

Letters from Nahjul Balaagh

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Letters of Imam Ali b. Abi Taalib, peace be upon him
from Nahjul Balaagha (The Peak of Eloquence)

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1. To the people of Kufa before proceeding for the Battle of Jamal.
2. To the people of Kufa after the conquest of Basra.
3. To the Qadhi of Kufa, Shurayh b. Haarith when he purchased a costly house.
4. To one of the commanders of his army.
5. To the hypocrite Ash'ath bin Qays when he usurped public funds.
6. To Mu'awiya on his (Ali's) right to the caliphate.
7. To Mu'awiya, on receiving letters from him based on hypocritical advice and false accusations.
8. Jarir bin Abdullah Bajali was sent to Damascus. He was carrying a letter for Mu'awiya. Some delay occurred in his return. Imam Ali (a) felt anxious about his safety and wrote the following letter to him.
9. To Mu'awiya.
10. To Mu'awiya.
11. Part of instructions to his marshal when Imam Ali (a) sent him to a battle.
12. When Imam Ali (a) sent an expedition of 3000 soldiers under Ma'qil bin Qays Riyahi against the Syrians, he issued the following instructions.
13. Instructions to two of his commanders.
14. To his soldiers before the Battle of Siffin.
15. His invocation to Allah whenever he faced an enemy.
16. His advice to his followers during a battle.
17. A reply to a letter of Mu'awiya.
18. When Abdullah bin Abbas was the Governor of Basra, Imam Ali (a) wrote the following letter to him. The cause of this letter was the behaviour of Ibn Abbas towards the clan of Bani Tamim. Ibn Abbas hated them because some of them had sided with Talha and Zubayr in the Battle of Jamal and therefore, he had on occasions treated them scornfully. They reported this matter to Imam Ali (a) requesting that the whole clan should not be treated badly because of the folly of a few. This letter shows what a kind rule it was that Imam Ali (a) wanted to introduce.

19. A letter to one of his governors. It speaks volumes about the ways of Divine Rule. It shows how Imam Ali (a) was training the Muslims to behave tolerantly towards other religions, how minority was to be treated and what should those who hold a different creed, expect of a Muslim ruler.
20. To the corrupt Ziyad ibn Abih, who had been appointed as the Commissioner of Basra by Abdullah bin Abbas.
21. Another letter to Ziyad ibn Abih.
22. An advice to Abdullah b. Abbas, which the latter claimed, that except for the advice of the Holy Prophet (s), no advice had been so beneficial to him as this.
23. Instructions to his family a little before his martyrdom.
24. His Will in which he has left instructions as to how to treat his property and estate. It was written after his return from the Battle of Siffin.
25. Directions to assessors and collectors of Zakat.
26. His instructions to Zakat collectors.
27. Instructions to Muhammad b. Abu Bakr when he appointed him as the Governor of Egypt.
28. A famous reply to the letter of Mu'awiya. It throws ample light on many phases of the history of Islam from the time of its dawn up to the time of Imam Ali (a).
29. To the people of Basra.
30. To Mu'awiya.
31. Advice to one of his sons after returning from the Battle of Siffin. Some historians consider him to be Imam Hasan (a) while others are of the opinion that he was Muhammad Hanafiya. He wrote them in the form of a will. They deal with almost every aspect of life which goes a long way to make a man successful in life - brave, humane, generous, virtuous and pious.
32. To Mu'awiya.
33. To Qutham b. Abbas, the brother of Abdullah b. Abbas, who was the Governor of Imam Ali (a) in the province of Hijaz.
34. Muhammad, son of Abu Bakr (the 1st caliph) was one of the favourite disciples and companions of Imam Ali (a). Imam Ali (a) had treated and trained him like his own son and had appointed him as the Governor of Egypt. Later on Imam Ali (a) called him back from Egypt and sent Maalik Ashtar as the Governor. Muhammad thought that he was deposed and felt sad about it. When Imam Ali (a) came to know of this he wrote the following letter to him.
35. When Muhammad bin Abi Bakr was killed in Egypt by the guerrillas of Mu'awiya through disloyalty of his (Muhammad's) own companions and officers, Imam Ali (a) felt sad and wrote the following letter to Abdullah b. Abbas.

36. To his brother Aqil. It so happened that Zahaak bin Qays Fahri was sent to Makkah by Mu'awiya with a force of guerrillas to ravage the city. Imam Ali (a) had sent Hujr bin Adi Kindi to defend the city of Makkah. Hujr defeated Zahaak. Aqil at that time was in Makkah. He wrote to Imam Ali (a) offering his voluntary services saying that the Quraysh were not sincerely serving the cause of Islam and were bent upon the enmity of Imam Ali (a). In reply Imam Ali (a) wrote this letter.
37. To Mu'awiya.
38. To the people of Egypt, telling them about Maalik when Imam Ali (a) appointed him as their Governor.
39. To Amr bin Aas.
40. To a commissioner of a province. It could not be ascertained as to whom it was addressed.
41. To a Governor who left Imam Ali (a) and ran away with Public Treasury, this man was a cousin of Imam Ali (a) and was his confidant. Some historians say that he was Abdullah b. Abbas who was Imam's cousin and had once behaved in this way.
42. To Umar bin Abi Salama Mukhzumi when Imam Ali (a) called him back from the Governorship of Bahrain and appointed Nu'man bin Ajlan Zuraqi in his place.
43. To Masqala bin Hubayra al-Shaybani who was the governor of Ardshir Khurra (Iran).
44. To Ziyad ibn Abih when Imam Ali (a) came to know that Mu'awiya was secretly corresponding with Ziyad, inviting him to leave the side of Imam Ali (a) and to join him, offering him the bribe of being declared the son of Abu Sufyan.
45. To Uthman bin Hunayf, the Governor of Basra, when he attended a feast given by a rich man of Basra.
46. To one of his governors.
47. To Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a) after he was wounded by Abd al-Rahman b. Muljam whilst offered the morning prayers in the mosque of Kufa.
48. To Mu'awiya.
49. To Mu'awiya.
50. A circular to the chiefs of his army.
51. To the collectors of taxes and revenues.
52. A circular about prayers to the governors of all the provinces.
53. An order to Maalik al-Ashtar.
54. To Talha and Zubayr (sent to them through Imran bin Hasin Khuza'i, a pious companion of the Holy Prophet (s)).

55. To Mu'awiya.
56. Instructions to Shuray bin Hani when he was appointed as the commanding officer of the vanguard of his army, which was marching towards Syria.
57. To the people of Kufa while leaving Madina for Basra. It is a wonderful epistle. It invites people to judge his intentions and actions.
58. To the people of various provinces, giving them the causes of the Battle of Siffin.
59. To Aswad bin Qatiba, the Governor of Hulwan.
60. A circular sent to those governors and State officers, through whose territory the armies of Imam Ali (a) were to pass.
61. To Kumayl bin Ziyad Nakha'i, expressing his displeasure and rebuking him in leaving his province unguarded and allowing the army of the enemy to enter and carry on loot. He was the Governor of Hayit and had not properly defended the province against the Syrian guerrillas. After their attack and loot he wanted permission of Imam Ali (a) to take revenge upon the Syrian province of Kirkisiya. Imam Ali (a) replied to him in the following letter.
62. To the Egyptians. The letter was handed over to Maalik bin Haarith Ashtar to take with him when he was appointed as the Governor of that province.
63. To the Abdullah bin Qays, better known in history as Abu Musa Ash'ari, for his weak-faith and double-standards.
64. A reply to Mu'awiya's letter.
65. To Mu'awiya.
66. To Abdullah b. Abbas. Ibn Abbas said that except the advice and sayings of the Holy Prophet (s) no other advice benefited him more than this.
67. To Qutham b. Abbas (brother of Abdullah b. Abbas), who was the Governor of Makkah.
68. To Salman al-Farsi, before his (Ali's) caliphate.
69. To Harith Hamdani.
70. To Suhayl b. Hunayf, the Governor of Madina (and brother of Uthman b. Hunayf) about some Madinites who had left him and gone over to Mu'awiya.
71. To Munzir b. Jarud Abdi when he misappropriated something which he had been entrusted with.
72. To Abdullah b. Abbas.
73. To Mu'awiya.
74. A treaty which Imam Ali (a) has worded for the Bani Rabi'a tribe and the Yemenites to agree upon.
75. After the Muslims took oath of allegiance to Imam Ali (a), he wrote the

following letter to Mu'awiya.

76. Instructions to Abdullah b. Abbas when he sent him as his representative to Basra.

77. Instructions to Abdullah b. Abbas when he sent him for discussions with the Kharijites.

78. Abu Musa Ash'ari (Abdullah b. Qays) wrote a letter to Imam Ali (a) from the place where the decision of the arbitration (after Siffin) took place. Imam Ali (a) wrote to him the following letter in reply.

79. An order issued to his generals when he took over rulership of the Muslim State.

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Letter 1

The following is the letter sent by Imam Ali (a) through Imam Husayn (a) and Ammar Yasir to the people of Kufa before he proceeded to Basra for the Battle of Jamal.

This letter is from the servant and creature of Allah, Ali (a), Amir al-Mu'minin, to Kufiyites who are the leaders of Ansar and respectable persons.

After praising Allah and invoking His Blessings on the Holy Prophet (s) I want to throw light on the event of the assassination of Uthman and to make the whole affair as clear as if you were present on the occasion and were witnessing the event yourself.

People were dissatisfied with him and were accusing and blaming him. Out of the Muhajirs I was the only man who wanted to appease and pacify the people and who did not want to indulge in the activities of those dissatisfied persons, while Talha and Zubayr were instigating the populace in such a way that the least they said was worse than the worst that could be asserted or alleged against Uthman. Their whispering campaign was deadlier than the loudest propaganda which could be carried on; Aisha also exhibited extreme annoyance and anger against him. Under such conditions some persons resolved to kill him and they murdered him. Then everybody (friends and foes alike) came to me and took the oath of allegiance to me.

This was done without any desire, instigation, inducement, persuasion or compulsion and force on my part. They came to me of their own free-will, without hesitation, and with pleasure, ecstasy and joy.

Let it be known to you that the people of the city towards which the Holy Prophet (s) had migrated (Madina), is being deserted by its inhabitants, they are leaving it, it is seething with discontentment and rebellion. A seditious campaign has started against the Amir. I want you to come to the help of your Amir to fight against his enemies.

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Letter 2

After the conquest of Basra Imam Ali (a) wrote the following letter to the citizens of Kufa.

O' Citizens of Kufa! May the Merciful Lord reward you on His behalf and on behalf of the Ahlul Bayt (Progeny of the Holy Prophet) (a) for obeying their orders and coming to their help. May He reward you more handsomely than He rewards those who obey His commands (because you followed the true path against very heavy odds and in spite of alluring enticements).

You have done your duty. You heard the call of your Amir, responded to it; he called you and you obeyed his orders with zeal and enthusiasm.

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Letter 3

Shurayh bin Haarith had been holding an important post during the previous regimes. Imam Ali (a) had also appointed him as a Qadhi (Chief Judge) of Kufa. It was brought to the notice of Imam Ali (a) that he had purchased a house for himself in the city (rather a costly and expensive house, perhaps more expensive and luxurious than his status demanded and that too rather at a cheaper price).

Imam Ali (a) called him and asked of him: "I am given to understand that you have purchased this house for eighty dinars and a sales deed has also been completed regularizing it with signatures of witnesses".

Shurayh replied, "O Amir al-Mu'minin this is a fact". Hearing this Imam Ali (a) felt annoyed and said to him: "Shurayh be warned that a thing (death) will come to you; it will not take any notice of this sales deed nor will it accept the testimony of the witnesses but it will take you out of this house alone and unattended and will drag you to your grave.

And before such a thing happens, you must think well over the fact whether you have purchased this house with the money which does not belong to you but to somebody else and whether the purchase price was acquired with foul means or it was an ill-gotten wealth, which met its cost, if it was so, then remember that you will part (through death) with this house and in the bargain you will lose your place in Paradise.

If you had come to me prior to this transaction I would have drafted such a sales deed for you that you would not have cared to purchase this property even for a dirham. You know what the transfer deed would have been like, it would have been phrased in the following words:

A humble and powerless creature has purchased this house from another mortal being, its boundaries are as follows: On one side it is bounded by calamities and disasters, on the other side with disappointments and sorrows, on the third side its borders are covered with inordinate and excessive desires ending in failures and on the fourth side it adjoins the misleading and captivating

allurements of Satan, and the door of this house opens towards this fourth side.

A man leading his life under the merciless grip of intemperate and disorderly desires has purchased this house from another person who is being relentlessly pursued by death. And for the purchase price he has bargained the glory of an honourably contented and respectable way of living against the detestable life of submitting to every form of humiliation for profits and pleasures. The buyer had not realized what sorrows and degradations he was purchasing and what he was paying in by way of the cost.

His delivery now lies in the hands of One Who throws the bodies of kings into dust and overthrows their empires, Who ends the lives of despots and Who has brought to an end the dominions of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome and Himyars, kings of Yemen, Who had destroyed the wealth, power and glory of all those individuals who had amassed wealth, gathered property, built very strong and durable houses, furnished them with the choicest and most costly furniture and surrounded them with beautiful gardens. Those people were imagining that they and their descendants will enjoy the fruits of their labours, though in reality everyone of the house so built or the article so collected will have to be accounted for on the Day of Judgement, the day when people will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds, the day on which evil doers will suffer for their vicious and wicked ways. Your mind will corroborate and confirm this if it is kept free from intemperate ambitions, from lust for alluring things, from sensuality and from vicious affections and attachments.

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Letter 4

A letter to one of the commanders of his army.

If our enemies agree to obey us, it will be as I desire, but if they adamantly insist upon dissension and revolt, then be ready to fight against them with the help of your faithful followers. Trust those who have proved themselves faithful. Do not trust and do not count upon the help of those who have proved faithless and disloyal. Remember that the absence of those who do not join us willingly and sincerely is better than their presence in our ranks, and their inactivity and lethargy is better than their participation in our activities.

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Letter 5

Ash'ath bin Qays was a hypocrite and time-sever. For sometime he attached himself to Imam Ali (a) pretending to be his sincere follower. The ulterior motive behind this was to amass wealth and to grasp power. Imam Ali (a) had appointed him as the Governor of Azarbaijan. He started collecting and procuring wealth by every means possible. When this was reported to Imam Ali (a), he wrote the following letter to Ash'ath: On receipt of this letter he wanted to abscond with the wealth so amassed but good counsels prevailed upon

him and he was persuaded by Hujr bin Adi Kindi to go to Imam Ali (a). When his accounts were audited he had to surrender 400,000 dirhams.

Verily, you have neither been entrusted with the governorship so that you amass wealth nor is it a tasty and juicy morsel to be swallowed up. On the contrary it is a trust committed to your care and trust. Its responsibility lies upon your shoulders.

Your Amir (meaning Imam Ali himself) has appointed you as a shepherd and a guardian of the people. You have no right to do as you like and to act independently without seeking his advice and permission. In all important affairs of the State and the public, your decisions must be based on true facts and sound reasons. In your control and custody there is one of the treasuries of Allah, you are only a treasurer, you have no right to make personal use of any part of this wealth, it is your duty to pass it on to whom it belongs.

I hope you will not give me a chance to prove myself a hard task-master and a harsh administrator. May you see the light.

