judgement and, at the same time, deals with human life, its goal and attainments, its virtue and qualities. Then there are chapters on fear of God, self-denial in its positive sense and admonition. Nahjul Balagha requires us not only to engage in the admiration of its style, but also to understand and apply its lessons.

Nahjul Balagha was compiled by Shareef Radhi, one of our renowned ulama of the fourth century. Besides being a *Faqeeh* of high repute, he was a fine scholar of Arabic literature, with a noteworthy contribution of his own. Sheikh Muhammad Abduh a great scholar of Egypt, quotes Tha'alabi in his preface to Nahjul Balagha as follows:

“He (Shareef Radhi) is a man of wonderful attainments and the noblest among Sadat of Iraq. Besides, he stands unequalled in his erudition. Among all the famous poets and literary giants of his time, he towers high. In fact, none has been able to reach his height.”

Tha'alabi was a contemporary of Shareef Radhi. The words from Shareef Radhi's own preface give us an insight into how the sermons of Imam Ali (A.S.) influenced him to undertake the compilation. He says:

“My friends requested me to compile a book containing selected sayings of our Lord Amirul Momineen, related to various subjects and their branches, from his sermons, letters, admonitions and literature. They knew that those sayings were examples of exquisite skill in human expressions. They were jewels of Arabic literature, radiant words of religious as well as secular wisdom, not to be found in any single work.

Amirul Momineen (A.S.) is the fountainhead of eloquence and source of Arabic rhetoric. From him was found the hidden treasure of wisdom and he enunciated the laws of correct speech. The famous lecturers followed his style, and the renowned preachers quoted his sayings. And yet he is far above those who tried to emulate him. Because words of Ali, peace be upon him, have a divine touch and an unmistakable aroma of the Prophet's utterances."

It must be noted, however, that Nahjul Balagha is not the only book containing the sayings of Imam Ali (A.S.). A hundred years before Shareef Radhi lived, Masoodi had referred in *Murooj-u-dhahab* (Vol. 11) to a collection of the Imam's sayings. In fact, there are many sermons and short sayings of Imam Ali, which were not included by Shareef Radhi in his selection. .

Ali-El-Jundi, head of Cairo University, in his introduction to *Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Shiruhu wa Hikamuh* (Ali Ibn Abi Talib, his verses and maxims) mentions the following three unpublished works which contain a wealth of quotations from Imam Ali (A.S.).

- i. *Dastoor Maàlim el Hikam* by Qadhai, the author of *El Khutat*.
- ii. *Nathru Lua'li*. This has been translated by a Russian orientalist and published in one volume.
- iii. *Hikamu Seyyidina Ali*. A manuscript in Darul Kutub, Egypt.

As mentioned earlier, several versions of English translations of Nahjul Balagha have appeared, and there is no further need for repeating the exercise. To translate Nahjul Balagha is to undertake a mammoth task, and the scholars who devoted their time to this invaluable endeavour deserve our admiration. What is needed, however, is a concise introduction to Nahjul Balagha, to prepare a student before he plunges into the depths of the great Book itself. In so doing, it was necessary to select a few passages as beacons, so that the way is well-lit and the veil is lifted.

I have translated, in my own way and style, some of the paramount

features of Nahjul Balagha. The passages, deal with the fundamentals, and with other ancillary subjects. Needless to mention the inspiration I have received from the works of Marhum Allama Sayyid Mohammad Husain Tabatabai, Marhum Sheikh Murtaza Mutahhari and Allama Mohammed Taqi Jaffery - for with their aid and guidance, I feel better acquainted with the fringes of Nahjul Balagha. It is Nahjul Balagha re-visited.

Peace be upon Muhammad and his progeny, and all those who follow Divine Guidance.

Asgharali M. M. Jaffer
Nairobi, Kenya 1982.

THE IMAM IN HIS OWN WORDS

So much has already been written about Imam Ali bin Abi Talib that to treat the subject will entail repetition. In this chapter, I have thought it prudent to introduce the Imam in his own words. In his various discourses compiled in Nahjul Balagha, and in other Islamic works, he has referred to his childhood, his youth, his old age, and to many events, attending upon his life. And in so doing he has vividly portrayed his concepts and convictions.

For nearly three decades, Ali lived with the Prophet, among the phalanx of companions most of whom were senior to him in age.

After the Prophet's death, he continued to live in Medina for twenty-five years virtually as a recluse, acting as a counsel whenever called upon to advise. All these years, he was treated and acknowledged as a man of impeccable conduct, frank, fearless, pious and wise. Apart from the authentic traditions of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, which bear witness to Ali's enviable attributes and attainments, history is fraught with attestation by his contemporaries, friends, and foes alike, to his excellences.

A new generation came into existence, which had neither seen the Prophet nor known Ali's contribution in the early days of Islam. They knew Ali as they saw him: aloof from the administration, full of learning, matchless jurist yet acting as a mere counsel, modest, austere, just and upright. Elders sometimes touched upon the attributes of Ali and cited traditions from the Prophet peace be upon him, in praise of Ali, but as history tells us, such a practice was not looked upon with favour by the authorities.

The most easily discernible effect of Ali's conduct and personality was reflected in those companions of the Prophet who remained close by his side, accepting him as a guide. These companions were all, without exceptions, acknowledged by the contemporaries for

their probity, piety, knowledge and steadfastness. Among thousands of Muslims in Medina and Mecca, and elsewhere where Islam had already found a foothold, historians have singled them out for their exceptional qualities. Allama Mohammed Taqi Ja'fferi in his commentary on Nahjul Balagha (Part 1) has enumerated 81 such companions of the Prophet. Among them, the most well-known are:

1. Salman Farsi
2. Abu-Dhar Ghifari
3. Malik Ashtar Nakh'i
4. Muhammed bin Ali Bakr
5. Miqdad bin Aswad Kindi
6. Ammar bin Yasir
7. Abu Ayyub Ansari
8. Mitham Tammar
9. Asbagh bin Nabatah
10. Hujr bin Adi
11. Adi bin Hatim Tai
12. Rushayd Hujari
13. Owais Qarani
14. Kumail bin Ziyad
15. Jabir bin Abdillah Ansari
16. Abu Saeed El Khudari
17. Amru bin El-Humuq Khizai
18. Habib bin Mazahir Asadi
19. Qambar
20. Zayd and Sa'sa' sons of Suhan

These companions loved Ali, and lived with him as his wards. They looked upon him as a model, and emulated his ways. They considered him to be the Prophet's rightful successor and vicegerent.