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Letter 6

The following is a letter to Mu'awiya and in it Imam Ali (a) has used the same principle that he applied on Talha and Zubayr. Imam Ali (a) in this letter has raised all the points which were once quoted against him. He says if an election on the basis of general franchise is the criterion to decide such a caliphate, then general election took place to elect him the Caliph and nobody can deny this fact, and if limited franchise (Shura) was the criterion then those who represented this group (Muhajirs and Ansars) were amongst those who elected him and therefore even according to the rules formulated by opponents of Imam Ali (a) his election was lawful, regular and bonafide. Thus no Muslim has a right to speak or act against him.

Verily, those who took the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman have sworn allegiance to me. Now those who were present at the election have no right to go back against their oaths of allegiance and those who were not present on the occasion have no right to oppose me. And so far as Shura (limited franchise or selection) was concerned it was supposed to be limited to Muhajirs and Ansars and it was also supposed that whomsoever they selected, became caliph as per approval and pleasure of Allah. If somebody goes against such decision, then he should be persuaded to adopt the course followed by others, and if he refuses to fall in line with others, then war is the only course left open to be adopted against him and as he has refused to follow the course followed by the Muslims, Allah will let him wander in the wilderness of his ignorance and schism.

O Mu'awiya! I am sure that if you give up self-aggrandizement and self-interest, if you forsake the idea of being alive only to personal profits and pleasures, if you cease to be actuated solely by selfishness and if you ponder over the incident leading to the murder of Uthman, you will realize that

I cannot at all be held responsible for the affair and I am the least concerned with the episode. But it is a different thing that you create all these false rumours and carry on this heinous propaganda to gain your ulterior motives. Well you may do whatever you like.

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Letter 7

A letter to Mu'awiya, on receiving letters from him based on hypocritical advice and false accusations.

After praising Allah and invoking His Blessings and Peace on the Holy Prophet (s), I write to inform you that I am in receipt of many of your letters which appear to consist of various pieces of advice to me. You have very cunningly tried to couch them in flowery words and phrases. You have done this because of your natural evil-mindedness and because of the envy, enmity and malice you bear against me.

(These kinds of letters show that they have been written from a person who has no inner-light and no benevolent guide to show him the true path. Avarice, self-aggrandizement and lust of power prompted him to do so and he jumped at the suggestion. It is a letter from a person, whom selfishness has led astray and who has lost his sense of proportion and therefore, it contains no sense and no real worth. Some commentators consider the following passage as a part of the letter above:)

Remember that the allegiance and fidelity sworn to me is such that it does not require reconsideration on the part of those who have sworn it nor are they at liberty (from a religious point of view) to go back upon it. Therefore, those who belittle it, scoff at it, or go back upon it are hypocrites and traitors.

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Letter 8

Jarir bin Abdullah Bajali was sent to Damascus. He was carrying a letter for Mu'awiya. Some delay occurred in his return. Imam Ali (a) felt anxious about his safety and wrote the following letter to him:

After praising Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) I want to advise you that as soon as you receive this letter of mine, force Mu'awiya for a reply to my letter written to him. Compel him to come to a decision and to give a final reply. He must decide between two things. Either war or obedience. If it is going to be a war then I shall get ready to fight against him, and if it is going to be peace then you must make him swear the oath of allegiance to me and then you must return.

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Letter 9

A letter to Mu'awiya.

Quraysh was our tribe, but they wanted to kill the Holy Prophet (s) and to exterminate our family. They conspired against us and made plots after plots to harm us. They tried their best to frighten and injure us. They forced us to leave our homes and to retire to the cave of Shi'b Abi Taalib. It was a very rough and hard place to live in, and we were forced to lead a very harsh life. They instigated their tribe as well as other clans to fight against us. The Merciful Allah came to our help. He protected and defended us. From amongst us those who had faith in the Holy Prophet (s) and Islam stood up to defend him and his cause; their desire was to achieve the favour of the Lord; and those of Bani Hashim who had not embraced Islam as yet like Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib also came to our help because we belonged to them and they to us. From amongst the Quraysh, the condition of those who had embraced Islam, was not as bad as ours.

Either they had defensive alliance with the non-believers or some tribes decided to defend them despite their differences in religion. While it was the practice of the Holy Prophet (s) that whenever a battle was raged and his companions behaved cowardly or ran away from the battlefield (as in Badr, Uhud and Hunayn) which was usually the case or started making the Muslims nervous (as in Khandaq), he sent members of his family (Bani Hashim) to fight out the battle to protect his companions. These members of Bani Hashim often fought single handed and some even met martyrdom as for instance, Ubayda bin Haarith was killed in the Battle of Badr, Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib in Uhud and Ja'far bin Abu Taalib in the Battle of Mu'tah. Besides these three, there was another person (here Imam Ali (a) meant himself) who also tried his best to meet martyrdom. I could name him but the date of his death had not yet approached and he passed through these terrible ordeals alive.

O time! O world! How could I wonder at your vagaries? People have started considering such a person (Mu'awiya) equal to me! He in his whole lifetime never exerted himself in the service of Islam and Allah as I have done at every moment of my life. In Islam there is no rank, no honour, no position and no merit for him as there is for me. No one can pretend to claim any superiority and excellence over me but a pretender. I do not know of anyone who served Islam and the Holy Prophet (s) as sincerely and as constantly as I have. The Almighty Lord knows that I am not wrong in claiming what I have said and no one can be compared to me in this respect. All Glory, Praise and Greatness belongs to Him and to nobody else.

You have requested me to send to you all those people who were responsible for the murder of Uthman. I pondered over your request and found that it was not in my power to send them to you or to anybody else.

I swear by my life that if you do not leave your hypocrisy, avarice and your rebellious activities they will make themselves known to you. Instead of your demanding them they will demand for you. On the sea and land and in the plains and on the hills they will make their presence known to you and you will not find it easy or pleasant to face them and will curse the day when you demanded to see them.

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Letter 10

A letter to Mu'awiya.

Have you ever seriously considered what would happen to you if all your wealth and property is taken away from you. The possessions, the riches and the luxuries that you have surrounded yourself with, belong to this world, a world which has profusely decorated itself and which is bent upon alluring you with its enjoyments. It has enticed you away and you have fallen an easy prey to its allurements. It has dragged you and you have followed it like a tame animal on the other end of the rope. It has ordered you and you have obeyed its orders submissively.

You have forgotten that shortly you will be called to bear the consequences of such a life; consequences from which no one can shield, liberate or absolve you.

Abstain from such a life, keep yourself ready for the Day of Judgement; be ready for death which is inevitable, bound to come and sure to end every life, rich or poor. Do not listen to the exciting whispers of those who want to tempt you and do not make them believe that they and their heinous whisperings have any importance in your mind.

If you do not faithfully and sincerely follow the dictates of religion and do not act as I have advised you, then I want to warn you of something that you have entirely forgotten. It is that you are unthankful to Allah for all which He has granted to you and you are ungrateful to Him for the Favours bestowed upon you. Satan has taken possession of your soul. Its desire to secure you as his obedient slave, is fully fulfilled. It has a firm hold on your mind.

O Mu'awiya! Were you ever entrusted with the noble status of dispensing peace and justice to mankind? Have you the necessary knowledge for the work? Do you really know the canons of equity and justice as laid down by Islam? You and your ways of government! May Allah protect me from and may withhold me from behaving towards mankind the way you have behaved and from tyranny, exploitations and murders that you commit. Take care! You are being madly driven by the lust of wealth, power and vicious indulgence, you are behaving hypocritically against man and Allah. You shall be damned forever.

You have challenged me to a battle. I accept your challenge. But I have a proposal to make. Why have a war involving murder and bloodshed of thousands of ignorant people? Why be a scourge to mankind? Let us have mercy on them, whether they are sincere and Allah-fearing Muslims, or ignorant, unenlightened and greedy mercenaries misguided and fooled by you. Let there be peace and tranquillity for all the creatures of Allah.

Let us, you and I, have a single combat. Let it be a combat unto death. Let the soldiers of both armies stand aside and let two of us alone combat with each other. Let the world see and realize who is the sinner and who has forgotten

Allah and the Day of Judgement. Will you accept this invitation of mine? Have you the courage for it? Are you a man to face death boldly and bravely or are you merely a vampire sucking the blood of others surreptitiously?

Remember Mu'awiya! Though now old I am still Abu al-Hasan, the man who killed your maternal grandfather, your uncle and your brother in single combats in the Battle of Badr. The same sword is still in my hand, the same blood is still flowing in my veins, the same heart is still throbbing in my chest and with the same courage I still face my enemy. Will you come and face me alone?

Remember that I have not introduced any innovation in religion, nor have I insinuated schism. Verily, I sincerely believe in the religion which you pretended to embrace hypocritically with mental reservations and pretensions, a religion which you in your heart of hearts actually hated and which you gave up quickly and cheerfully.

You pretend that you want to avenge the murder of Caliph Uthman. Do you know who actually killed him and who caused his murder? If really you do so, then seek vengeance on them.

I see before me the day when you will be tired of this war, when you will face defeat, when you will find death or disgrace facing you, when I shall scatter your armies, killing your famous but misguided marshals, when I shall thin your ranks and files; then in despondency and despair you will turn towards the Book of Allah, though you will have no faith in it and no belief in the truth preached by it because you and your followers being hypocrites have no faith in Allah, in the Holy Prophet (s) and the Day of Judgement and who have gone back on their promises.

[What a prophecy! It all took place as Imam Ali (a) had prophesied. While facing defeat in the Battle of Siffin, Mu'awiya following Amr bin Aas tied some scraps of paper to the spears of his soldiers and raising them declared that it was the Holy Qur'an and that they wanted the Holy Book to act as an arbitrator between him and Imam Ali (a).]

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Letter 11

Part of instructions to his marshal when Imam Ali (a) sent him to a battle.

When you approach an enemy or when he approaches you, make it a point to keep your army on a hilltop or at the foot of a mountain or on the side of a river so that you easily watch the movements of your enemy. Do not involve the whole army in the encounter, allow only a few units to take part in the engagements. If your army is not on a hilltop then post your scouts and guards on high vantage points and along the line of fortification so that the enemy may not take you unawares.

Remember that the commanders of an army are its guardians and the eyes of these commanders are the scouts.

Try to avoid dissensions and do not cause superiority or inferiority complexes to take root among your officers and in your ranks. Wherever and whenever you camp, make it a point that all of your officers and soldiers camp in the same locality and are provided with the same comforts and conveniences and whenever you march, always march in company formation. If you want to rest during the night draw a circular formation of your lancers round your army and do not let sound sleep overpower you.

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Letter 12

When Imam Ali (a) sent an expedition of 3000 soldiers under Ma'qil bin Qays Riyahi against the Syrians, he issued the following instructions.

Always keep the fear of Allah in your mind. Remember that you have to meet Him one day (let the fear of Allah guide you in all your activities against man) and your end will be towards Him and towards none else.

Do not fight against anybody unless he wishes to fight against you. During winters travel in the mornings and give your army a rest in the afternoons. Do not rush through journeys (unless absolutely necessary). Travel by easy stages, and do not tire out your army during the journey. Do not travel during the early part of the evening because Allah has meant this to be time for rest and comfort and not for march and exertion, make use of these hours to give rest to your body and mind.

When you have rested then begin your march with trust and faith in Allah in the early hours of the morning.

When you face your enemy, stand in the midst of your army, never alone. Do not be over-anxious to fight and do not behave as if you are craving for a combat or aspiring for an encounter, but at the same time do not try to avoid your enemy or to evade an engagement as if you are afraid or nervous. Keep my orders in mind and act accordingly until you get further instructions. Do not let the hatred and enmity of your opponents force you to a combat, do not begin a battle even if the enemy so desires unless you have explored every avenue of amity and good-will and have exhausted all the chances of a peaceful settlement.

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Letter 13

Instructions to two of his commanders.

I have appointed Malik bin Harith as chief of the staff over you and the armies under you. Take your orders from him and obey him. Treat him as if he is your shield and armour because there is no risk of laziness or lethargy from him, nor of nervousness and blunders nor of any error of commission and omission.

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Letter 14

At Siffin Imam Ali (a) gave the following instructions to his soldiers before the battle.

Do not take the initiative in fighting, let them begin it. It is because by the Favour of Allah you are on the side of truth and justice. Leave them until they begin their hostilities and then you are at liberty to take to fighting. Their keenness to begin a battle will be another proof of your sincere belief in the orders of Allah .

If Allah favours you with success and inflicts defeat to the enemy, then do not attack those who have surrendered, do not injure the disabled and weak, do not assault the wounded, do not excite women and do not make them angry with rude behaviour even if they use harsh and insulting words against your commander and officers because they are physically and mentally weak and get excited easily and frightened quickly. During the days of the Holy Prophet (peace of Allah be upon him and his descendants) we had strict orders not to touch, molest or insult women though they were unbelievers. Even in pre-Islamic days it was the custom that if a man struck a woman even with a stick or a stone, the revenge had to be taken by his sons and descendants.

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Letter 15

Whenever Imam Ali (a) faced an enemy he invoked Allah in the following words.

O Lord! Our hearts seek Your Protection, our faces turn to You, our eyes look towards You, our feet move towards Your path and our bodies sincerely submit to Your command. O Lord! Hidden hostilities and concealed spite are exposed, hearts are boiling over with envy and malice. O Lord! We place before You our difficulties, the absence of the Holy Prophet (s) from amongst us, the abundance of enemies, the disappointments and frustrations which face us. O Lord! Let truth prevail and let our people realize justice, honesty and piety of our case.

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Letter 16

During a battle Imam Ali (a) used to advise his followers in these words.

Do not allow a retreat to become so disastrous and overpowering as to make it impossible for you to remain firm at the battle. Do not be so disappointed and discouraged with a withdrawal or a defeat as to be unfit for a come back and a resumption of activities. Be bold, be courageous and allow your swords to do their duties and to justify your existence. Attack your enemies furiously and bravely and let them feel the full might of your arms and your hands. Impel and drive yourselves towards a dauntless and heroic courage and towards daring and undismayed use of your armaments. Do not shout but attack with eyes fixed on every movement of your enemy because you will thus dispel nervousness and

cowardice.

I swear by the Lord Who allowed a seed to germinate into a plant and Who created these men who are opposing and facing you and who are fighting against you who did not embrace Islam but for securing a safety device for their lives and properties. They were not sincere in embracing Islam. It was done simply to provide for themselves a place in the growing and expanding power and position of the Islamic State. They would keep their paganism hidden to their hearts until they found their supporters and helpers. Only then they would come out openly.

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Letter 17

A reply to a letter of Mu'awiya.

You want me to give Syria over to you but remember that what I have previously refused you cannot be handed over to you and I will never consent to your usurpation of the same. You tell me that wars have annihilated the Arabs and very few people are left alive. I must inform you that verily, those, who were killed defending the truth and Islam were martyrs, and they are in Paradise and those who were killed helping paganism or hypocrisy, are now in Hell. But the contention that your position in wars is the same as mine, is very fantastic and ludicrous. The absurdity of your claim is due to the fact that you want to match your doubt and incredulity in the truth of Islam to my sincere belief and faith in it, this you cannot do. Further the Syrians are as keen for these worldly gains as Iraqis are to achieve the favour of Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) [therefore they are so willing to run the hazard of war].

You claim that your clan is also descended from Abd Manaf is true but you must remember, as the history of the Arabs will convince you, that your ancestor, Umayyayya was not equal to our ancestor, the famous Hashim, neither Harb, another ancestor of yours, was equal to our Abdul Muttalib who was the defender and the guardian of Makkah nor Abu Sufyan could claim himself equal to Abu Taalib [who defended, guarded and suffered so much for the Holy Prophet (s) and Islam]. What is more, no freed-slave can be considered equal to a Muhajir and one coming from a doubtful lineage cannot claim to be equal to those who come from the noble parentage while there is no similarity between one who follows truth and Islam and one who doubts the truth of Islam. Remember also that the worst descendant is one who follows in the footsteps of his ancestor in the way of paganism, hypocrisy and Hell.

We (Bani Hashim) still own the glory of prophethood (having the Holy Prophet (s) from amongst us). Prophethood which brought equality to mankind by lowering the position of mighty and despotic lords and raising the status of oppressed and humiliated persons. When Allah willed the Arabs to embrace Islam, in large numbers they entered its fold willingly or reluctantly. During the days when those who had precedence in embracing Islam were receiving the Blessings of the Lord for this precedence or when those who, on account of unbearable sufferings

from the hands of your clan, were forced to migrate from Makkah, you and your family were after wealth and power. Some of you embraced Islam to better your position because Muslims were gaining ascendancy and supremacy and some others became Muslims because after having harmed and wronged the Muslims in the early days of Islam, you felt that the only way to protect yourself from their vengeance was to profess their religion, though outwardly and hypocritically.

Fear Allah and do not let Satan influence your mind and body and do not give it a way into your soul.

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Letter 18

When Abdullah bin Abbas was the Governor of Basra, Imam Ali (a) wrote the following letter to him. The cause of this letter was the behaviour of Ibn Abbas towards the clan of Bani Tamim. Ibn Abbas hated them because some of them had sided with Talha and Zubayr in the Battle of Jamal and therefore, he had on occasions treated them scornfully. They reported this matter to Imam Ali (a) requesting that the whole clan should not be treated badly because of the folly of a few. This letter shows what a kind rule it was that Imam Ali (a) wanted to introduce.

Understand very well Ibn Abbas that Basra is a satanic place. It is an abode of strifes and bloodshed. So be kind and tolerant towards the citizens of Basra. Win them over with kindness, sympathy and sincerity. Remove fear, suspicion, distrust and animosity from their minds. I am given to understand that you have ill-treated the clan of Bani Tamim and have insulted them.

Remember that Bani Tamim is such a clan that their star has not set as yet, amongst them if one great man dies there is another to take his place. Remember that after embracing Islam and even during pre-Islamic days these people were never regarded as mean, jealous or covetous. On the contrary, they had a very high status. Besides they have claims of kinship and friendship with us. If we behave kindly, patiently and sympathetically towards them Allah will reward us. But if we ill-treat them we shall be sinning.

May Allah have mercy upon you, Ibn Abbas! Be careful about your behaviour towards those over whom you are ruling, be kind to all and be careful about your tongue and your behaviour because you are ruling there on my behalf and your actions are those of mine and I am responsible for them. I have a good opinion about you, please try to be such that I may not be forced to change it.

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Letter 19

The following is a letter to one of his governors. It speaks volumes about the ways of Divine Rule. It shows how Imam Ali (a) was training the Muslims to behave tolerantly towards other religions, how minority was to be treated and what should those who hold a different creed, expect of a Muslim ruler.

After invoking Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) be it known to you that villagers and farmers of the provinces under you, complain of your harshness, arrogance and cruelty. They complain that you consider them mean, humble and insignificant and treat them scornfully. I deliberated over their complaint and found that if, on account of their paganism they do not deserve any favourable treatment of extra privileges, they do not deserve to be treated cruelly and harshly either. They are governed by us, they have made certain agreements with us and we are obliged to respect and honour the terms of those agreements.

Therefore, be kind to them in future, tolerate them and give them due respect, but at the same time keep your prestige and guard well the position and honour of the authority which you hold. Always govern with a soft but strong hand. Treat them as they individually deserve, kindly or harshly and with respect or with contempt.

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Letter 20

The following is a letter from Imam Ali (a) to Ziyad who was appointed as the Commissioner of Basra by Abdullah bin Abbas, the Governor of the provinces of Ahwaz, Basra, Kirman and Fars. Ziyad was from the very beginning dishonest and corrupt, a man who would not stop short at any vice or sin to gain his end. He had come from a very low family so much so that nobody knew his father's name; his mother was a harlot. Ummul Mu'minin Aisha had nicknamed him as "His father's son" and he was known all over Arabia by this insulting name. But he was a self-made man, a great conspirator. Ibn Abbas had found him a useful officer as he could suppress any voice raised against his government. He appointed him as a commissioner and had recommended him to Imam Ali (a). Imam Ali (a) also gave him a chance and wanted to see whether he could give up his bad ways. But he did not change his behaviour, so Imam Ali (a) dismissed him.

Later on Mu'awiya in his court declared him to be his father's (Abu Sufyaan's) illegitimate son. Ziyad was glad that atleast he could name some big man - though thirty years after the death of that man - to be his father, and thus became a staunch friend of Mu'awiya - his so-called half brother. Imam Ali (a) wrote this letter to Ziyad when he was still the Commissioner of Basra.

I swear by Allah that if I find you misappropriating the wealth of Muslims I will punish you in such a way that you will be left poor. Besides this poverty there will be the burden of sins on your shoulders, you will be disgraced and humiliated, losing your position and prestige.

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Letter 21

The following is a letter from Imam Ali (a) to Ziyad.

Give up extravagance and be sparing and moderate in your expenditure. Do not let the pleasures of today make you forget the tomorrow, the Day of Reckoning and Judgement. Keep money with you strictly according to your real requirements

and give away the rest to the poor so that it may act as a provision for you in the next world. Do you expect Allah to grant you rewards reserved for courteous, kind and benevolent people, while you actually are proud, vain, haughty and miserly? Do you hope to receive His Blessings reserved for charitable, generous and kind-hearted persons who always help the poor and the needy, while you, rolling in wealth and luxuries, prevent any part of your wealth from reaching the disabled persons and poverty-ridden old widows?

Remember a man receives the reward according to actions he has done in this world because in the next world only the result of such deeds as he has done during his lifetime shall reach him.

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Letter 22

Ibn Abbas says that once Imam Ali (a) advised him in the following words, and except for the advice of the Holy Prophet (s) no advice has been so beneficial to him as this.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you, Ibn Abbas, that a man feels very happy if he achieves a thing without understanding that it would have ultimately come to him and he would not have missed it, and sometimes he feels sorry at not acquiring a thing which was not destined for him and which he could never have acquired. Only such things as will earn for you a reward in the next world should please you and you should only feel sorry for losing rewards of the next world. If you attain worldly pomp and pleasures then let not your happiness increase along with every enhancement of such pleasure and if you lose any of these pleasures then do not feel sorry at the loss because you must only feel sorry at the loss of such things as will be of use to you in the next world.

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Letter 23

Imam Ali (a) passed the following instructions to his family a little before his martyrdom.

My advice to you is that you should not consider anyone as a co-worker of the Lord, be firm in your belief that there is One and only One Allah. Do not waste the knowledge given to you by the Holy Prophet (s) and do not give up and destroy his Sunnah (traditions). Keep these two pillars of Islam (monotheism and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (s)) aloft. If you act according to my advice then you cannot be blamed for damaging or destroying the religion.

Until yesterday I was your Amir, today I am only an object from whom you can take lesson and warnings, and tomorrow I shall part company with you. If I survive this fatal wound I shall be at liberty to decide how to treat the man who attempted to kill me. If I die then my worldly life comes to an end. If I forgive my assassin then it will be to gain the Blessings of Allah for forgiving a person who has harmed you, and it will be a good deed if you also

forgive him. Do you not desire to be forgiven by the Lord? I swear by Allah that death is not coming to me suddenly and unexpectedly that I may hate or abhor, neither is it such a visitor whom I may refuse to meet. So far as death by martyrdom is concerned I always expected and desired it and I now welcome it like a thirsty person who finds water when he is extremely thirsty. I am a seeker whom martyrdom finds what he was seeking for. To the pious people the best is that which they find with Allah.

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Letter 24

The following is the will of Imam Ali (a) in which he has left instructions as to how to treat his property and estate. It was written after his return from the Battle of Siffin.

This is a will of a creature of Allah, Ali son of Abu Taalib (a). It instructs (his heirs) how to spend his property only to gain the Blessings of Allah so that Allah may grant him peace and allow him to enter His Paradise. After me my son Hasan (a) will be the administrator, executor and testator of my property. He can spend it according to the laws of Islam in helping the poor, destitute and the needy in accordance with the canons ordained by Allah. If anything happens to Hasan (a) and Husayn (a) is alive after him, then he will be the next executor and testator and should act according to the spirit of the instructions given herein.

Verily, for the two sons of Fatima (a), Hasan and Husayn (a), the share out of my property is equal to the shares of my other sons (being Imams they should not be barred from taking their share and at the same time their share cannot be more on account of their being administrators and executors). I have appointed sons of Fatima (a) executors to please Allah and out of respect and love that I bear towards the Holy Prophet (a) and his daughter (peace of Allah be upon them and their descendants).

I order the executor to keep this property as it is and to spend the income on the poor and destitute as desired by me. I further order that young date-palm of the estate not to be cut until it is fully afforested with date-palm and take up the shape of a well-developed palm-orchard.

My widows are to be treated with respect and their shares, out of this property, are to be included in the shares of their sons and even if any of them loses her son she will still enjoy her share, she should not be left unhelped to work like a slave-woman for her living.

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Letter 25

Directions to assessors and collectors of Zakat.

These directions clearly show what form of regime it was that Imam Ali (a) wanted to introduce. It was not to be a regime whose officers had an upper hand

and were fattened on public money. It was to be a regime where the governed and the tax-payers were at premium. It was their convenience for which the State was to function. It was a welfare-state working solely for the welfare of the people living under its rule, a regime where the rich cannot get richer while the poor are made poorer; a regime where canons of religion hold the balance between the governed and the ruler.

Do not give up fearing Allah who has no partner. Do not let the Muslim grieve (over their lot of having you as their ruler) and do not approach them in a way as to make your approach hateful to them. Do not tax them more than what is actually due from them to Allah.

When you reach a group of people (tribe or village) to assess a tax on them, then stay only at their watering-place (a well or water-hole the most convenient place for stay in desert regions) and do not stay in their houses. Then go to them maintaining your dignity and prestige and when you are in their midst, wish them peace and blessings of Allah and show due respect to them. Tell them that the Caliph of Allah has sent you to collect from them their dues to Allah. Ask them whether they possess enough means to pay the dues of Allah that you may gather them and pass them on to His Caliph. If somebody tells you that he does not possess enough wealth to make him liable to pay taxes then do not worry him and accept his plea. If someone tells you that he is in a position to pay Zakat, then go with him to his house, field or pasture (because Zakat was then collected in coins as well as in kind). But do not frighten him or make him nervous and do not behave with them with undue harshness or tyranny. Then accept the gold or silver which he offers.

(Here are the instructions regarding the number of cattle to be assessed for Zakat). If he has cows, bulls, goats and camels then do not enter the herd without his permission because most of it belongs to him (it is not part of Zakat). If you have to enter the herd then do not enter like the one who is coming there to take possession of the cattle. Do not tyrannize the owner, do not frighten the cattle so as to make them disperse. Do not make the owner feel anxious or sorry for them. Then divide the herd into two parts and allow the owner to select the one for himself. If he selects one part for keeping himself, then do not object to it. Again divide the part which he has left for the share of Zakat to be selected from out of these two parts, again allow him to select the lot which he wants to retain for himself. Never object to his selection (because it is the assessor who is dividing them in equal lots; therefore, the selection between the two lots should naturally rest with the owner). Continue like that until you arrive at the lot which constitutes the share of Allah (Zakat) then take possession of it.

Even if, in spite of all these precautions, he thinks the division was unfair and unjust, then mix the whole lot and go through the process once again as I have already explained to you till you arrive at the share of Zakat to the satisfaction of everybody concerned. Remember you have not to accept old and diseased camels or such as have their limbs damaged. Entrust this lot only to such person who is honest and who can be trusted and who can guard the property

of the Muslims sympathetically till it reaches their ruler and caliph so that it may be distributed equitably among the Muslims. I want to instruct you once again that you should not entrust these goods and animals to anyone who is not honest.

Entrust them to one who is trustworthy and who is of a kind and sympathetic disposition so that he may not treat the animals cruelly and may not starve them or tire them out during the transit.

Instruct him not to separate a she-camel from its young, not to milk it so much that nothing is left for its young one and not to ride them harshly or to overburden them with heavy loads.

He should ride them in turns so that those who have been already ridden may have an easy journey. He should not drive them fast and should avoid harshness. He should always give them enough rest at watering places. They should not be driven through deserts. As far as possible green lands and well-wooded regions should be selected for the passage. Thus every care should be taken so that they reach their destination in healthy and robust condition without having received any harsh and brutal treatment on the way so that I may distribute them according to the Orders of Allah and the Holy Prophet (s). Verily, the collection of the dues of Allah in the way that I have explained to you is a pious deed and a religious duty which will carry its reward before the Lord.

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Letter 26

The following are his instructions to Zakat collectors.

I order you to fear Allah in all those affairs and on all those occasions where there is none to witness your actions and deeds or to guide your activities. I order you not to pretend fear of Allah and assume false piety and to go against His Orders secretly. One whose deeds coincide with his words and who is as honest in his secret activities as in open deeds, is the person who has faithfully discharged the duty laid down upon him by the Lord, his honesty handed over the things entrusted to him and has sincerely obeyed Allah only to achieve His Favours and Blessings.

I order you not to meet Muslims as a tyrant or an oppressor, not to ill-treat them and not to calumniate them because they are your brothers in religion and they will help you to collect taxes and to find means and ways to help the poor.

Certainly there is a share for you in Zakat but remember that the poor, the destitute and the have-nots also have claim over it.

Verily, I have paid you your share and now you should pay them their shares otherwise there will be many who will complain and protest against you on the Day of Judgement (they will be your enemies on that day). Woe be to the person against whom the poor, the destitute, the beggars and those who have been deprived of their rights of receiving Zakat complain before Allah.

Be it known to you that the person who misappropriates Zakat funds, who will fill his stomach with such amounts, and who harms his religion and injures his conscience with such deeds will be punished and disgraced in this world as well as the next. The worst form of dishonesty is the breach of trust of the public funds (Zakat) and the most despicable example of maladministration is that the Imam should tolerate such forms of dishonesty.

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Letter 27

When Imam Ali (a) appointed Muhammad bin Abu Bakr as the Governor of Egypt, he gave him the following instructions.

Treat them (the Egyptians) with respect. Be kind and considerate with them. Meet them cheerfully. Be fair, just and impartial in your dealings so that even the influential persons may not dare take undue advantage of your leniency and the commoners and the poor may not be disappointed in your justice and fair dealings.

O creature of Allah! Remember that the Almighty Lord is going to take an account of everyone of your sins, major or minor and whether committed openly or secretly. If He punishes you for your sins, it will not be an act of tyranny and if He forgives you it will be because of His Great Mercy and Forgiveness.

O creature of Allah! Remember that pious persons passed away from this world after having led a respectable and fruitful life and they are going to be well-rewarded in the next world (when compared with the worldly-minded people they had equal opportunities of gathering fruits of this world and utilized them to the best of their abilities and at the same time kept away from all wicked and vicious ways of life). They did not jeopardize their salvation like worldly-minded persons. They led a more contented, more respectable and happier life than those who lived wickedly. They enjoyed the fruits of their labours and they had more gratifying, sober and healthy experience of the pleasures of life than the rich and the wealthy. They regaled themselves with the joys, the facilities and the bliss of this world as much as the tyrant and vicious people desired to enjoy. Yet while leaving this world they carried with them all that would be of use to them in the next world. While living in this world they enjoyed the happiness of relinquishing its evil ways.

They made themselves sure that in the life to come they will be recipient of His Grace and Blessings, their requests will not be turned down and the favours destined for them in Paradise will not be lessened or reduced.