As can be seen, the new and the old generation knew Ali bin Ali Talib for his excelling attributes and virtue. However, when we pore over the pages of early Islamic history, we find that some of the companions purposefully ignored Ali, pretending to forget his achievements and contributions, and, at times, stirring up

opposition against him by reminding various clans that their dear ones had been the victims of Ali's sword.

It is a paradox that the most outstanding quality of Ali turned up against him, and created enemies for him in various groups. Ali's justice is proverbial, and he is known for having acted without fear or favour in the most trying times. While people found this quality quite plausible, when it was their turn to experience Ali's stern and strict measures, they cried aloud with chagrin and disapproval.

At the end of the third Caliphate, people gathered around Ali, pressing him to ascend to the seat of leadership. The statement given by him at that time is chillingly prescient, but it seems that people expected that Ali would bend with the times. He said:

“Leave me alone, and find someone else - for with my acceptance, we will all soon face a situation, colourful and full of divergent aspects. And when that turns up, your hearts would not acquiesce and your judgments would falter. The horizon is covered with dark clouds, and the once bright path is now under a gloom. You very well know that if I take over the reins, I will lead you unto the goal I know, paying no heed to the critics nor to those who are disgruntled or chagrined. And if you leave me as I am then I am one of you; and, no doubt, Ali has been the most loyal and obedient citizen amongst you. Perhaps, you might find it comfortable to have me as a counsel, than as a ruler.”

Ali's eldest brother Aqeel was known for meagre means. He had a large family to support and was given a stipend from public treasury, which was just sufficient. It once occurred to him that he might as well try to win a favour from his brother who was also a Caliph. So, one day he came to Ali with a request for an increase. This incident is related by Ali himself, and makes an interesting reading. He says:

“By God, I saw Aqeel stricken with poverty. He requested me to spare him an extra bushel of wheat from public granary. I saw his children, unkempt and disheveled; their complexion dusty

and black. He came to me quite often, and prevailed upon me persistently. I lent him my ears till he thought that I was prepared to sell my conscience and faith at his hands; following his dictates and falling apart from my way. I heated a piece of iron in fire, and when it was red hot, I brought it nearer to him so that he may just feel the heat. He screamed in pain like an ailing man, about to be scorched and shriveled. So I said, 'May the mourners mourn you, O, Aqeel, you groan and moan because of this little heat generated by fire lit by man in a playful demonstration, and wish to drive me to the fire kindled by the Almighty for retribution'."

Aqeel is known to have reluctantly sought periodical refuge at the court of Mua'wiya, the chief adversary of Ali. Mua'wiya deliberately showered upon him special favours, and tried to win him over. Once, he asked Aqeel to curse Ali in accordance with the custom of the Omayyid court. Aqeel went to the pulpit, and said, "Here is Mua'wiya, he has asked me to curse Ali bin Abi Talib, so O you believers, curse him." The listeners invoked the curse of God without ascertaining to whom the pronoun referred.

Those were the tumultuous and eventful days in which Ali lived. While he left an indelible stamp of his clean conduct and unsurpassed virtue, there was always a group of people ready at hand to tarnish his name, underestimate his contribution, and diminish his exalted status.

For a man like Ali bin Abi Talib an exercise in self-introduction may not be a very pleasant task. But since his life, belief and practice are so very closely linked with Islam, he has drawn a self portrait to give an accurate analysis of his days, and to lay bare the truth for which he so vehemently fought.

The next chapter presents Ali bin Abi Talib as portrayed by himself in his sermons addresses and letters.

ALI BIN ABI TALIB - A SORT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

As a child, Ali lived with the Prophet. History tells us that due to the financial strain, Abu Talib allowed his sons to be looked after by his various kinsmen, leaving Aqeel to himself. The Prophet volunteered to have Ali in his custody. Ali says:

“I sprang forth from the line of Rabia and Mudhar and was placed in my childhood among the noblest of Arabs. And you may well know how close I was to the Prophet, enjoying his special attention. I was in his laps when a baby, and he kept me close to his bosom. He kept me close to himself when he slept; I felt secure in his warmth, and imbued his fragrance. He fed me with his own loving hands, and at times chewed hard bits for me to eat. He never found me lying, nor did he find me of unbecoming conduct.

I followed in his wake like a young weaned camel follows its mother. And everyday he unravelled a new code of conduct for me, bidding me to follow it in all earnest. Every year he would seek refuge in the caves of Hira., where none but I saw him. Those were the days when Islam was confined to one house, comprising of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, his wife Khadija, and myself as a third member. I saw the light of revelation and message inhaled the sweet fragrance of divine covenant.”

Clearly, Ali worshipped none but Allah, and in his lifetime he never bowed in awe or prostrate to worship in presence of the idols. This exclusive trait has been acknowledged by all Muslim chroniclers and historians, all of whom upon the mention of Ali’s name say: “*Karrama Ilahu wajhahu*” - may Allah exalt his countenance. Ali refers to this, adding that his faithfulness to the Prophet also had been unexampled. He says:

“And those companions of Muhammad, peace be upon him

and his progeny, who acted as his aids and confidant, very well know that I have never for a second wavered or flinched upon the path of Allah or his Prophet. There had been occasions when the bravest flickered and faltered, and the marching steps withdrew - but I stood by the side of the Prophet, firm and undaunted. It was the courage given by Allah.”

The question of the first early converts to Islam has been a subject of debate among Muslims. Different names in various orders have been suggested. It is evident, however, that since the Prophet was commanded to first spread the word of Allah in his own family, as testified by the Holy Qur'an, the question of anyone else from outside taking precedence over Ali does not seem tenable. Let us see what Ali has to say:

“I heard the Satan wail and lament when the first revelation came upon him, peace be upon him and his progeny; so I said, ‘O Prophet of God, what is this lamentation?’ He said, ‘It is the Devil, despondent of his control over Men. No doubt, you hear what I hear, and witness what I see. Except that you are not a Prophet - you are my aid and Minister, and you are destined for the best’.”