O creature of Allah! Fear the inevitable and unavoidable death which is so near to everybody. Be prepared to meet it. Verily, it will come as the most important and the greatest event of your life; it will either carry unmixed blessings and rewards for you or it will bring in its wake punishments, sufferings, and eternal damnation. There will be no chance of its lessening or redemption or any change for the better. It is for you to decide whether to proceed towards perpetual peace and blessings - Paradise, or towards eternal

damnation - the Hell. Remember that life is actually driving you towards death which will meet you if you are ready to face it and which will follow you like a shadow if you try to run away from it.

Death is with you as if it has been twisted and tied round your head in between your hair and life is being rolled away from behind you with each exhalation of your breath, never to be unrolled.

Be afraid of the fire - the Hell, whose depth is fathomless whose intensity is enormous and where new kinds of punishments are constantly being introduced. The Hell is an abode where there is no place for His Mercy and Blessings. Prayers of those who are thrown there will neither be heard nor accepted and there will not be any lessening in their sufferings and sorrows.

If it is possible for you to be sincerely afraid of Allah as well as have sincere faith in His Justice, Mercy and Love of His creatures, then try to hold these two beliefs firmly because a man entertains and cherishes the love, reverence and veneration of Allah in proportion to His fear and awe that develops in his mind.

Verily, among men he who fully believes in His Justice and is afraid of it, as well as likes it expects the best rewards from Allah.

O Muhammad, son of Abu Bakr! Remember that I have entrusted you with the command of the most important section of my army which is Egyptian. Do not allow your whims and passions to overrun your judgement. Keep on guarding and defending your religion and the State given under your trust. Take care that not for a single moment in your life, you incur the Wrath of Allah, to gain the pleasure of any person. Remember that the Pleasure of Allah can substitute the pleasure of everybody else and it will be the most beneficial substitute for you but His Pleasure cannot be substituted by anything. Offer your prayers on time, do not rush through them, and never delay in offering them. Remember that piety and nobleness of all your activities are subject to sincerity and punctuality of your prayers.

Remember that a true Imam and leader cannot be equal to the one who leads humanity towards wickedness and vice and eventually towards Hell nor can there be an equality between a follower of the Holy Prophet (s) and his sworn enemy.

Remember the Holy Prophet (s) said that so far as his followers are concerned he was not afraid of encroachments upon any true Muslim by a heathen because Allah will protect every true Muslim from evil deeds on account of the sincerity of his faith and He will expose and avert the evils introduced by heathens, but he (the Holy Prophet (s)) felt anxious about the activities of hypocrites among Muslims, activities of those outwardly wise and learned people who loudly proclaimed greatness and virtues of their good deeds but who secretly indulged in vices and sins.

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The following is a famous reply of Imam Ali (a) to the letter of Mu'awiya. It throws ample light on many phases of the history of Islam from the time of its dawn up to the time of Imam Ali (a).

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you that I am in receipt of your letter wherein you write to me that Almighty Allah selected Muhammad (s), the Holy Prophet as the Messenger of His revelations and He helped those companions of the Holy Prophet (s) who sincerely exerted themselves to assist him. Is it not an irony of fate that circumstances have favoured you to such a position that you dare remind us of the Favours which Allah bestowed upon us and the Blessings conferred by Him upon His chosen Prophet (s) who was one of us. You have nothing to do with them and you have no share in these Blessings and Favours.

Your condition is like that of a man who carries dates to the date-growing districts or that of a man who tries to teach archery to the master from whom he has learnt the art. You believe that the best of the people amongst the Muslims are so and so and you have started discussing a subject (superiority of Muhajirs over Ansar) which if it is proved correct will not be of any use to you, will not enhance your status and if it is repudiated, this repudiation will not harm you because you are neither a Muhajir nor an Ansar.

What have you to do with their respective status and prestige? What is that for you if one is considered superior to the other? How are you considered in their affairs? You are a freed and liberated slave, and slaves and their sons, though freed and liberated, cannot aspire to the status of Muhajirs and Ansar and they have no right to introduce unholy classification amongst the Muhajirs and Ansar. Do you realize your limitations? You do not belong to either group, you are a liberated slave and son of liberated parents and you want to introduce an unhealthy division between these two groups.

The false status you have tried to grasp is not going to enhance your prestige (before Allah or the people). Can you not think of remaining at the place where you old hostility towards Islam and the Holy Prophet (s) has kept you? How is the lower status or defeat of one class or a person of that class, to whom you do not belong going to harm you and how is the success or higher status of the other going to do you good? You have gone astray from the straight path and from the real teachings of Islam. Listen! I want to give you a short description of the Blessings of Allah upon us.

A party of Muhajirs met martyrdom. They were killed in the cause of Islam and Allah. everyone of them was blessed by Allah with a status and rank. Out of them those who belonged to my family and tribe, Bani Hashim, were granted an excellent status by Allah. Hamza (the uncle of the Holy Prophet (s) and Imam Ali (a)) received the title of Chief of Martyrs (Sayyid al-Shuhada). The Holy Prophet (s) himself called him by this name after his martyrdom and at his funeral ceremony.

The Holy Prophet (s) recited Takbir ('Allahu Akbar') seventy times as a mark of distinction for him, which is not for any other Muslim. Some Muhajirs lost

their hands in the battlefield but when one of us (Ja'far, cousin of the Holy Prophet (s) and brother of Imam Ali (a)) lost both of his hands and died in the battlefield, Allah granted him angelic wings and the Holy Prophet (s) informed us that this martyr received the title of Tayyar (one who flies in Paradise). If Allah had not disapproved man's habit of eulogizing and praising himself, I would have given several such instances which speak of the enhancement of my prestige and status before Allah, instances which are accepted and can be testified by faithful Muslims about which the hearers will have no reason to doubt. Do not be like a man whom the Devil has laid astray. Accept the obvious truth when it faces you.

Listen O' Mu'awiya! We (Ahlul Bayt, the progeny of the Holy Prophet (s)) are unique examples of the creation of Allah. For such a status, we are not under obligation to any person or tribe but the Almighty Allah who granted us these blessings. Human beings have received and will receive perfection through us. The perpetual supremacy and inherent superiority do not prevent us from making contact with human beings or with your clan, we have married amongst you and have established family connections with your (as well as with others) clan, though you do not belong to our class. How can you be our equal when the Holy Prophet (s) belongs to us and Abu Jahl, the worst enemy of Islam was from amongst you.

Asadullah (lit. "the Lion of Allah" - a title of Imam Ali (a)) is from amongst us, while Asadul Ahlaaf (lion of the opposing groups, who had sworn to fight against Islam and the Holy Prophet (s)) was from you.

The two foremost leaders of the youth of Paradise (Imam Hasan (a) & Imam Husayn (a)) are from us and the children of Hell are from you. The best woman in the world (title bestowed by Allah upon Fatima (a)) the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet (s) is from us, and the slanderer and the wood-carrying woman who tried to spend every hour of her life in doing harm to the Holy Prophet of Islam (s), was your aunt. There are so many other things similar to the few mentioned which praise us and speak ill of your clan and which show how far and superior we are to you.

We were faithful followers of the commandments of Allah and you and your clan always opposed Islam and accepted it out of sheer expediency simply to save yourselves from humiliation and disgrace.

Our sincerity in Islam and our services to its cause are the facts of history and history cannot deny your enmity against Islam and the Holy Prophet (s).

The credit which you want to take away from us and the honour which you want to deprive us of is the one which the Holy Qur'an is carefully guarding for us. It says: "Some relatives are superior and have excellence over others, according to the Book of Allah" [Qur'an, 33:6] and in another place in the very same Book, Allah informs mankind that: "The nearest people to Abraham, are those who follow him and those who follow the Holy Prophet (s) and the true believers. Allah is the guardian of the true believers" [Qur'an, 2:68]. Therefore we hold two excellences: That of close relationship to the Holy Prophet (s) and

that of loyally accepting his teachings. Do you know on the day of Saqifa, Muhajirs told Ansar that they were superior to them because they in one way or the other, were related to the Holy Prophet (s) and therefore they deserved the caliphate and with the aid of this argument the Muhajirs carried the day.

If success can be achieved with the help of this argument and if it has got a grain of truth in it then according to it, we and not you, deserve the caliphate. If not, then the Ansar still hold their claim over the caliphate.

You want to impress the world with the idea that I envied all the previous caliphs and that I was jealous of them. Even if I grant this, I want to know what right and authority have you to ask for an explanation from me? You have no place in religion to talk of such things. You also want to taunt me by saying that when I refused to accept the caliphate of the First Caliph I was dragged like a camel with a rope round my neck and every kind of cruelty and humiliation was leveled against me. I swear by my life that by talking like that you want to bring disgrace to me but you are actually doing the greatest service to me and are disgracing yourself as well as the cause that you pretend to support.

There is no disgrace for a Muslim if he is subjected to tyranny and suppression so long as he is firm in his faith and belief in Allah and religion. This is exactly what I say that every cruelty and tyranny was leveled against me to deprive me of the right which Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) have given me and this is exactly what you do not want to acknowledge and accept. Your taunts against me go a long way to prove that in reality there was no election, it was a coup d'etat followed by brutal force which decided the fate of caliphate by making it neither hereditary nor elective but possessive. I have no desire to go into these details but you brought in the subject and I was forced to explain a few points about it.

Then you have referred to the murder of Uthman, and declaring yourself to be his relative, you claim vengeance and blood (and want me to arrange for it as if I was responsible for the murder). I want to say something about the insinuation and false propaganda carried on by you in this respect.

My reply to you is that first of all you should try and find out who was the arch-enemy of Uthman. Can the arch-enemy be he who offered his help and services to Uthman and Uthman refused to have anything to do with him and told him plainly to go and sit at home as his help was not required and his services were not needed or the worst enemy of Uthman is he whom Uthman asked to come to his succour and who purposely and intentionally delayed the help and allowed the events to take their course till what was to happen. No, these two persons cannot be considered in the same category. I swear by the Omniscient Allah that He very well knows everything as He says in the Holy Book, "Allah certainly knows the people who put obstacles in the path of those who wanted to go to war and also to those who did not stay to face a battle." [Qur'an, 33:18].

I do not want to offer any excuse for having objected to his introducing innovations in religion. If my objections to the introduction of innovation and

my advice to him to give it up was considered by him a sin committed by me, then I do not attach any importance to his opinion, because well-wishers are often blamed, and their good advice is misconstrued but they do their duty to man and religion. Allah in the Holy Book repeats the saying of a prophet which appropriately represents my position. He says, "I only intend to reform you as much as I can. My success lies with Allah. I have faith in Him and trust in His help." [Qur'an, 11:88].

Then you have tried to frighten me by saying that there is nothing with you for me and my companions but your sword. Well, Mu'awiya! You made the people laugh at your words, they were feeling very sad and depressed at the standard of mental depravity exhibited by you.

When did you find the sons of Abdul Muttalib (the grandfather of the Holy Prophet (s) and Imam Ali (a)) timid in facing their enemies or getting afraid of brandishing swords?

Just wait a little, you will in the near future have to face the attack of a brave soldier. He will shortly invite you for the encounter you are desiring for. The thing which you apparently wish for is not as far away as you imagine it to be. I am coming towards you with an army of Muhajirs, Ansar and those companions who have sincere faith in me. Theirs is a powerful congregation. Their movements will raise huge clouds of dust (indicating the strength of the army). They are prepared to die or to kill. They believe that the best that could happen to the is to receive the Blessings of the Lord by their good deeds. Sons of those warriors who routed your clan in the Battle of Badr is with them.

The swords of Bani Hashim are with them. And you have already realized the sharpness of these swords when your brother, your maternal uncle, your grandfather and kinsmen were killed (those people were killed by Imam Ali (a) in the battles of Badr and Uhud). These swords are now nearing the despots who have tyrannized the Muslim world.

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Letter 29

The following is a letter to the people of Basra.

Your activities revealed your disloyalty to Islam, your enmity towards me and the intense malice you nurse against me, the things which you wanted to conceal and which you knew so well. I have forgiven the offenders and I do not want to punish those whose once faced me in the battlefield and then fled. I have accepted the excuses of those who came back to me repenting. If you again do what you have done once before, if you readopt schism and if once again advice of unwise and wicked people drives you towards animosity against Islam, then remember, I shall chastise you. I shall invade you at the head of my army. If you compel me to that then remember that this invasion will be such that the Battle of Jamal will look like a child's play when compared to it.

I know you all and appreciate the sincerity of those who are faithful to me and the excellence of those who come to me with their sincere advice and good wishes. I am willing to forgive and to forget those who have wronged me and to requite those who have exhibited fidelity towards me.

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Letter 30

A Letter to Mu'awiya.

Fear Allah in respect of the responsibilities you hold and the power and authority that you command. Deeply deliberate over the duties that Allah has laid down upon you, each one of them is His due which should be respectfully rendered. Try to learn and understand that for which you have no right to plead ignorance.

Remember that there are clear modes, honest means, bright ways, rational procedures, sensible manners, pious methods of faithfully carrying out His orders and obeying His commands and there are innumerable gains and unlimited advantages in that way of life. Wise people adopt those ways and follow them but only fools refuse to accept His advice. Whoever turns away from Allah actually turns away from the realities of life and dictates of wisdom and, therefore, he wanders in the wilderness of ignorance.

The Almighty Allah will take away His Blessings from him and will send His Wrath upon him.

For the sake of yourself be afraid of self-aggrandizement, self-glorification and selfishness. The Merciful Allah has shown you the correct way of leading an honest and a virtuous life and has clearly pointed to you the place where life and its activities are going to end.

Beware that your vicious desire of gaining everything for yourself has landed you in a maze of wickedness and crime, it has forcefully driven you to the folds of vices and sins, it has made it easy for you to achieve your eternal damnation and has rendered it impossible for you to follow the path of virtue and to attain salvation.

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Letter 31

After returning from the Battle of Siffin, Imam Ali (a) gave certain pieces of advice to one of his sons. Some historians consider him to be Imam Hasan (a) while others are of the opinion that he was Muhammad Hanafiya. He wrote them in the form of a will. They deal with almost every aspect of life which goes a long way to make a man successful in life - brave, humane, generous, virtuous and pious.

These exhortations are from a father who realizes the morality of life, who is getting old, who has patiently borne reverses and calamities, who hates inordinate desires and has overcome them, and who is shortly going to pass out

of this world, to his son who is young, who has the desire of leading the world to sober ways of thinking and better ways of life, a desire which is rather difficult to be achieved, a son, who is mortal and is bound by nature to follow the steps of all mortals, is subject to ailments, is surrounded by misfortunes and calamities, has to face oppressions and tyrannies, has often to confront with and sometimes to tolerate hypocrisy, deceit, guile, duplicity and treason and who is to end his life in death, is to bear sufferings, is the heir to a person who is dead and gone and who finally ended his life as a martyr to the animosity of his enemies. (What a prophecy!)

Let it be known to you that decay of health, passing away of time and nearness of death, have made me realize that I should give more thought to my future (next world) and to my people; advise them more and spend more time in equipping them mentally to face this world. I felt that my own sons and my near ones have as much right to utilize my experiences and knowledge, all the ups and downs of life, all the realities and all the truths about life in this world and in the Hereafter, which are as much known to me as others. I decided, therefore, to spend more time over you and to prepare you more for your. This was neither selfishness nor self-esteem nor any mental luxury of giving away pieces of advice, but it was the sincere desire of making you see the world as I found it, look at the realities of lives as I looked at them, and do the right thing at the right time and right place as it should be done which made me write down these exhortations to you. You will not find in them anything but truth and realities.