Thus Ali stayed near the Prophet through all thick and thin. Returning from his last pilgrimage, the Prophet stopped at Johfa, and near Khumm, he declared Ali as his successor. This event has been reported by a phalanx of the Prophet's companions, the ulama of both the principle sects of Islam, and alluded to by writers and poets of all centuries. If this consistent narration still leaves any room for doubt, then it becomes very difficult for a discreet scholar to rely upon any section of the Islamic history. Two months later, the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, passed away. Ali says:

“The Prophet of God died with his head resting upon my breast, breathing his last over my palms, which I passed over my face in reverence. I undertook washing his body, with angels as my aid. The house and its open courtyard was filled with yell and cry of mourning; with a company of angels, ascending and

descending. I never failed to hear their subdued voices, praying for the Prophet till we interred him in his grave. So, who is more entitled, than I am, in this life and hereafter, to the rights of the Prophet? Be discerning, and make a sincere resolution to combat your adversaries. By God and there is no God but He, I am indeed on the right path, while they are treading the slippery ground of Untruth. I speak quite openly, and seek forgiveness from Allah for myself and you all.”

While the Prophet lay on his deathbed, Muslims in Medina convened a meeting at *Saqeefah* of Bani Saidah to appoint a Caliph who would succeed the Prophet. This strange and ill-timed episode has been given an ample treatment by the historians, and it is not our present concern to go through the events here. Abu Bakr, son of Abu Qahafah, was finally elected a Caliph, among hue and cry of dissatisfaction from many quarters. Ali, as we have seen earlier, was engaged in completing final rituals for the burial of the Prophet. The news of the meeting at *Saqeefah* and its outcome came to him as a thunderbolt. Ali says:

“By God, the fellow squeezed himself into the array of Caliphate, very well knowing that I was as indispensable as a pivot is to a quern. The torrent of wisdom flowed from me, and the high flying could not scale my heights. So I retired and withdrew. There were only two ways for me: either to advance with hands cut off, or to patiently endure the gross injustice. An experience that would weaken the old, turn a young man into an old man, and cause a faithful to drudge till he meets his death.”

Ali married Fatima, the only daughter of the Prophet. This marriage took place in the first year after the Prophet’s migration to Medina. Ali had two sons and two daughters by her: namely, Hasan, Husain, Zainab and Ummu Kulthum. The fifth one named Muhsin, died in miscarriage caused by the impact of a door flung open upon her by the people trying to take away Ali by force before the Caliph to swear the oath of allegiance.

While traditions from the Prophet about Fatima and her excelling qualities abound, the attitude and treatment meted out to her after her father's death makes a sad and shameful reading. Fatima died some ninety-five days after the Prophet's death. She was 18.

As Ali buried her, he spoke the following words:

“Salaams unto you, O Prophet of God, from me and from your daughter, being buried in your proximity, and joining you so soon. O Prophet of God, her departure has left me immersed in grief, and snatched away my restraint and endurance. However, your demise being a greater misfortune, I draw solace from the first bereavement for the other. I laid you to rest in your grave, after you breathed your last over my breast. Surely, we belong to Allah, and unto Him shall we return. So here is your trust deposited, and your charge entrusted back. As for my sorrow, it is eternal, and my nights sleepless; till when Allah ordains for me to unite with you in your blissful abode.

Your daughter will inform you how your so-called followers joined hands to usurp her rights. You will ask her in detail and know the situation, which arose, not too long after your departure, while people still cherished your memory.

Salaams unto you both; salaam of farewell - farewell not born of dislike or weariness. For if I go, it is not because I am tired of your company, and if I stay on, it is not because of my distrust in what Allah has promised those who forbear.”

During the reign of the three Caliphs, which spanned over a period of twenty-five years, Ali lived a life of a private citizen. Whenever the rulers needed him for his advice or judgement, he wholeheartedly co-operated, for in so doing he believed that he performed his duty towards Islam, regardless of who sat on the seat of authority. The reign of the third Caliph was tumultuous. Uthman, the third Caliph, treated his own relatives and tribesmen condescendingly, till a faction of dissatisfied Muslim rallies against him. In a final bid

to free themselves from the yoke of nepotism, they killed him. It is a known fact that Ali made several attempts to save the situation by offering advice to the Caliph, but the Caliph was more inclined towards his Umayyid counsellors.

Mua'wiya, the Umayyid prince, was then governing Damascus. He made a unilateral declaration of his autonomy soon after Uthman's death, and came out openly against Ali, accusing him of complicity in the murder of Uthman.

Here in Medina, people enjoined upon Ali to take up the reins. Ali gives a graphic description of what transpired. He says:

“Till the third one from them boastfully jumped upon the throne, to control both, the waste and the cultivated. And with him stood his cousins, plundering the wealth of God, the way a hungry camel devours harvest grass. The twine that he twisted, broke his own neck, undoing his mischief, His greed killed him.

And then the people flocked and swarmed around me from all sides, till they trampled upon my toes and tore my dress, They crowded together like cattle, and when I girded up my loins to take up the responsibilities, some of them abrogated their pledges, some became apostates, and others turned into oppressors.”

On the subject of Uthman's murder, Ali wrote to Mua'wiya:

“By my life, O, Mua'wiya, if you made a dispassionate survey of the episode, you would find me totally innocent - unsoiled and unstained by the blood of Uthman. And you would know for certain that I remained completely detached. Unless you want to frame up an accusation - well, then do what you please.”

For the first time after the Prophet's death, Muslims were divided into two camps, one attached to the just, stern caliphate of Ali, another to the misrule of Mua'wiya. While no parallel can be drawn between the two rulers, it is interesting to note that posterity has

judged Mua'wiya as a diplomat and politician of the first rank. Compared to Mua'wiya and the Caliphs preceding him, Ali has been regarded as one devoid of diplomatic skill. This is what Ali has to say about Mua'wiya and his diplomacy:

“By God, Mua'wiya is not cleverer than I am. He betrays, he is an unscrupulous schemer. Had I not hated that wicked habit, I might have been among the most crafty statesmen. But remember that such duplicity is a sin, and such sin is a violation of Islamic tenets. Such a treacherous ruler will be identified on the Day of Judgement. By God, I cannot be overtaken by the artful trickery, nor can I be subjugated by force.”

With Ali on the seat of authority, Muslims were reminded of the early days of Islam, when the Prophet, with all simplicity and humility, conducted the affairs of the state. However, there was a marked difference. Some people were now used to privileges and preference. The interval of twenty-five years between the Prophet's death and Ali's ascension to Caliphate had worked a great change. There arose an influential class amidst the common men, who needed to be appeased, and this gave a rise to inequity and injustice. Without much ado, Ali set out to cancel all the privileges, and resorted to the Prophet's way of fair and equitable distribution of public wealth. Needless to say that the rich and influential people felt the ground slipping from under their feet, and they clustered together to form a dissention group.