My dear son! You are part of my body and soul and whenever I look at you I feel as if I am looking at myself. If any calamities befalls you, I feel as if it has befallen me. Your death will make me feel as if it was my own death. Your affairs are to me like my own affairs. Therefore, I committed these pieces of advice to paper. I want you to take care of them, to pay attention to them and to guard them well. I may remain longer in your life or I may not, but I want these pieces of advice to remain with you always.

My first and foremost advice to you, my son, is to fear Allah. Be His obedient servant. Keep His thought always fresh in your mind. Be attached to and carefully guard the principles (Islam) which connect you with Him. Can any other connection be stronger, more durable and more lasting than this to command greater respect and consideration or to replace it?

Accept good exhortations and refresh your mind with them. Adopt piety and kill your inordinate desires with its help. Build your character with the help of true faith in religion and Allah. Subjugate your nature with the vision of death, make it see the mortality of life and of all that it holds dear, force it to realize the actuality of misfortunes and adversities, the changes of circumstances and times and compel it to study the lives of past people. Persuade it to see the ruined cities, the dilapidated palaces, decaying signs and relics of fallen empires of past nations. Then meditate over the activities of those people, what they have all done when they were alive and were in power, what they achieved, from where they started their careers; where, when

and how they were brought to an end, where they are now; what have they actually gained out of life and what was their contributions to the human welfare.

If you carefully ponder over these problems, you will find that each one of those people has parted company with the others and with all that he cherished and loved and he is now in a solitary abode, alone and unattended; and you also will be like him.

Take care to provide well for your future abode. Do not barter away eternal blessing for pleasures of this mortal and fleeting world.

Do not talk about things which you do not know. Do not speculate about and pass verdicts on subjects about which you are not in a position to form an opinion and are not called upon to do so. Give up the way where there is a possibility of your going astray. When there is danger on your wandering in the wilderness of ignorance, possibility of losing the sight of the goal which you want to attain and of reaching the end aimed at, then it is better to give up the quest than to advance facing uncertain dangers and unforeseen risks.

Advise people to do good and to live virtuously because you are fit to give such advice. Let your words and deeds teach the world lessons of how to abstain from wickedness and vicious deeds. Try your best to keep away from those who indulge in vices and sins.

Fight, whenever required, to defend the cause of Allah. When you think of defending the cause of Allah do not be afraid that people will laugh at you, censure your action or slander you. Fearlessly and boldly help truth and justice. Bear patiently the sufferings and face bravely the obstacles which come in your way when you follow truth and when you try to uphold it. Adhere to the cause of truth and justice wherever you find it. Try to be well versed with Islamic Jurisprudence and theology and acquire a thorough knowledge of the canons of this religion.

Develop the habit of patience against sufferings, calamities and adversities. This virtue of patience is one of the highest values of morality and nobility of character and it is the best habit which one can develop. Trust in Allah and let your mind seek His protection in every calamity and suffering because you will thus entrust yourself and your affairs to the Best Trustee and to the Mightiest Guardian. Do not seek help or protection from anybody but Allah. Reserve your prayers, your requests, your solicitations, your supplications, and your entreaties to Him and Him alone because to grant, to give, to confer and to bestow, as well as to withhold, to deprive, to refuse, and to debar, lies only in His Power. Ask as much of His Blessings and seek as much of His Guidance as you can.

Try to understand my exhortation, ponder over them deeply; do not take them lightly and do not turn away from them because the best knowledge is that which benefits the listener. The knowledge which does not benefit anybody is useless, not valuable and not worth learning and remembering.

My dear son! When I realized that I was getting old and when I felt that weakness and feebleness are gradually creeping into me then I hastened to advise you as to the best ways of leading a noble, virtuous and useful life. I hated the idea that death should overtake me before I tell you all that I wanted to tell or before my mental capacities like my bodily strength are weakened. I convey all this to you lest inordinate desires, temptations and inducement should start influencing you, or adverse changes of times and circumstances should drag your name in the mire or I should leave you like an untrained colt because a young and fresh mind is like a virgin soil which allows things sown in it to grow verdantly and to bear luxuriantly.

Then, I have made use of early opportunities to educate you and train you before your mind loses its freshness, before it gets hardened or warped, before you start facing life unprepared for the encounter, and before you are forced to use your decisions and discretions without gaining advantages of cumulated traditions, collected knowledge and experiences of others. These words of advice and counsels that I give you, will save you from the worry of acquiring knowledge, gathering experiences and soliciting advice from others. Now you can easily make use of all the knowledge which men have to acquire with great care, trouble and patience. Things which were hidden from them and which only experiments, experiences and sufferings could bring to light are now made easily available to you through these exhortations.

My dear son! Though the span of my life is not as that of some other people who have passed away before me yet I took great care to study their lives, assiduously I went through their activities, I contemplated over their deliberations and deeds, I studied their remains, relics and ruins, I pondered over their lives so deeply that I felt as if I have lived and worked with them from early ages of history down to our times and I know what did them good and what brought harm to them. Sifting the good from bad I am concentrating within these pages, and for your good, the knowledge that I so gathered. Through these pieces of advice I have tried to bring home to you the value of honest-living and high-thinking and the dangers of a vicious and sinful life, I have taken care to cover and guard every aspect of your life as it is the duty of a kind, considerate and loving father.

From the very beginning, I took care to help you to develop a noble character and to fit you for the life which you will have to lead, to let you grow up to be a young man with a noble character, an open and honest mind and clear and precise knowledge of things around you. Originally my desire was only to teach you the Holy Book thoroughly, to make you understand its intricacies, to impart to you the complete knowledge of His commandments and interdictions and not to leave you at the mercy of the knowledge of other people.

But after having succeeded in this task I felt nervous that I may leave you untrained and uneducated in the subjects which themselves are subject to so much confusion and so many contradictions. These are the subjects whose confusions have been made worse confounded by selfish desires, warped minds, wicked ways of life and sinful modes of thinking. Therefore, I have noted down,

in these lines, the basic principles of nobility, piety, truth and justice.

You may feel them to be over-bearing and harsh but my desire is to equip you with this knowledge instead of leaving you unarmed to face the world where there is every danger of loss and damnation.

As you are a noble, virtuous and pious young man, I am sure you will receive Divine Guidance and Succour. I am sure He will help you to achieve your aim in life. I want you to promise to yourself to follow my advice carefully.

Remember my son! The best out of these pieces of advice of mine are the those which tell you to fear Allah, to concentrate and to confine yourself to the performance of those duties which have been made incumbent upon you by Him and to follow in the footsteps of your ancestors (The Holy Prophet (s) & Imam Ali (a)) and your pious and virtuous relationship. Verily, they always carefully measured their thoughts and deeds, as you must also try to do and they carefully thought over the subject before saying anything about it or before doing a deed. You should also follow the same.

This kind of deliberation made them take from life what was really the best and forsake that which was not made incumbent upon them or which was not the best. If your mind refuses to accept my advice and you persist to try your own experiments like them then you are at liberty to arrive at your conclusions but only after thoroughly studying the subject and after acquiring the knowledge necessary for such decisions. You must not allow uncertainties and doubt poison your mind, scepticism or irrational likes and dislikes should not affect your views. But remember that before you start thinking and deliberating over a problem seek guidance of the Lord and beseech Him to give you a lead in the right direction. Avoid confusion in your ideas, and do not let disbelief take hold of your mind because the first will lead you to agnosticism and the others towards errors and sins. When you are thus prepared to solve any problem and you are sure that you possess a clear mind, a sincere and firm desire to reach the truth, to say the correct thing and to do the correct deed, then carefully go through the advice that I am leaving for you.

If your mind is not clear and it is not as free from doubts as you wish it to be, then you will be wandering in the wilderness of uncertainties and errors like a camel suffering from night-blindness. Under these circumstances it is best for you to give up the quest because with such limitations none can ever reach the truth.

My dear son! carefully and very carefully remember these sayings of mine. The Lord who is the Master of death is also the Master of life. The Creator is the Annihilator. And the One who annihilates has the power to bring everything back again to existence. The One who sends calamities has also the power to protect you from them.

Remember that this world is working under the laws ordained by Him, and it consists of assemblage and aggregation of actions and reactions, causes and effects, calamities and reverses, pains and pleasures and rewards and

punishments, but this is not all which the picture depicts, there are things in it which are beyond our ken, things which we do not and cannot know and things which cannot be foreseen and foretold, for example the rewards and punishments on the Day of Judgement. Under these circumstances, if you do not understand a thing, do not reject it. Remember that your lack of understanding is due to insufficiency of your knowledge. Remember that when you came into this world your first appearance was that of an ignorant, uneducated and unlearned being. Then you gradually acquired knowledge, but there were several things which were beyond your knowledge, which perplexed and surprised you, and about which you did not understand. Gradually you acquired knowledge about some of those subjects and in future your knowledge and vision may further expand.

Therefore, the best thing for you to do is to seek guidance of One who has created you, Who maintains and nourishes you, Who has given you a balanced mind and a normally working body. Your invocations should be reserved for Him only, your requests and solicitations should be alone to Him and you should only be afraid of Him.

Be it known to you, my son, that nobody has given mankind such detailed information about Allah as our Holy Prophet (s). I advise you to have faith in his teachings, to make him your leader and to accept his guidance for your salvation. Thus advising you I have done the best that I can do as a sincere and loving adviser and I assure you that however you may try to find a better way for your good, you will not find any superior to the one advised by me.

Remember, my son, had there been any other god, besides the One, he would have also sent his messengers and prophets and they would have pointed out to mankind the domain and glory of this second god, and you would have also seen them. But no such incident ever took place. He is One Allah whom we should all recognize and worship. He has explained Himself. Nobody is a partner to Him in His Domain, Might and Glory. He is Eternal, has always been and shall always be. He existed even before the Universe came into being but there is no beginning to His Existence. He shall remain when every other thing shall vanish, and there shall be no end to His Existence. His Glory and His Existence is so supreme, pre-eminent, transcendent, incomparable and excellent that it is beyond the grasp of intellects. No one can understand or visualize Him.

When you have accepted these facts then your behaviour, so far as His commands are concerned, should be that of a person who realizes that his status, power and position is nothing when compared to that of His Lord; who wants to gain His Blessings through prayers and obedience, who fears His Wrath as well as His Punishments and who absolutely in need of His Help and Protection. Remember, my son, Allah has not ordered you to do anything but that which is good and which propagates goodness and He has not prohibited you from anything but that which is bad and will bring about bad effects.

My dear son, through this message of mine, I have explained everything about this world, how fickle and fleeting is its attitude, how short-lived and evanescent is everything that it holds or offers about and how fast it changes

its moods and favours. I have also explained about the life to come, the pleasures and blessings provided there, and the everlasting peace, comfort and happiness arranged for in Paradise.

I have given enough examples of both aspects of life, before and after death so that you may know the reality and lead your life on the basis of that knowledge.

As a matter of fact those people who have carefully studied the condition of life and the world, pass their days as if they know that they are travellers, who have to leave a place which is famine-stricken, unhealthy and uncongenial, and they have to proceed towards lands which are fertile, congenial, and where there is abundant provision of all comforts and pleasures. They have eagerly taken up the journey, happy in the hope of future blessings and peace. They have willingly accepted the sufferings, troubles and hazards of the way, parting of friends, scarcity of food and comfort during the pilgrimage so that they may reach the journey's end - a happy place. They do not refuse to bear any discomfort and do not grudge any expenditure by way of giving out alms and charities, and helping the poor and the needy.

Every step which they put forward towards their goal, however tiring and exhausting it may be, is a happy event of their lives. On the contrary the condition of those people who are solely engrossed in this world and are sadly engulfed in its short-lived, quickly fading and vicious pleasures, is like that of travellers who are staying in fertile and happy regions and who have to undertake a journey, knowing fully well that the journey is going to end in a rough, arid and infertile land. Can anything be more loathsome and abhorring to them than this journey? How they would hate to leave the place where they are and to arrive at a place which they so much hate and which is so dismaying, dreadful and horrifying!

My dear son, so far as your behaviour with other human beings is concerned, let your 'self' act as scales to judge its goodness or wickedness. Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you.

Whatever you like for yourself, like for others, and whatever you dislike to happen to you, spare others from such happenings. Do not oppress and tyrannize anybody because you surely do not like to be oppressed and tyrannized. Be kind and sympathetic to others as you certainly desire others to treat you kindly and sympathetically. If you find objectionable and loathsome habits in others, abstain from developing those traits of character in yourself. If you are satisfied or feel happy in receiving a certain kind of behaviour from others, you may behave with others in exactly the same way. Do not speak about them in the same way that you do not like others to speak about you. Do not speak on a subject about which you know little or nothing, and if you at all want to speak on anything or about anyone of whom you are fully aware, then avoid scandal, libel and aspersion as you do not like yourself to be scandalized and scorned in the same manner.

Remember, son, that vanity and conceit are forms of folly. These traits will

bring to you serious harm and will be a constant source of danger to you. Therefore, lead a well-balanced life (neither be conceited nor suffer from inferiority complex) and exert yourself to earn an honest living. But do not act like a treasure for somebody (do not be miserly so that you leave what you hoard for others). And whenever you receive guidance of the Lord to achieve a thing you desire, then do not get proud of your achievement but be humble and submissive to Him and realize that your success was due to His Mercy.

Remember my son, that before you is a long and arduous journey (life). The journey is not only very long, exhausting and onerous but the route is mostly through dismal, dreary and deserted regions where you will be sadly in need of refreshing, renovating and enlivening aids and helps and you cannot dispense with such provisions as to keep you going and to maintain you till the end of the journey - the Day of Judgement.

But remember not to overload yourself (do not entrust yourself with so many obligations and duties that you cannot honourably fulfil them or with such luxurious life as to be wicked and vicious).

Because if this load is more than what you can conveniently bear then your journey will be very painful and tiresome to you. If you find around you such poor, needy and destitute people who are willing to carry your load for you as far as the Day of Judgement then consider this to be a boon, engage them and pass your burden on to them. (Distribute your wealth amongst the poor, destitute and the needy, help others to the best of your ability and be kind and sympathetic to human beings). Thus relieve yourself from the heavy responsibility and liability of submitting an account on the Day of Judgement of how you have made use of His Bounties (of health, wealth, power and position) and thus you may arrive at the end of the journey, light and fresh, have enough provision for you there (reward of having done your duty to man and Allah in this world).

Have as many weight-carriers as you can (help as many as you can) so that you may not miss them when you very badly need them (when your sins of commission and omission will be balanced against your good deeds you must have enough good deeds to turn the scale in your favour). Remember that all you give out in charities and good deeds are like loans which will be paid back to you. Therefore, when you are wealthy and powerful, make use of your wealth and power in such a way that you get all that back on the Day of Judgement, when you will be poor and helpless. Be it known to you, my son, that your passage lies through an appallingly dreadful valley (death or grave) and extremely trying and arduous journey.

Here a man with light weight is far better than an over-burdened person and one who can travel fast will pass through it quickly than the one whose encumbering forces go slowly. You shall have to pass through this valley.

The only way out of it is either in Paradise or in Hell. Therefore, it is wise to send your things there beforehand so that they (good deeds) reach there before you, prearrange for the place of your stay before you reach there

because after death there is no repentance and no possibility of coming back to this world to undo the wrong done by you.

Realize this truth, my son, that the Lord who owns and holds the treasures of Paradise and the earth has given you permission to ask and beg for them and He has promised to grant your prayers. He has told you to pray for His Favours that they may be granted to you and to ask for His Blessings that they may be bestowed upon you. He has not appointed guards to prevent your prayers reaching Him. Nor is there any need for anybody to intercede before Him on your behalf.