But Ali had warned them in advance. Abdullah bin Abbas says that he once called upon Ali at a place known as *Ziquar*, and found him mending his shoe. Looking up, Ali asked:

“How do you price this shoe?”

Ibn Abbas said:

“The shoe seemed to be quite worn out and had been repeatedly patched. It is worthless - My lord.”

Ali said:

“Well, I love it more than the office I hold; unless I use the office

to uphold Truth and justice, and eradicate the last vestiges of untruth and tyranny.”

Then he came before the people and said:

“Our Lord sent Muhammad, peace be upon him and his progeny, when the Arabs knew nothing of the Book nor of the Prophethood. He led unto their rightful place; saved, steady and satisfied. And I was there as a vanguard - till society was thoroughly cleaned of all evils. My efforts never slackened, nor did cowardice get the better of me. And my mission today follows the same pattern - I shall pierce the veil of Untruth, till Truth is evident and manifest.”

They found him intolerably austere, his ways forbidding. During the tenure of his Caliphate, which lasted for four years and nine months, various factions arose to fight him. The battles of Jamal, Siffeen and Nehrawan were waged against him by leaders who enjoyed substantial following. Some of them like A'isha, the wife of the Prophet, Talha and Zubair were leading the rebels, This left the masses completely baffled and torn apart.

Dr. Taha Husein in his famous work *Aliyyun wa Banoohu* (Ali and his Sons) relates an interesting incident. During the battle of Jamal, one comes to Ali and says:

“O Ali, Can people like Talha and Zubair, who are opposed to you, be on the wrong side?”

Ali answered:

“You, my brother, are gravely mistaken. Right and Wrong, Truth and Untruth are not identified by the personalities. Know the Truth, and you shall know its people; know the Untruth, and you shall identify its followers.”

Dr. Taha Husein, despite his known agnostic tendencies, remarks:

“I have neither seen nor known a rejoinder more persuasive, except the words of revelation in the Book of God, the Holy Qur'an.”

Most of his trusted friends died in these battles. Till Ali felt alone, and at times, with an air of despondency, he remembered them from the pulpit, he said:

“Where are my friends who rode on the right Path, and died with their feet firm thereon? Where is Ammar? Where is Ibn-u-Tayyihan? Where is Zu-sshahadain? Where are their likes who faced death with valour, and whose heads were carried to the sinful rulers?”

Alas! they were my friends who recited Qur’an and lent strength to it; they pondered over their obligation and fulfilled it. They kept alive the Traditions, and uprooted all innovations. When called for defense, they responded; when they trusted a leader, they followed him faithfully.”

There is no doubt that the period during which Ali ruled was turbulent - though at the same time reminiscent of the Prophet’s days and ways. There are several factors, which contributed to this unrest and turmoil, chief among them being the contrast between his, and the preceding rules. But in spite of all the opposition, people acknowledged Ali’s distinction, and in the face of efforts to suppress his qualities, they mentioned and referred to his excellence with helpless abandon.

But the most outstanding quality of Ali is that he knew his people very well. This is not to merely say that he had acquaintance with them. He knew their state of mind, their propensities, aspirations and the intensity of their Faith. In a sermon, which he delivered from the pulpit, he said:

“And God be my Witness, if I chose to inform everyone of you about his beginning, his end and his destiny, I could do that - for the fear that you might disbelieve and belie what the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, told me.

But I shall transmit this to the trusted ones. By God who sent His Messenger with Truth, and selected him of all that He created, I speak not but the Truth. He imparted unto me all the details -

telling me about those damned and those saved. He had revealed to me the date of this responsibility upon my shoulders. In short, there is nothing of which he did not inform me.

O people, I do not exhort you to be obedient to Allah, unless I have preceded you in doing so - and I do not dissuade you from committing sins and vices, unless I have first refrained from them myself.”

Ali knew very well what turn the events were going to take, and he seemed to be fully prepared for it. He knew that the forces acting against him were gaining strength, and what destiny held in store for him. But the prospects failed to daunt him. The Ummah was passing through a period of trials and tribulations, and the impasse had been presaged by the Prophet. Once when asked about what the Prophet had foretold, Ali related the following:

“When Allah revealed unto the Prophet the Ayah: ‘Alif lam Mim’ - Do these people think that they would be left upon claiming that they believe, and that they would not be put to test? - I knew that we would not be subjected to any test as long as the Prophet lived amongst us.

So I said: ‘O Prophet of God: What is this test of which Allah has, informed you?’

He said: ‘O Ali, my people will definitely be tested after my departure.’

So I said: ‘O Prophet of God: On the day of Uhud, when Muslims were blessed with martyrdom, and I felt deprived and hence grieved, you gave me the glad tiding of my martyrdom in later years.’

The Prophet said: ‘Yes, O Ali, I told you so - and now let me know how are you going to exercise your patience in that situation?’

I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, that is not a situation for patience,

it is an occasion which calls for praise and thanksgiving.'

Then the Prophet said: 'O Ali, the people will be put to test in matters of their wealth and properties. They will hold Allah under obligation for having accepted Islam, and at the same time expect His Grace. Under flimsy and feeble pretexts, they would legalize that which is forbidden; yet feel protected from His Wrath. They will partake of wine saying it is a juice, accept bribes under the guise of gifts and presents and legalize usury as a transaction of trade.'

I said: 'O Prophet of God: how am I to treat them then? Would they be apostates - or mere tempted sinfults?'

The Prophet said: 'Treat them as sinners.'”

If one is led to believe that Ali was a mere ascetic, oblivious of the world around him, stricken with self-pity because of the unfriendly and uncooperative surrounding, then that indeed is a grave mistake. For Ali did not live in oblivion, nor was he in the world of fancy and make-believe. He was a practical man, fully conscious and profoundly aware. In the course of his sermons, which chiefly dwelt upon the tenets of Faith and the human society, he at times digressed to enlarge upon the wonders of creation, describing the work of nature with an unsettling precision. Here is an example:

“One of the greatest wonders of creation is a peacock, well built and with a perfect blend of bright colours. It has circular patches of feathers along the shafts, and a train spread into a fan. When in presence of the peahen, it ostentatiously raises its train, to form an erect, delicately hued fan over its head, like a skipper who spreads the sail to catch the wind. Proud of its colours, it walks with a swinging gait.

It mates like any other bird, advancing towards its female with the zest of a youthful stallion.

Observe it yourself, and do not rely upon baseless stories. Like

when they say that tears flow from the tear glands of a peacock, and when they reach the comers of his eyelids, the peahen stands by to drink the droplets and thus conceive. This indeed is a tall story.

Its quills look like a comb of silver with the ornate feathers having sunlike 'eyes', gleaming like pure gold and pieces of emerald. If you compare them with what grows from earth, you may say: It is a bouquet of flowers gathered in spring. If you look at them as an apparel, then they are a dress embroidered with gold, like the best cloth of Yemen. And if you compare them with jewellery, then they are the colourful stones studded upon silver rings.

And look at it when it walks and struts with a swinging gait, spreading its train, crackling complacently at its colourful attire and beautiful neck. And then when it looks at its long unfeathered legs, it screams and makes a harsh crackle, for they are as ugly as the legs of a crossbred fowl - with a spur grown on it.

And it has a crest of iridescent green tuft, with a neck long and slim like a carved goblet. And its underpart is dark blue - like smooth silk or soft velvet, its gleam and gloss makes a perfect blend with the radiant green.

And near its ear holes runs a thin well-defined line, like a daisy, pure white -forming a brilliant contrast with the black background. So there is hardly any shade of colour, which is not there, the effect of each enhanced by the lustre and embellishment, looking like spring flowers, fresh and unspoilt.

And at times the bird rustles its quills, and the feathers drop, like leaves falling from the branches, only to be replaced again with the same pattern and arrangement as before. Take a feather in your hand, and you will see it rosy pink, and then emerald green, and again golden yellow all at once."

SHORT SAYINGS BY IMAM ALI (A.S.)

Conceit: Conceit prevents the pursuit of perfection.

Secret: He who withholds his secrets controls the options.

Places of Suspicion: He who frequents the places of suspicion must not complain if he is accused.

Ignorance: People rally as enemies against things of which they are ignorant.

Patience: Anguish destroys him whom patience fails to save.

Character: A man is known by the height and extent of his aspirations. His truthfulness is in measure with his honour; his valour with his dignity; his purity and continence with his self-respect.

Day of Judgement: Blessed is he who remembered the return unto Allah, worked to account for his deeds, remained contented with just sufficient and pleased with his Creator.

Contentment: Contentment is wealth inexhaustible.

Charity: Never feel ashamed to give a little charity for to deny or deprive is lesser still.

Wisdom: There is no wealth like wisdom, no want like ignorance, no legacy like good breeding and no aid like consultation.

Wisdom: Exceeding wisdom has few words.

A Leader: Whoever poses as a leader of the people must begin with self-discipline before educating others, and let his own conduct and

bearings teach before his tongue does. And a master of self deserves better reverence.

Miser: A miser surprises me. He runs away from poverty but lives with it, he longs for affluence but misses it. In this world he lives like a poor man, while in the next he will be judged among the rich.

Distribution: O son of Adam, whatever you earn over and above your subsistence, you are its treasurer on behalf of the others.

Worship: There are people who worship Allah with a desire for reward; they are like merchants who trade for profit. And some worship Him with awe and fear; they are like slaves who obey to avoid punishment. And there are others who worship Him to thank Him and express gratitude; that is the way of free men.

God: Where resolute plans fail, well-knit arrangements fritter away, and ambitions and aspirations remain unfulfilled - there I see Allah, the Glorious, and His inscrutable way.

Wealth: Two attendants share everyone's wealth; the heirs and the eventualities.

Honour: The honour of your countenance is intact, till you abuse it by begging - so watch before whom you stoop so low!

Contentment: Abandon hope for all that lies in the hands of people - and enters the realm of the greatest content.

Sin: The greatest sin is the one considered small by its doer.

Patience: Patience and gentleness is a veil that conceals, and wisdom is a sword that cuts. So cover the defects of your disposition with gentleness and kill your passions with your wisdom.

Backbiting: Backbiting is an effort by the helpless.

Knowledge: Quest of knowledge and coveting this world and all that is in it - are two desires which ever remain insatiable.

Speech: Do not speak on matters you do not know; rather, do not say all that you know - For God has assigned duties to all your limbs and they may bear witness against you on the Day of Judgement

Knowledge: Every container gets filled up with its content, except the container of Knowledge - it grows and expands with the increase of knowledge.

Conceit: Vanity and conceit make a man jealous of his own reason.

Greatness: To disregard and connive at things one knows is the noblest act of greatness.

Circumstances: The whip and scorn of changing times reveal the essence of men.

Greed: Much of reason is destroyed by bolts of greed.

End of Life: Every man shall have an end; sweet or bitter.

Warning: O Son of Adam! When you see your Lord's continuous blessings despite your constant disobedience unto Him - there! be careful.

Faith: Faith is to prefer truth, when it harms you, over Falsehood, when it benefits you; and to watch that your words do not exceed your deeds, and to fear God when you talk about others.

Wealth: A man accumulates wealth with total disregard of Allah - and is then inherited by one who spends it all in the way of Allah. What a disappointment awaits him on the Day of Judgement when the heir enters the heavenly bliss while he himself is condemned to eternal fire!

Praise: To praise someone more than he deserves is to flatter him, and a default may be due to either inability or jealousy.

Wealth: When bereaved of a dear son, man may sleep to end his heartache - but when wealth is lost, he sleeps not a wink!

Fool: Do not remain in a fool's company for he makes all his foolish acts seem plausible to you and wishes that you be like him.

Authority: A man in authority is like one who rides a lion - people envy his position while he knows his place better.

Warning: When people are engaged in the betterment of their world at the expense of some religious laws, God sets them to encounter that which is worse.

Humility: Blessed is he who is modest and humble, and his attainments all pure. His private life reformed, his nature fair and graceful. The excess in wealth he spends well; the excess in words he withholds, and spares. People fear no injury from him - he is given to the norm of the Prophet and introduces no innovations.

Worth: He is doomed who never knew his own worth.

Love: Weed out evil from the hearts of others by purifying your own heart.

Anger: Anger is a kind of madness - for an angry man must later repent. And if he does not repent, then his madness is firm and well rooted.

Distribution: There are men whom Allah gives countless blessings so that their fellow men may share the benefits. They stay as long as they are so used and spent, but when withheld, life takes them away and entrusts to the others.

Nobility: A man devoid of noble heart prides in vain on his noble ancestry.

Speech: Talk and you will be known. For man is hidden beneath his tongue.

Fault-Finding: One who looks at the faults of others disapprovingly, and excuses oneself for the same faults, it's indeed a perfect fool.

Arrogance: Greed, arrogance and envy lead unto the dark world of sins.