If you go back upon your promises, if you break your vows, or start doing things that you have repented of, He will not immediately punish you nor does He refuse His Blessings in haste and if you repent once again He neither taunts you nor betrays you though you may fully deserve both, but He accepts your penitence and pardons you. He never grudges His Forgiveness nor refuses His Mercy, on the contrary He has decreed repentance as a virtue and pious deed. The Merciful Lord has ordered that every evil deed of yours will be counted as one and a good deed and pious action will be rewarded tenfold. He has left the door of repentance open. He hears you whenever you call Him. He accepts your prayer whenever you pray to Him. Invoke Him to grant you your heart's desire, lay before Him the secrets of your heart, tell Him about all the calamities that have befallen you and misfortunes which face you, and beseech His help to overcome them. You may invoke His Help and Support in difficulties and distresses.

You may implore Him to grant you long life and sound health, you may pray to Him for prosperity and you may request Him for such favours and grants that none but He can bestow and award.

Think over it that by simply granting you the privilege of praying for His Favours and Mercies, He has handed over the keys of His treasures to you. Whenever you are in need you should pray and He will confer His Bounties and Blessings. But sometimes you will find that your requests are not immediately granted, then you need not be disappointed because the grant of prayers often rests with the true purpose and intention of the implorer. Sometimes the prayers are delayed because the Merciful Lord wants you to receive further rewards for patiently bearing calamities and sufferings and still believing sincerely in His Help. Thus you may be awarded better favours than you requested for.

Sometimes your prayers are turned down, and this is also in your interest; because you often, unknowingly, ask for things that are really harmful to you. If your requests are granted they will do you more harm than good and many of your requests may be such that if they are granted they will result in your eternal damnation. Thus the refusal to accede to your solicitations is a blessing in disguise to you. But very often your requests, if they are not really harmful to you in this life or in the Hereafter, may be delayed but they are granted in quantities much more than you had asked for, bringing in more blessings in their wake than you could ever imagine. So you should be very

careful in asking Allah for His Favour. Only pray for such things as are really beneficial to you, and are lasting and in the long run do not end in harm. Remember, my dear son, that wealth and power (if you pray for them) are such things that they will not always be with you and may bring harm to you in the life in the Hereafter.

Be it known to you, my son, that you are created for the next world and not for this. You are born to die and not to live forever. Your stay in this world is transient. You live in a place which is subject to decay and destruction. It is a place where you will have to be busy getting ready for the next world. It is a road (to the next world) on which you are standing. Death is following you. You cannot run away from it. However hard you may try to avoid it, it is going to catch you sooner or later. Therefore take care that it may not catch you unawares or when you are not prepared for it, and no chance is left to you to repent the vices and sins committed and to undo the harm done by you. If death catches you unawares, then you are eternally damned. Therefore, my dear son, always keep three things in mind: death, your deeds and the life in the Hereafter. In this way you will always be ready to face death and it will not catch you unawares.

My dear son, do not be carried away and be allured by the infatuations of the worldly people in the vicious life and its pleasures, and do not be impressed by the sight of their acute struggle to possess and own this world. Allah has very mercifully explained to you everything about this world. Not only the Merciful Lord but also the world has also told you everything; it has disclosed to you that it is mortal; it has openly declared its weakness, its shortcomings and its vices.

Remember that these worldly-minded people are like barking dogs and hungry and ferocious beasts. Some of them are constantly barking at others. The mighty lords kill and massacre the poor and the weak.

Their powerful persons exploit and tyrannize the powerless. Their inordinate desires and their greed has such a complete hold over them that you will find some of them like animals tamed and tied with a rope round their feet and necks. (They have lost the freedom of thought and cannot come out of the enslavement of their desires and habits).

While they are others whom wealth and power have turned mad. They behave like unruly beasts, trampling, crushing and killing their fellow beings, and destroying things around them. The history of this world is merely a reward of such incidents, some big and some small, the difference is of might but the intensity is the same. These people have lost the balance of their minds. They do not know what they are doing and where they are going, scan their activities and study their ways of thinking and you will find them confused and irrational, they appear like cattle wandering in a dreary desert where there is no water to drink and no fodder to eat, no shepherd to cater for them and no guardian to look after them. What has actually happened to them is that the vicious world has taken possession of them, it is dragging them wherever it

likes, and is treating them as if they are blind because it has in reality blind-folded them against Divine light of true religion.

They are wandering without reasonable aims and sober purposes in the bewitching show that the world has staged for them, they are fully intoxicated with the pleasures amassed around them. They take this world to be their god and nourisher. The world is amusing them and they are amused with it and have forgotten and forsaken everything else.

But the nights of enjoyments and pleasures will not last long for anybody, the dawn of realities will break sooner or later. The caravan of life will surely reach its destination one day. One who has nights and days acting as piebald horses for him, carrying him onward and onward towards his journey's end must remember that though he may feel as if he is stopping at one place yet actually he is moving on, he is proceeding to his destination. Everyday is carrying him a step further in his journey towards death.

Be it known to you, my son, that you cannot have every wish of yours granted, you cannot expect to escape death, and you are passing through your days of life as others before you have passed. Therefore, control your expectations, desires and cravings. Be moderate in your demands. Earn your livelihood through scrupulously honest means. Be contented with what you get honestly and honourably. Have patience and do not let your desires drive you madly because there are many desires which will lead you towards disappointments and loss. Remember that every beggar or everyone who prays for a thing will not always get what he begs or prays for and everyone who controls his desire, has self-respect and does not beg or pray for things, will not always remain unlucky or disappointed. So, do not bring down your self-respect, do not be mean and submissive and do not subjugate yourself through these vile and base traits though they may appear to make it possible for you to secure your hearts desires because nothing in this world can compensate for the loss of self-respect, nobility and honour.

Take care, my son! Be warned that you do not make yourself a slave of anybody. Allah has created you a freeman. Do not sell away your freedom in return of anything. There is no actual gain and real value in benefits that you derive by selling your honour and self-respect or by subjugating yourself to disgrace and insults as there is no real good in wealth and power that you acquire by foul means.

Beware, my son, that avarice and greed may not drive you towards destruction and damnation. If you can succeed in having nobody as your benefactor but Allah, then try your best to achieve this nobility because He will grant you your share whether you try to taunt your donors, patrons and benefactors or not.

Remember that the little which is given to you by Allah is going to be more useful and serviceable to you and is more honourable and respectable than what is granted by man in abundance. And what can a man give you but part of that which Allah has granted him?

The losses that you suffer on account of your silence can be easily compensated but the losses which arise out of excessive and loose talk are difficult to requite. Do you not see that the best way of guarding water in a water-bay is to close its mouth.

To guard what you already possess is better than to beg from others.

The bitterness of disappointment and poverty is in reality sweeter than the disgrace of begging.

Returns of hard but respectable labour of a craft or profession, though small in quantity, are better than the wealth which you amass through sin and wickedness.

Nobody can guard your secrets better than you.

Often a man tries his best to acquire a thing which is most harmful to him.

One who talks too much makes most mistakes.

One who often reflects, develops his foresight.

By keeping company with good people, you will develop your character and by avoiding the society of wicked persons, you will abstain from wickedness.

Livelihood acquired by foul means is the worst form of livelihood.

To oppress a weak and helpless person is the worst form of ferocity.

If your kindness or indulgence is going to bring forth cruel results, then severity of strictness is the real kindness.

Often medicating results in disease; sometimes diseases prove to be health preservers.

Often you obtain warnings and advice from people who are not fit to warn and advise you and often you come across advisers who are not sincere.

Do not rely on vain hopes because vain hopes are assets of fools and idiots.

Wisdom is the name of the trait of remembering experiences and making use of them. The best experience is the one which gives the best warning and advice.

Take advantage of opportunities before they turn their backs on you.

Everyone who tries cannot succeed.

Everyone who departs this life will not return.

The worst form of follies is to waste opportunities of this life as well as to lose salvation.

For every action there is a reaction.

Shortly you will get what has been destined for you.

There is an element of risk and speculation in every trade as well as danger of loss.

Often small returns prove as beneficial as big profits.

An accessory of an accomplice who insults you and a friend who has not formed a good opinion of you will not be of any help or use to you.

Treat those with consideration and kindness over whom you have power and authority.

Do not run the risk of endangering yourself through irrational, unreasonable and extravagant hopes.

Take care so as not to be fooled by flattery.

Do good to your brother when he is bent upon doing harm to you. When he ignores or declines to recognize the kinship, befriend him, go to his help and try to maintain relations. If he is miserly with you and refuses to help you, be generous with him and support him financially. If he is cruel with you, be kind and considerate with him. If he harms you accept his excuses. Behave with him as if he is a master and you are a slave, and he is a benefactor and you are a beneficiary. But be careful that you do not thus behave with undeserving and mean persons.

Do not develop friendship with the enemy of your friend otherwise your friend will turn into an enemy.

Advise your friend sincerely and to the best of your ability even though he may not like it.

Keep a complete control over your temper and anger because I never found anything more beneficial at the end and producing more good results than such a control.

Be mild, pleasant and lenient with him who is harsh, gross, and strict with you; gradually he will turn to your behaviour.

Grant favour and be considerate to your enemy because you will thus gain either one of the two kinds of victories: (one rising above your enemy, the other of reducing the intensity of his hostility).

If you want to cease relations with your friend, then do not break off totally, let your heart retain some consideration for him so that you will still have some regard for him if he comes back to you.

Do not disappoint a person who holds a good opinion of you and do not make him change his opinion.

Under the impression that you, as a friend, can behave as you like, do not violate the rights of your friend because, when he is deprived of his rights and privileges, he will no more remain your friend.

Do not ill-treat members of your family and do not behave with them as if you are the most cruel man alive.

Do not run after him who tries to avoid you.

The greatest achievement of your character is that the hostility of your brother against you does not overcome the consideration and friendship you feel towards him, and his ill-treatment of you does not overbalance your kind treatment to him.

Do not get worried and depressed over the oppressions because whoever oppresses you is in reality doing himself harm and is trying to find ways for your good.

Never ill-treat a person who has done good to you.

Know it well, son, that there are two kinds of livelihood: one which you are searching for and the other which follows you (which has been destined for you). It will reach you even if you do not try to obtain it.

To be submissive, humble, crawling and begging when one is needy, powerless and poor and to be arrogant, oppressing and cruel when in power and opulence are two very ugly traits of the human character.

Nothing in this world is really useful to you unless it has some utility and value for you for the next world. If you at all want to lament over things which you have lost in this world then worry about the loss of things which had immortal values for you.

The past and almost all that was in your possession during the past is not with you now. You may thus rationally come to the conclusion that the present and all that is in your possession now will also leave you.

Do not be like persons on whom advice has no effect; they require punishment to improve them. A sensible man acquires education and culture through advice, while brutes and beasts always improve through punishment.

Overcome your sorrows, your worries and your misfortunes with patience and faith in the Merciful Lord and your hard work; one who gives up a straight path, honest and rational ways of thinking and working, will harm himself.

A friend is like a relation and a true friend is one who speaks well of you even behind your back.

Inordinate desires are related with misfortunes.

Often close relations behave more distantly than strangers and often strangers help you more than your nearest relatives.

Poor is he who has no friends.

Whoever forsakes truth finds that his path of life has become narrow and troublesome.

Contentment and honesty are the lasting assets to retain one's prestige and position.

The strongest relation is the one which is between man and Allah.

One who does not care for you is your enemy.

If there is a danger of death or destruction in securing an object then safety lies in avoiding it.

Weaknesses and shortcomings are not the things to talk about.

Opportunities do not repeat themselves.

Sometimes very wise and learned persons fail to achieve the object they were aiming at and foolish and uneducated people attain their purposes.

Postpone evil deeds as long as possible because you can commit them whenever you so desire (then why hurry in committing them).

To cut connections with ignorant people is itself like forming connections with wise persons.

Whoever trusts this world is betrayed by it and whoever gives it importance is disgraced by it.

Every arrow of yours will not hit the bull's eye.

When status changes your conditions also change.

Before ascertaining the conditions of a route, find out what kinds of persons will accompany you on the journey.

Instead of enquiring about the condition of the home in which you are going to stay, first of all try to find out what kind of people your neighbours are.

Do not introduce ridiculous topics in your talk even if you have to repeat sayings of others.

Do not seek the advice of women, their verdicts are often immature and incorrect and their determinations are not firm. You must guard and defend them and act as a shelter to protect them from impious and injurious surroundings and infamous sights, this kind of shelter will keep them well-protected from every harm. Their contact with a vicious and sinful atmosphere (even with all the shelter that you can provide) is going to prove more harmful than being left with protection. Do not let them interfere with affairs where you cannot personally guide or protect them. Do not let them aspire for things which are beyond their capacities. They are more like decoration to humanity and are not made to rule and govern humanity. Exhibit reasonable interest in things which they desire and give importance to them, but do not let them influence your opinions and do not let them impel you to go against your sane views.

Do not force them into marriages which they abhor or which they consider below their dignity because there is danger of thus converting honourable and virtuous women into shameless and dishonourable beings.

Divide and distribute work among your servants so that you can hold each one responsible for the work entrusted to them. This is a better and smoother way of carrying on a work than each one of them throwing the responsibility of every bit of work on somebody else.

Treat the members of your family with love and respect because they act as wings with which you fly and as hands which support you and fight for you. They are people towards whom you turn when you are in trouble and in need.

My dear son! After having given these pieces of advice to you I entrust you to the Lord. He will help, guide and protect you in this world and the Hereafter. I beseech Him to take you under His protection in both the worlds.

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Letter 32

A letter to Mu'awiya.

You have misguided the whole generation of men around you. Having no faith in the truth of Islam you have led others astray. You have thrown them in the depths of ignorance. You have enticed them towards the abyss for unenlightenment and illiteracy. They were out to reach truth but they cannot reach it now, because of you. They have lost the true path of religion. They are becoming sceptics and most of them are returning to infidelity of pre-Islamic days.

Theirs is an unfortunate plight. A few wise men from amongst them who have seen your ways and who realized the intensity of your viciousness and your cunningness in turning them away from the ways of Islam, have given you up and have turned towards Allah. They are fortunate and may be blessed.

O Mu'awiya! Fear Allah, do not let the Devil lead you to Hell, throw away its yoke which is tied round your neck, remember that this life will after all come to an end and soon you will have to face the next world.

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Letter 33

The following letter was written to Qutham bin Abbas, the brother of Abdullah bin Abbas, who was the Governor of Imam Ali (a) in the province of Hijaz.

I have received confidential reports from the Western State saying that certain people have been sent from Syria and they are pretending that they are at Makkah for Hajj pilgrimage but the duty assigned to them was to carry on propaganda and create disloyalty against me. These people have no eyes for truth and no ears for the Orders of Allah and sayings of the Holy Prophet (s). They are trying to reach the path of religion through wrong ways and to acquire worldly wealth and pleasure under the pretence of religious activities. Not only this but they are also trying in various ways to persuade noble and pious persons to sell their salvation to the possession of pleasures of this life. They are serving their vicious ruler by sinning against Allah and man.

Remember that Divine Reward is for those who earn it with their sincere and good deeds and punishment is the lot of men who deserve it by their evil activities. Therefore, you should carry on your duties like an experienced, wise and faithful officer, like an officer who obeys his ruler, guards his

interest and keeps himself well-informed of the affairs of the State. Do not act in a way that you may in future feel sorry for your actions and may have to offer excuses and apologies. Do not get arrogant when times prove favourable to you and do not show weakness when your duties require you to be strong and resolute.

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Letter 34

Muhammad, son of Abu Bakr (the First Caliph) was the favourite disciple and companion of Imam Ali (a). Imam Ali (a) had treated and trained him like his own child and had appointed him as the Governor of Egypt. Later on Imam Ali (a) called him back from Egypt and sent Maalik Ashtar as the Governor. Muhammad thought that he was deposed and felt sad about it. When Imam Ali (a) came to know of this he wrote the following letter to him.

I am given to understand that you feel sorry and aggrieved because I called you back and sent Maalik in your place as the Governor of Egypt. The fact of the case is that I did not bring about this change because I found you weak and inefficient and wanted to make you more energetic and strong but because as a change I wanted to send you to a place where the work was easier and which you would find more congenial.

Undoubtedly the man whom I sent as the Governor of Egypt was very faithful to us and very severe against our enemies. May Allah bless him as he finished the days of life assigned to him and left this world. He died in such a state that we were pleased with him. May Allah grant him His highest reward.

You come out of your house, armed with superior intelligence and the best armours, ready to face the enemies. Be ready to fight those who fight against you. Advise the people to obey the orders of the Lord and ask His help as much and as often as you can so that He may grant success to you in your important affairs and may help you in your difficulties.

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Letter 35

When Muhammad bin Abi Bakr was killed in Egypt by the guerrillas of Mu'awiya through disloyalty of his (Muhammad's) own companions and officers, Imam Ali (a) felt sad and wrote the following letter to Ibn Abbas.

Ibn Abbas! Muhammad, (may his soul rest in peace), died as a martyr and Egypt has fallen in the hands of the enemies. I beseech the Reward of Allah for the sorrow I feel and the grief I suffer on account of the martyrdom of this young man who was like a son to me. He loved me. He was faithful to me. So far as the defense of the Islamic State is concerned he was like a sharp sword and an impregnable fort.

Long before this deplorable event I had issued orders to the Heads of various provinces and to the people of Kufa to reach him or send help to him when he

calls for it. I had repeated these orders. Some went to his help but half-heartedly, others started submitting excuses, while some sent false reports of important engagements and did not co-operate with him.

I feel disgusted and pray to Allah to relieve me of the society of such faithless and worthless people.

I swear by Allah that had I no desire of dying as a martyr, and had I not been ready for my death awaiting night and day, I would not have liked to live amongst them even for a day and I would not have come out with them to fight against the enemies of Allah and Islam.

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Letter 36

The following is a letter written by Imam Ali (a) to his brother Aqil. It so happened that Zahaak bin Qays Fahri was sent to Makkah by Mu'awiya with a force of guerrillas to ravage the city. Imam Ali (a) had sent Hujr bin Adi Kindi to defend the city of Makkah. Hujr defeated Zahaak. Aqil at that time was in Makkah. He wrote to Imam Ali (a) offering his voluntary services saying that the Quraysh were not sincerely serving the cause of Islam and were bent upon the enmity of Imam Ali (a). In reply Imam Ali (a) wrote:

I had sent against him (Zahaak) a strong force of Muslim fighters. When he realised this, he wanted to run away, giving up loot and plunder. Before sunset our expeditionary force overtook him and his guerrillas, a skirmish did take place, not worth being mentioned as a battle, and he fled. When he was caught by the throat he thought a cowardly retreat to be the best solution.

Do not take to heart the behaviour of Quraysh. To talk about their scepticism, their enmity of Islam, their revolt against the cause of Allah and their desire to bring harm to me are a waste of time. They now are as much bent upon doing me injustice and fighting against me, as they were unanimously against the Holy Prophet (s). May Allah punish them for their sins. They have not even paid any consideration to the relationship that existed between them and I. They have deprived me of the estate of my mother's son.

As far as your enquiry about my intention against the enemies of Islam is concerned, my opinion is to combat those who have made up their minds to harm the cause of Islam. I shall keep on combating them to the end of my life.

I am neither emboldened by abundance of followers nor am I disheartened by their scarcity. Do not think that your brother will lose heart if people forsake him and give up their help or he will humiliate himself, bow down against heavy odds, submit to unreasonable demands of others or accept their commands or orders like a beast of burden.

So far as I am concerned I am like a person about whom a poet of Bani Salim says:-

"If you enquire about me, my beloved, Then hear me:

I am very strong to face calamities and reverses;

I cannot tolerate

That signs of sorrows and griefs on my face

Make my enemies happy,

And increase sorrows of my friends".

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Letter 37

A letter to Mu'awiya.

Allahu Akbar! How hopelessly you are engulfed in your inordinate and sinful desires, how mercilessly you are swept by such vicious and unholy cravings which misguide you in this life and will bring you to a sad end. You have forsaken the cause of truth and justice and have arrogantly spurned the arguments which are agreeable to Allah and were unacceptable to man.

What do you mean by creating this faction and revolt with pretence of taking revenge on the murderers of Uthman?

The real facts of the case are that during the life of Caliph Uthman, you only went to his help when this action in the end was profitable to you and you could get something out of him, and you refused to help him when he was really in need of you and your support and for which he had frequently requested you.

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Letter 38

A letter to the people of Egypt, telling them about Maalik when Imam Ali (a) appointed him as their Governor.

From the creature of Allah, Ali bin Abi Taalib (a), to people whose anger and enmity was on account of Allah, they got angry when they saw that their land was being run over by people disobedient to Allah, when rights were being crushed and obligations were being ignored and spurned, when tyranny and oppression were the order of the day and every good or bad person and every local resident or outsider had to face them, when goodness and piety were taboos and when nobody cared to keep himself away from vices and sins.

After glorifying Allah and paying homage to the Holy Prophet (s) be it known to you that I am sending towards you a creature of Allah who forsakes rest and sleep during days of danger, who does not fear his enemy in the critical junctures, and who is more severe than burning fire to sinners and vicious people. He is Maalik bin Haarith Mazhiji (Mazhij is a sub-class of Bani Nakha'a). Hear him and obey his commands which you will find to be right and according to true canons of Islam. He is such a sword among the swords of Allah that its sharpness will never get blunt or whose stroke and blow will never be without effect and who will never lose an opportunity. If he orders you to

advance against your enemies, then advance; if he commands you to halt then halt because he himself will never advance nor halt and will never give orders to advance, halt or retreat without my consent.

In sending him to you, I have given preference to your needs over those of mine so that he may serve you faithfully and may treat your enemies severely and strongly.

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Letter 39

A letter to Amr bin Aas.

Undoubtedly you have subordinated your religion to the worldly power, pomp and wealth provided to you by a person whose apostation and scepticism are not hidden from anybody. He and his ways are known to everybody. He sullies the reputation as well as the character of those who keep company with him. He tries to deceive sober and sedate people. For the sake of remnants and crumbs of bread left over at his table, you have attached yourself to him. You are following him like a dog which follows a tiger, frightfully looks at its paws and waits to live upon the refuse which it leaves of its kill.

In this way you have lost your self-respect and honour in this world and your salvation in the next. You have ruined your present and future. Had you followed the true path, you would have secured success in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

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Letter 40

A letter to a commissioner of a province. It could not be ascertained as to whom it was addressed.

I have been given to understand that you have taken possession of State-lands and that you have not only brought them under personal use but you have misappropriated State treasury also. Will you immediately send the detailed accounts (about both the items)? Remember that the reckoning of Allah is far more severe than any audit which man can carry out.

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Letter 41

The following is a letter written to a Governor who left Imam Ali (a) and ran away with Public Treasury, this man was a cousin of Imam Ali (a) and was his confidant. Some historians say that he was Abdullah bin Abbas who was Imam's cousin and had once behaved in this way.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you that I trusted you and appointed you on a very responsible post. I did this under the impression that from my own clan nobody will prove more sympathetic, more helpful and more trustworthy to me than you. But when you found that the

times have gone against your cousin, his enemies are on the war path, wealth of the country is being recklessly plundered, the nation has lost sight of the true path of religion and it is confused and confounded, then you have also changed colour. You have forsaken your cousin, you left him along with other deserters and by joining the gang of dishonest persons, you have also betrayed the trust I reposed in you.

You have changed so much that you have not only lost the sense of sympathy for your cousin but you have also lost the sense of honesty and virtue. Your present behaviour indicates that you have never been sincere, as if your participating in jihad (the Holy Wars) was not in the cause of Allah and as if the true light of religion had never illuminated the dark recesses of your mind. Along with the majority, you had also participated in jihad to amass wealth under the pretence of serving Allah and religion and awaited opportunities to decamp with wealth of the Islamic State. And when the opportunity presented itself to you to be dishonest to your heart's content and when you found your ruler seriously engaged somewhere else you jumped at the evil chance, you invaded the Public Treasury and looted as much as was possible for you, the money which was reserved for widows, orphans and the poor. In this plunder your action was so quick, so nimble and so effective that it resembled the action of a very active and wary wolf attacking and snatching away a wounded and helpless goat.

You have with pleasure sent this looted wealth to Hijaz.

The sin pleased you and the loot made you happy. The thought that it was an evil deed never stopped you from the act. Did you take it for a heritage which you can take hold of and send home? Allahu Akbar! Do you not believe in the Day of Judgement? Are you not afraid of the reckoning on that Day?

O you whom we took for a wise and intelligent person! How can you happily and with easy conscience eat and drink things purchased by this wealth being aware all the time of its unlawfulness. Do you realise the enormity of your sin? Out of the money which was earmarked for the use of orphans, paupers and the destitute or which was reserved for faithful Muslims and Mujahids or was conserved for the defence of the Muslims State, you provided for yourself means of your enjoyments and pleasures, you purchased slave-girls out of it and you spent it on your marriages.

I advise you to fear Allah and return the money to those whom it rightfully belongs. If you do not do this and if Allah gives me a chance to punish you then I shall act in such a way that Allah will be pleased with me. I shall give you a stroke with that sword of mine which has sent all those whom I struck with it, to Hell. I swear by the Merciful Allah that even if all the wealth which you have so wickedly looted had come into my possession in a lawful way it would not have pleased me to leave it to my heir as a heirloom.

Control your inordinate desires, think well over what you have done and remember that you have reached the mature age, just try to visualize that death has brought an end to your life, you are lying in a grave with so much earth

over you and your deeds are placed before you. What would you say and do at such a time and place, a place where tyrants and oppressors could only repent and wish to go back to the world they left behind but there will be no escape from the punishment.

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Letter 42

The following is a letter which Imam Ali (a) wrote to Umar bin Abi Salama Mukhzumi when Imam Ali (a) called him back from the Governorship of Bahrain and appointed Nu'man bin Ajlan Zuraqi in his place.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you that I have appointed Nu'man as the Governor of the province of Bahrain and have removed you from the post not because I was dissatisfied with your work or there was any charge against you. Undoubtedly you have discharged your duties satisfactorily and have done full justice to the trust reposed in you. I am quite satisfied with your work and I neither doubt your honesty nor do I consider you to be inefficient and blameworthy.

Come to me immediately. The fact is that I have resolved to face the Syrian tyrants and oppressors and I want you to be with me because you are one of those men whom I can trust to help me in facing the enemies of Allah and in the establishment of the Islamic State.

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Letter 43

A letter to Masqala bin Hubayra al-Shaybani who was governor of Ardashir Khurra (Iran).

I have received certain information about you and if you have actually done what is reported against you then you have verily, displeased Allah and have annoyed me.

I am given to understand that you are lavishly distributing State treasury among the bedouins of your clan and among those Arab nomads who are loyal to you. You know this wealth has been gathered by Jihad in which many of them were killed and many more of them were wounded.

I swear by Allah who gave life to plants and animals that if this accusation against you proves correct then you will humiliate yourself in my eyes and will lose the good opinion I have formed about you.

Do not imagine that the trust reposed in you by Allah can be treated lightly, do not ruin your religion otherwise you will be one of those whose deeds are to be punished.

Remember that all the Muslims who are there or here have equal share in this wealth. Believing and acting on this principle, they come to me for their share and receiving it from me they return to their places.

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Letter 44

Ziyad was the son of a slave named Ubayd, his mother was Sumaiyya, a slave-girl of Haarith bin Kalda, a woman of flexible virtues and very elastic conscience. But Ziyad grew up to be an intelligent man and a very good orator. Everybody knew that Ziyad was born out of wedlock. Umar during his caliphate, did not give him any chance but later on he became a governor and Imam Ali (a) had allowed him to retain that post. When Mu'awiya came to power, he started corresponding secretly with Ziyad, inviting him to leave the side of Imam Ali (a) and to join him, offering him the bribe of being declared the son of Abu Sufyan. When Imam Ali (a) came to know of these secret messages he wrote the following letter to Ziyad.

I am given to understand that Mu'awiya has been corresponding with you. Beware, he wants to make a fool of you, to blunt your intelligence and to harm your self-respect. Remember that it is Satan which will attack an imprudent and incautious Muslim from behind and from right and left so that finding him unwary and unwatchful, it may overpower him and may enslave his reasoning.

The fact is that during the Caliphate of Caliph Umar, Abu Sufyan unwisely gave utterances to something which was unjustifiable and unreasonable. It was one of those evil suggestions of Satan which are not only an insult to a self-respecting man but which cannot help in proving the descent (according to the laws of Islam) or in legalizing the heritage. The condition of a man claiming such a lineage is that of a gate crasher in a party from which he may be thrown out with humiliation.

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Letter 45

Uthman bin Hunayf was the Governor of Basra. He was one of those persons who were held in respect by Imam Ali (a). During his governorship Ibn Hunayf once attended a feast given by a rich man of Basra. It was a very sumptuous dinner. When Imam Ali (a) heard of this he wrote the following letter to him. It shows that the more Imam Ali (a) liked a person the more severely he judged his activities.

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

Look carefully into the things which you eat. If there is even a shade of their being obtained unlawfully then throw them away, only eat those things about which you are perfectly certain that they are obtained by honest means.

You must know Ibn Hunayf, that for everyone who follows a religion there is a leader and a guide from whom the follower learns the canons of that religion and the ways of leading a pious life. Now look to your Imam (Imam Ali (a) meant himself). In this world he has satisfied himself with two old, torn and coarse garments and two pieces of bread (one in the morning and one in the evening). I know that to adopt such a hard way of life is beyond you but at least try to be pious. Try to follow me and be my companion in virtue, piety and simple living. I swear by Allah that from this world I have neither amassed gold nor have I gathered wealth and possessions nor have I changed these coarse and old garments of mine with even an ordinary raiment from your treasury.

Verily, under the sky we had only Fadak as our personal property but we were deprived of it, it tempted them, they took it by force and we had to bear the wrench patiently and cheerfully, the best judge is the Lord Almighty. What was I going to do with Fadak or with any other worldly possession? I never wanted them for myself. I know that tomorrow my lodging will be my grave. Its darkness will cover my traces and will not allow my condition to reach this world. A grave after all is a pit, and even if it is made very big and broad, time will gradually reduce its size and will fill it with earth and stones. My attention is concentrated on one thing, that is, with the help of the fear of Allah and piety I keep my desires under control so that in this world I may not commit sins and errors and on the Day of Judgement when fear will be the lot of everybody I may feel safe and satisfied.

If I had so wanted I could have very easily found ways and means to provide for myself the purest honey, the best variety of wheat and the finest silk clothes that could be woven. But it is not possible for inordinate cravings to overcome me and it is not possible that greediness persuades me to acquire the best provisions when in Hijaz and Yemen there may be people who have no hope of obtaining a piece of bread and who have never satisfied their hunger fully. It is not possible for me to satiate myself when there are around me people whom hunger and thirst keeps restless and agonized. Do you want me to be like that person about whom somebody has very aptly said, "Is this disease not enough for you that you keep on sleeping with your stomach full, and around you there are such starving mouths that will greedily eat even dried goat-skin"?