Sin: One who approves a deed becomes a party to it; and a partisan to an ill-deed commits two sins: sin by act, and sin by approval.

Time: Time withers the bodies but renews and reinforces false desires, then it brings Death closer, and all wishes and hopes grow remote. In the face of Time, both the successful and the loser are tired and spent.

Forgiving: The more powerful ought to be the more forgiving.

Secrets: Slips of tongue and colours of face often give away a well-guarded secret.

Circumstances: When fate is smiling and the world is at your feet, good qualities of others are lent and attributed to you. But when the ever-evasive fate turns its face, then your own qualities are denied.

Peace: In the days of undue strife and dispute act like a calf, it neither has a back for someone to mount, nor udder for anyone to milk.

Justice: For no doubt, in justice there is comfort and relief. And whoever is depressed by Justice shall find injustice more cumbersome and depressing.

Daily Prayer: Say your prayers at the appointed hour. Do not say them before time even if you were free, nor delay because you were busy. You must know that all your acts and accomplishments depend upon your prayers.

Qur'an: And the Qur'an has a beautiful exterior, the interior of it is profound. Its marvels never lost, its wonders never reduced. Darkness is not dispelled but by its penetrating beam.

The Prophet: Allah commissioned Muhammad, peace be upon him and his progeny, as a warner to the people and a guardian of revelation; when you Arabs followed the worst religion at the worst abode. You lived among rough stones and deaf serpents; your drink unclean, your food unhealthy; you engaged in bloodshed and severed all bonds of kinship. Idols were created everywhere around you, and your vices were fanatically guarded.

The Prophet: At last Allah sent Muhammad, peace be upon him and his progeny, as a witness, a warner and bringer of glad tidings. Best of man as a child, noblest of them at maturity, purest in character, most generous in his endowments.

The Prophet: And follow your Prophet, the most congenial and most pure, peace be upon him and on his progeny. In his life there is an example to emulate and a solace for those who seek comfort. The most beloved in the eyes of Allah are those who obey His Prophet and follow in his wake.

He, peace be upon him and his progeny, sat on the ground to eat and sat with all humility - stitched his sandal, and patched his clothes with his own hands, rode on the bare back of a donkey and at times shared a ride.

Allah sent him with a proof that was sufficient, an admonition that restored the spirit and a redeeming call. With these he revealed the unexplored paths, checked the irrational innovations and brought to light the ordinance of Allah.

Ahlul Bait: We are a family of Prophets, receivers of Divine Message; our house a place where Angels frequent. We are the source of knowledge and the fountainhead of Wisdom. Our friends and helpers expect Divine Grace, while our adversaries reckon on worldly power alone.

We are closest to the Prophet. And we are his companions, guardians of his message and doors of access unto him. Houses are not entered but through the doors - and one who intrudes from other than the doorway is normally called a thief.

Day of Judgement: O servants of Allah, weigh your conscience before it is put in balance, and examine it before you are called upon to account for your deeds. Breathe in respite before you are stifled, and submit before you are driven by force.

Death: When you want to rush into the arms of Evil, remember Death. A sting that destroys all mortal tastes disturbs all pleasures and turns all hope into despair.

Counsel: Listen to my counsel, O Son! The Master of Death is Himself the Master of Life; the Creator Himself causes death. The Destroyer is at the same time the Preserver. He afflicts and He cures. And the affairs of this World - prosperity, affliction, reward hereafter, and such of which you know not but He has willed - all follow His design. When you find yourself baffled base it on your ignorance; for you were created ignorant first, and then were taught. Your ignorance abounds and you are bewildered. Your vision remains blurred till you see the pattern unfold before your eyes.

Amirul Momineen: Am I content with being addressed as Master of the Faithful, while I do not share with them their grief and pain? Or do not act as a model in their sorrow and strain? I was not created to delight in the delicacies of food like a tied animal that is fattened on fodder; nor like a loose grazing animal wandering here and there, and in nobody's care. I am not left without responsibilities, nor have

I been granted a wasteful respite. How can I lead people unto error or aimlessly tread on a path to confusion?

Orphans and Neighbours: Remember the Orphans! Care for their meals when they are away, and attend to their needs when they are in your presence. And work no ill to your neighbours, for that is the counsel of your Prophet. The Prophet recommended them so very often; till we thought he would grant them a share in our estates.

Amr bil Ma'roof: Do not abandon the practice of exhorting people to do Good and dissuading them from indulging in Evil; else the wicked amongst you will rule over you. Then you will invoke assistance from Allah, but your prayers will not be answered.

Character: Expect from none but your Lord, the Sustainer; fear nothing but your own evil deeds; do not feel ashamed of admitting your ignorance and saying, "I do not know" when you really do not know, do not fight shy of learning that which you do not know; be patient and forbearing for it is to the Faith what head is to a body. These five habits I strongly recommend, even if acquiring them involves distant travel.

ALLAH

The beginning of religion is to know God,
And the perfection of knowledge about Him.
Is to confirm and believe
In His Existence; And the most rational belief is
the belief in His Oneness,
Pure, Unblemished and Flawless.

The absolute purity means to
disallow all descriptions of Him.
For every description bears witness
that it is other than the one described.
And so the described one is
not the description.

So whoever describes Him,
draws for Him a parallel,
Makes Him one of a pair, and thus a part of it.
To conceive Him as a part
is gross ignorance about Him;
and ignorance leads to pointing at Him.

Whoever points at Him indeed
sets a limit for Him;
And to limit Him is to count Him.
To ask “wherein is He?”
Is to contain Him.

To ask “whereupon is He?”
Is to exclude Him.
He is Existence,
not contingent - Presence,
Not from void.
With everything,
but neither together not comparable:
Away-yet not separate

GOD OF ISLAM

He is One, but not by
numerical interpretation;
A Creator, not by
movement or effort.
Hears most, but not
by any organ -
Sees best, but not
with a separate aid.
He is a Witness, though not by contact;
He is separate, though not detached.
Manifest, yet not seen,
Unseen, yet not small
or insignificant,
Different from all things
by His Power and Potence;
All things different from Him,
being submissive and subservient.

... And God Almighty created Life
when He created; not in need of
compliance nor apprehensive of disobedience,
for disobedience causes Him no harm,
just as devotion and compliance earns
Him no gain.

But the God-fearing and pious are the
people of excellence; their behaviour humble.
They turn their eyes away from things forbidden
by Allah, and lend their ears to the learning
which is truly useful to them. They conduct themselves
with equal ease in hardships and comforts.

When night falls, they stand in prayers,
reading the Qur'an, and reciting its verses

slowly, with sadness in their hearts - seeking the
cure of their ailing soul.

And during the day, they are the forbearing,
learned, virtuous and pious. Fear of God shapes
them like a sharpened arrow; someone looks at them
and says: "They are indeed taken ill."
While actually they are not ill. And someone comments:
"They are affected by delirium."

Well, something of greater import has no doubt affected them.
They are not happy about their little good turns;
nor are they ever complacent about their achievements.
Always introspective, they are critics of their own actions.
When anyone among them is praised, he is disturbed and says:
"I know of myself better than others do,
and my Lord knows of me more than I do.
O Allah! Do not hold me responsible for
what they say: place me higher than their estimate;
and forgive my sins of which they are unaware."

You will find them firm in Religion,
discreet in tenderness, faithful with certitude,
eager for learning, conniving at what they know.
Moderate in plenty, humble in prayers, they
face deprivation with honour and hardships with grace.
They pursue lawful livelihood, disdain greed;
their main source of pleasure is to
I guide people unto the right path.

TO MALIK ASHTAR

Then select the noblest and most
exalted in your estimate for Judgeship -
one not preoccupied with his own problems,
and not involved in any quarrels.

Free from recurring errors, he must be the one
who readily accepts Truth once it is known.

He must be a man of immaculate record,
never spurred by avarice. One who does
not decide without weighing the pros and cons,
is cautious when in doubt, considers each and
every evidence and is least restive over prolonged
re-examinations, and new disclosure of facts,
And yet, he is the one least stained by flattery,
never infused with conceit. Alas! Such men are few!

However, when you find one, and have made an
appointment, study his judgements as often as you can.
Pay him enough and more, so that he is free from want,
and is not tempted to go to people for his needs.
Give him a position so nearer to you that no other
privileged men would aspire, thus keep him
free from all intrigues.

Do not include a miser among your counsellors
for he will deter you from granting favours,
and will frighten you of poverty. Nor a coward,
who will make you weak of intent and resolve.
And not a greedy man either, for he will push
you to unjustified extremes. Miserliness, cowardice
and greed are all born of mistrust in Allah.

And now, do not remain concealed from your
people for an unduly long period for such a
concealment and aloofness is a kind of tyranny,

and inherits ignorance about the state of affairs. The masses remain uninformed; things small assume exaggerated proportions, while important matters are ignored. Your right actions might appear faulty to them, and some might even commend your errors. Truth and Untruth would thus remain undistinguished.

And do not act like a wild animal
set to devour whatever comes your way.
For the people under your care are of two categories:
either your brothers in Faith, or your like in creation.
They all commit mistakes and are victims
of their weaknesses - some do it on purposes,
others do it inadvertently. Be gracious and forgiving,
the way you would love to be forgiven by God Almighty.
For you are placed over them, and the one who has
appointed you is placed over you - but above all is Allah.
He has placed their affairs in your care, and thus
subjected you to a test. Do not set yourself to bear
His wrath nor can you afford to remain
without His forgiveness and Mercy.
Never repent for having forgiven.

A Minute, O Lord !

A SORT OF PRAYERS

**Based on the thoughts and teachings of
Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib
and
Imam Ali Ibn Husain, Zainul Abedeen**

Rendered In free style.

THANK YOU

O Allah, a word.
I want to thank You;
can You spare a minute,
or two, You don't mind,
Do You?
You are not one of those
who like to be thanked but
graciously say: "Mention not";
Anyway, I do feel obliged to say
How thankful I am
To You, to You alone.

Thank You for giving me
Life on this beautiful earth;
And for the eyes to behold
All that is so wonderful, so exact,
so meticulously planned and
so very pleasing. Thanks for the ears,
Which hear;
So much that travels and vibrates
on the wingless, cooling, soothing air,
And for the nose that discerns
sweet smell from that which stinks,

And for the discretion
To refrain from poking it into matters
with which I am not concerned.

It is a long list, God,
Perhaps an endless one -
Do You have a minute,
Or two?
For the very sanity that inspires me
to thank You

is Your gift - and that deserves
A myriad thanks. And if I
Thank You for the wisdom You have granted
to thank You,
then the chain goes on for ever and ever.

Thanks a million
for the mouth and its residents,
the pink tongue and spotless teeth.
It is a strange yet useful slit,
connected with the temporal
and the sublime.
It tastes and chews and conveys
to my fathomless belly that
which is my sustenance.
And it speaks my mind,
gives an audible existence to my
silent thoughts.
It translates my feelings and my passions,
straight and undiluted,
if I am not a politician.

Some say that You are not there,
And others doubt; they say
if You were there, You would not care,
but the morning dew in its freshness,
like a droplet of tears from a shy bride;
The rising sun with all its glare,
and the full moon and its gradual decline,
the singing bird on the nearby branch,
the buds, the blossoms, the bush and pine,
the wild and mild animals around,
and my very existence with all its wonders,
Told Me You are there!
For this realization and recognition
that at times transcends
the limits of Intellect,
I Thank You.

WHAT THEY SAY

A minute more, O Allah,
for this is a confession.
Do you know how conscious I am,
and inquisitive about what they say?
What they say about me,
my thought, my work, my speech,
and my reactions. I deem it a challenge to
my pride and dignity, I confess
I am conceited, self-cantered, ego-centric
and selfish, and a coward.

Grant me, O Allah, the wisdom to discern,
And to speak and do, regardless of what they say -
That which is right and according to Your pleasure.
Grant me the courage -
not to fight them for what they say, -
but to ignore them
so that the pilgrim's progress is on,
free and liberated firm and unflinching,
Till at the feet of my Master,
You, I rest.

PARENTS AND PARENTHOOD

This is just a request, God.
Or call it a prayer.
Have You a minute,
or two, my God,
I want You to bless my parents
with all the good things
and what-have-You,
for their concern, kindness and love
shown to me
When I was tender and needed it most.

I was musing over
the helpless state in which
man is born. This again, is Your design.
small, tender and delicate;
little claws clutching nothing,
little legs kicking at nothing,
a head full of gray matter,
registering impressions,
but comprehending nothing.
Let me tell You, my Lord,
and this is in all earnest
there is no place as secure
as the nursing arm of the mother.
To me, now, it is a Paradise lost.

Father was the bread - winner,
never spared the rod,
never spoilt the child.
Under his strict but kind vigil
I grew up to regard him as my Ideal.
He showed me the ways
and taught me the ways -

preparing me to enter into life,
which is not a bed of roses.

Some tell me that parents
must not be regarded so high.
It is a modern world -
where father and mother are our
mere friends, and then, later on, a burden.
They met and married and reproduced -
A natural outcome of lust and passion
I am. Am I? O God,
this is most perplexing.

Forgive me Lord,
but the appraisal seemed plausible,
and worse still, I found the parents
accepting the so called modern trend.
Or have they resigned to what
they cannot change?

And I grew, and grew -
The sweet days of childhood
passed away like a dream
and then came adolescence.
Oh, those carefree days
when life was sweet and easy
and the Moon and the Stars
were my companions,
in a world full of ecstasy
and expectations.
Then there was Youth and
I married and became a parent.
And brought into this world
a natural outcome of my lust
and Passion. My children.

O God, a minute, or may be two,
I promise, I will not digress.
But the lessons taught in Your
school come a hard way.
Suddenly, I realized that
the small ones are mine,
And I am theirs.
They must respect me, my years,
I my devotion, my sacrifice
And at the thought of their
indifference when they grow,
I shuddered.

No wonder that in Your Book,
at several places,
parents are mentioned immediately
after Your Glorious name.

You have said:

*“Your sustainer commands you to worship
None but Allah, and to be kind to your Parents”*

No doubt, O Allah
You are the Sustainer,
and through You,
parents are my sustainers, providers,
not for my physical needs alone,
but for the mental and the
spiritual needs.

Therefore I pray -
and I will not take long,
my Lord bless them, Please,
for their kindness, concern, love
shown to me.

SAJDAH

You have a minute, O Allah?
or may be two?
I want to tell You
how very close to You
I feel when I prostrate myself before You
I speak of my own feelings,
else You are always close to me,
nearer than the jugular vein -
to use Your Own expression
in The Holy Qur'an.

I must unabashedly confess,
O God, -
and this is very important; that
I have seen men bow down
before fellow men.
Unthinkable of man to descend
so low from his heights;
But this, believe me, my Lord,
Is true.

They bend on their knees
before a King, a wealthy man,
an influential snob, a tyrant,
and sometimes a Priest.
They abase themselves before
all forms of Power. And there
is a lover who stoops to conquer.

They tell me it is in human being ingrained
to stoop low sometimes in hypocrisy
And at times in awe:
a preliminary to achieve an end.
Hypocrisy, a modern veneer of culture,

is out of question with You Who knows All.
For You have said, in the Holy Qur'an,
You know the eyes that deceive
and the secrets of the bosom.
And for the way Your Unseen Hand
guides and controls our destiny,
we stand in awe, and that You know.

Forgive me for the digression, my Lord,
but You are with me, I am sure,
a minute or two,
I am coming to the point.
More than fear or favour,
I am aware of my dignity as a man,
standing highest on the rung of the ladder.
How can I bow down before those I govern?
or before those who are
in one way or the other
as helpless as I am?
At your feet, I prostrate, myself, O Allah,
the embodiment of Power, the only Power,
The Omnipotent,
Who can do and undo
all that I seek and desire.

In that moment of humility
before You, the Most High,
my heart is lifted,
my spirit elevated,
And I feel on top of the world.
This forehead that stands high,
Must bow down before He Who
Created, and none Other.
SAJDAH for ONE,
and not everyone.

QUR'AN

A minute or two
can You spare, O Allah?
I want to compliment You.

That Book of yours,
the Holy Qur'an
is undoubtedly Your masterpiece.
I was taught to read it
when I was young, thanks
to my parents,
and to my tutor,
serene, sober and methodical;
I can still remember his cane,
and the monotonous inculcations

I learnt to read,
and even committed the small
chapter to memory,
but never understood a word.
You know, my God,
it is in Arabic;
and Arabic is not my language.
Yet,
when I read Your Word.
It stirred my emotions -
- the combination of sound that emerged
and the evident harmony -
showed that somewhere,
beyond my comprehension,
lay an important meaning
And message.

Do not misunderstand me, GOD,

for I am not lodging any
complaint: no, not because
Your Book is in Arabic,
not at all.

It is a living language
spoken in various dialects,
colloquial and classic,
in many parts of the world.

And since the black gold has shown its glitter,
- a paradox, my God, You will say,
but You know Your designs better

I am not digressing.
Coming to the point, my Lord,
the Arabs and the Arabic
became universally important,
overnight.

No more is Arabic a language of
religion - to be looked down upon or
ignored - as it used to be,
by me and my like -
forgive my impertinence,
it is now a language of
commerce and industry;

And You made us all
of all sorts,
and it takes all sorts, You know.
Black and White, Brown and Yellow,
with different tones and tongues.
The Book was meant for
human beings,
And had to be in any one language.
Anyway.

So I learnt the language,
and pored over the
translations and the commentaries,

to understand when You spoke to me,
every time I read the Qur'an.

A minute more, or two, O Allah!

Let me compliment You
For the eloquence and an
inimitable style,
The lucid treatment to all
important subjects -
For the good tidings and the
warning -
For the enunciation of laws
governing human life;
What a comprehensive
Jurisprudence!

And when You relate the
events of the days gone by -
about the Prophets, their enemies
and friends,
Your descriptions and rendering
are so apt and pertinent that I feel
enraptured.
But somewhere between the lines,
a subtle hint here and there,
is dropped,
and takes me away, from it all,
to a new world which
transcends this temporal and transitional Existence.

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“I don't pray for His acceptance of my amaal as much as I pray for the opportunity to serve. And the day He grants me a new opportunity to serve, I believe the previous ones have been accepted. And I hope till my last breath the opportunities are there and when the Almighty calls me back, I will be able to tell my Lord, Thank You for giving me life, Thank You for giving me life.”

“To translate Nahjul Balagha is a mammoth task, and the scholars who devoted their time to this invaluable endeavour deserve our admiration. What is needed, however, is a concise introduction to Nahjul Balagha, to prepare a student before he plunges into the depths of the great Book itself. In so doing, it was necessary to select a few passages as beacons, so that the way is well-lit and the veil is lifted. I have translated some of the paramount features of Nahjul Balagha. Needless to mention the inspiration I have received from the works of Marhum Allamah Sayyid Mohammad Husain Tabatabai, Marhum Sheikh Murtaza Mutahhari and Allama Mohammed Taqi Ja'ffery, for with their aid and guidance, I feel better acquainted with the fringes of Nahjul Balagha.”



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