Shall I be satisfied simply because people call me "Amir al-Mu'minin" (Leader of the faithful Muslims)? Shall I not sympathise with the faithful Muslims in their calamities? Shall I not be their partner in their adversities? Shall I not be their fellow-sufferer? Shall I not set an example for them to patiently, courageously and virtuously bear privation?

Am I created simply to keep on thinking about my food? Am I like that animal which is tied down to a post and which thinks of nothing but its fodder or like that uncontrolled beast which roams about and does nothing but eats its fill and does not know the purpose of life for which it is created? Have I no religion, no conscience and no fear of Allah? Am I left absolutely free without any check or control to do as I like? Am I at liberty to go astray, to wander away from the true path of religion and to roam about in the wilderness of

greed and avarice?

I am sure some of you would say that if the son of Abu Taalib eats so little and lives on starvation, then surely he must have gone weak and exhausted and must be unfit to face his enemies in battlefields. But you must remember that hardy trees which grow on the border of deserts have very strong timber; and trees which are found in marshy lands have thin bark and soft wood, similarly when the former are lit up they burn longer and with a very strong glow and give out more heat than the latter.

My relationship with the Holy Prophet (s) is like a branch shooting from the same stem or like the relation of the wrist to the arm. I swear by Allah that even if all the Arabs unite together against me I shall not run away from the battlefield and when the occasion arrives I shall do my best to subdue them, at the same time I shall try to clean the earth of the existence and vicious influence of that untimely evil genius and warped mind (Mu'awiya) so that the land may be free of his wicked and sinful sway.

O vicious world! Do not try to snare me, you cannot entrap me, I am beyond your temptations and pitfalls and I have taken good care not to slip into such pitfalls. Where are those people whom you had tempted with pleasures and enjoyments? Where are those groups whom you had allured with pomp and glory? They are imprisoned in their graves pressed down by tons of earth upon them. O vicious world! Had you been a person or a being with life and limbs I would have punished you under the laws of the Lord because you have tempted with impossible hopes millions of individuals from the true path of humanity, you have brought about destruction, decline and falls of nations after nations alluring them with power and pleasure, you have thrown crowned heads into dust, you have lowered them to such depths that there is no refuge for any of them at that place and no one can come out from there.

Woe be to the man who with misplaced confidence, steps on the slippery ground presented by you as a firm foothold, he will certainly slip; woe be to the man who thinks of riding the waves of false hopes and expectations raised by you, he will surely sink.

Whoever tries not to be entrapped by your temptations and snared by your allurements will find the straight path to safety and salvation. Whoever tries to spurn you does not care for the consequences of his action though he may find himself in adverse circumstances and difficulties. To him this world, its pleasures and the life surrounded by the pleasures or by woes and afflictions, is like a day which will soon pass away.

Be gone from me. I can neither be caught unawares by you that you may plunge me into disgrace and humiliations nor will I lose control of myself that you may drag me wherever you like.

I swear by Allah that barring His Destiny over which I have no control and which may mould my life as He wishes, I shall control myself that I shall be contented and happy if I get one piece of bread with a pinch of salt and that

my mind will be dead to the desires of pleasures, fame, power and glory.

Ibn Hunayf! You have seen sheep and goats, after eating and drinking their fill they retire to their den. Do you want Ali to be like them - to eat, drink and enjoy? May I get blind if after having passed so many years of my life I now turn into an animal in human form!

Happy is the person who did his duty with Allah and man, who bore adversities patiently and when sleep overpowered him he used his hand as a pillow and lay on mere earth along with those whom fear of the Day of Judgement has often kept awake, who do not find much time to sleep, whose lips keep on moving glorifying Allah, and whose sins have been absolved on account of the penance they impose upon themselves. They are noble persons and they certainly will secure salvation.

O Ibn Hunayf! fear Allah and be content with the bread that you get with lawful means, so that you may be exempted and free from the fire of Hell.

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Letter 46

A letter from Imam Ali (a) to one of his governors.

You are one of those persons whose assistance I require in propagating the religion, in strengthening its hold, in defeating the unbelievers and sinners and in guarding dangerous frontiers of this State. Seek the help of Allah in your difficulties and enterprises. In your behaviour with your subjects remember that you should use leniency and tolerance alongside severity. Be kind, tolerant and lenient as far as and as long as possible but when you feel that your purpose cannot be achieved without severity only then can you adopt such an attitude.

But remember always to treat them sympathetically, kindly, courteously and to treat them cheerfully. While meeting them, talking to them and wishing everyone of them, whether rich or poor, big or small you should behave as if they are your equals so that important persons of your State may not presume to derive undue advantage out of your uncalled for servile behaviour and poor people may not lose hope in your justice and sympathy.

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Letter 47

When Abd al-Rahman bin Muljam wounded Imam Ali (a) who was then offering the morning prayers in the Mosque of Kufa, Imam Ali (a) advised Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a) in the following words.

I advise you to fear Allah, do not go after this vicious world though it may try to entice you, do not seek it though it may seek you and do not grieve over and pine for things which this world refuses you. Let the eternal Reward and Blessings of Allah be the prompting factors for all that you say and do. Be an enemy of tyrants and oppressors and be a friend and helper of those who are

oppressed and tyrannized.

To you, to my other children, to my relatives and to all who acquire this will of mine, I advise to fear Allah and to be pious, to have fair and honest dealings with one another and improve mutual relations because I have heard your grandfather, the Holy Prophet (s) saying, "To remove mutual enmity, ill-feeling and hatred is better than recommended prayers and fasting".

Fear Allah when the question of helpless orphans arises. You should never let them starve. So long as you are there to guard and protect them they should not be ruined or lost. The Holy Prophet (s) had always advised, cautioned and reminded us of this responsibility, so much so that we often thought that the Prophet of Allah (s) might on the next occasion assign them a share from our heritage.

Fear Allah in respect of the Holy Qur'an, lest others should excel and surpass you in following its tenets and in acting according to its orders. Fear Allah so far as prayers are concerned because prayers are pillars of your faith. Fear Allah in the matter of His Holy House (Kaa'ba). Let it not be deserted because if it is deserted, you (the Muslims) will be lost.

Do not forget Allah, struggle in His cause with your tongue, with your wealth and with your lives.

Develop mutual liking, friendship and love and help one another. Take care that you do not spurn and treat one another badly and unsympathetically.

Exhort people to do good and abstain them from evil, otherwise the vicious and the wicked will be your overlord and if you willingly allow such persons to be your rulers then your prayers will not be heard by Allah.

O' sons of Abdul Muttalib! Let there be no retaliation for the act of my murder, do not roam about with a drawn sword and with the slogan: "Amir al-Mu'minin is killed", and do not start the massacre of my opponents and enemies.

See to it that only one man, that is my assassin, is killed, as the punishment of the crime of murder is death and nobody else is molested. The punishment to the man who attempted the murder shall take place only when I die of the wound delivered by him and this punishment shall be only one stroke of sword to end his life. He should not be tortured before his death, his hands and feet should not be amputated because I have heard the Holy Prophet (s) saying: "Do not amputate hands and feet of anybody, be it a biting dog".

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Letter 48

A letter to Mu'awiya.

Remember that inequity and falsehood bring disgrace to a man in this world and in the Hereafter. The vicious character of a tyrant always betrays itself to those who carefully look into his actions. You must know that you can never get

what has not been destined for you.

There are people who want to grab a thing without having any right or claim over it. To get the object which they crave for, they try to interpret the commands of Allah to suit their purpose. But Allah has always given a lie to such people. Therefore, you should also fear the Day of Judgement, the day when only those people who have done deeds deserving reward will be happy, and those, who have surrendered themselves to Satan and do not want to come out of its influence, will cut a sorry figure.

You invited me to let the Holy Book act as an arbitrator but you never believed that Book to be the Word of Allah. I, therefore, did not accept your invitation though I always accept the commands of that Book.

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Letter 49

A letter to Mu'awiya.

This vicious world will try to turn a man away from religion and from having faith in the Hereafter. And when a worldly-minded person grasp a little of it, it always opens before him vistas of false hopes, ambitions, temptations and greed, so that he is never satisfied with what he has grabbed and will always covet for more. The result often is that he loses what he has already amassed and his plans do not work out. If you take a lesson from the past then you can guard your future very well.

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Letter 50

A circular to the chiefs of his army.

This is circular-letter from the creature of Allah, Ali bin Abi Taalib (a) to the chiefs of army and generals of his cantonments.

It is incumbent upon the chiefs of the State that their status and prestige should not make them change their attitude towards the subjects of the State; instead, the favours which the Lord has granted them should draw them nearer to the people and should make them more sympathetic towards them.

My duty towards you is that, except the secrets of war, I do not keep anything pertaining to the affairs of the State hidden from you. Barring religious questions in all other matters concerning your welfare, I should take you in my confidence and seek your advice, I should guard your interests and rights to the best of my ability, I should see that you are well-protected and well-looked after and I should treat all of you equally without any favouritism. If you receive such favourable treatment from me then it is your duty to thank Allah for His Kindness. Your obedience to me is that you follow the orders given, be good and bravely face difficulties to attain the right path. If you cannot maintain this standard of fidelity and do not behave yourself then you will lose the straight path of virtue and nobody will be

lower in my eyes than you. I shall then punish you severely.

You should make your subordinate officers promise to act accordingly and should give them the same facilities and privileges as are given to you so that your affairs also run smoothly.

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Letter 51

A letter to the collectors of taxes and revenues.

A letter from the creature of Allah, Ali bin Abi Taalib (a) to the collectors of taxes and revenues. One who does not care for his salvation, will never think of providing for his life after death with good deeds and, therefore, he will not be able to escape the punishment. Be it known to you that the responsibilities laid down upon you are a few but the Divine reward reserved for you is very high. Allah has forbidden you from tyranny and injustice; and even if there had not been any fear of punishment for these inequities, the mere reward of being just, kind and human would have been such that there could not have been any excuse for not trying to achieve it.

Treat the tax-payers with equity and justice and think over their wishes with patience and kindness because you are the treasurer of the subjects, representative of the people and the officer on behalf of higher authority. Do not force anybody to forsake his requirements and to do without his necessities (so that he may pay the taxes). In collection of taxes and revenues do not sell their winter and summer clothing, their slaves or such of their animals as are of service to them, do not resort to whipping, do not touch their property, be they Muslims or non-Muslims, but if you find there armaments or weapons or horses of the non-Muslims for which there is a danger and a possibility of these being used in war against the State, you may confiscate them. Such things as are dangerous to the safety of the country should not be left in the possession of unreliable persons so that they should not prove harmful and injurious to the Muslim State and its people.

Be kind to the people, treat the army well, do not grudge to do your best in helping the subjects and in guarding the religion. These two duties are obligations laid down upon you by Allah because, in return to the Blessings and Bounties which He has granted us, He wants you and me to be thankful to Him as much as we can, and to help His cause to the best of our ability. You must remember that even our strength and capabilities are His Blessings granted to us.

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Letter 52

A circular about prayers to the governors of all the provinces.

Lead the Zuhr prayer till the shadow of a wall becomes equal to the height of the wall, the Asr prayers can be performed till the sun is still bright and

enough time of the day is left for a person to cover a distance of six miles. The Maghrib prayers should be performed when people break their fasts and when Hajj pilgrims return from Arafat. And the time for Ice prayers is when the red glow of the even twilight disappears from the West, till one-third of the night is still left. The morning prayers are to be performed when there appears enough light of the dawn for a man to recognize the face of his companion.

While leading the prayers make them so short that the weakest among you may not feel tired to follow you and his strength and patience may not be over strained.

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Letter 53

An order to Maalik al-Ashtar.

[Maalik al-Ashtar was a famous companion of Imam Ali (a). He was the head of the Bani Nakha'i clan. He was a faithful disciple of Imam Ali (a). He was a brave warrior and had acted as a Commander-in-Chief of the armies of Imam Ali (a). His valour had earned him the title of "Fearless Tiger". Imam Ali (a) had specially taught him the principles of administration and jurisprudence. He venerated and loved Imam Ali (a) sincerely and earned Mu'awiya's enmity on that account. Mu'awiya had conspired against him and got him killed by his gang of hirelings. His untimely death deeply grieved Imam Ali (a) who, expressing his grief said: "He was to me what I was to the Holy Prophet (s)". The following instructions in the form of a letter were written to him by Imam Ali (a) who appointed him as the Governor of Egypt in place of Muhammad bin Abi Bakr:

This letter is a précis of the principles of administration and justice as dictated by Islam. It deals with the duties and obligations of rulers, their chief responsibilities, the question of priorities of rights and obligations, dispensation of justice, control over secretaries and subordinate staff; distribution of work and duties amongst the various branches of administration, their co-ordination with each other and their co-operation with the centre. In it Imam Ali (a) advises Maalik to combat corruption and oppression amongst the officers, to control markets and imports and exports, to curb evils of profiteering, hoarding, black-marketing. In it he has also explained stages of various classes in a society, the duties of the government towards the lowest class, how they are to be looked after and how their conditions are to be improved, the principle of equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, orphans and their up-bringing, maintenance of the handicapped, crippled and disabled persons and substitutes in lieu of homes for the aged and the disabled.

Then he (a) discusses the army, of whom it should consist of and how the ignorant, ruthless and corrupt mercenaries should not be allowed to join the army as their profession. He lays great stress upon the honour and the nobility of volunteers who in time of need, offer their voluntary services to defend the Islamic State. Finally, he comments upon the rights of rulers over the ruled

and of the ruled over the rulers.

There is a main central idea running all through these instructions, like one single thread out of which the cloth is woven, it is that of Allah . The regime is of Allah, the governors and the governed are both creatures of Allah, and their respective duties are laid down by Allah.

He expects each one of them to fulfil his obligations and to do his duties. The orphans and the depressed are the trust of Allah, the army is the army of Allah, whose soldiers should not behave like haughty and arrogant mercenaries but like honourable and noble knights, everyone is expected to do his duty to the best of his ability. He will be rewarded in Paradise according.

In short this letter is on one hand the Gospel of the principles of administration as taught by the Holy Qur'an, a code to establish a kind and benevolent rule, throwing light on various aspects of justice, benevolence and mercy, an order based on the ethics of Divine rulership where justice and mercy are shown to human beings irrespective of class, creed and colour, where poverty is neither a stigma nor a disqualification and where justice is not tainted with nepotism, favouritism, provincialism or religious fanaticism; and, on the other hand, it is a thesis on the higher values of morality.

The famous Arab Christian, jurist, poet and philosopher Abdul Masih Antaaki who died sometime in the beginning of the 20th Century while discussing this letter writes that it is a far superior and better code than the one handed down by Moses and Hamurabi, it explains what a human administration should be like, how it is to be carried out and it justifies the claims of Muslims that Islam wants to introduce a Divine administration of the people for the people and by the people and it wants a ruler to rule not to please himself but to bring happiness to the ruled and no religion before Islam tried to achieve this end, Ali (a) should be congratulated for having introduced these principles during his rule and for have written them down for the posterity.]

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL.

These are the orders issued by the creature of Allah, Ali, the son Abu Taalib (a) to Maalik, the son of Ashtar when he appointed Maalik as the Governor of Egypt to collect Zakat there, to combat the enemies of Islam and Egypt, to work for the welfare of its people and to look after its prosperity.

I order you, Maalik, always to keep the fear of Allah in your mind, to give priority to His worship and to give preference to obeying His Commands over every other thing in life, to carefully and faithfully follow the commandments and interdictions as are given by the Holy Book and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (s) because the success of a man to attain happiness in this world and in the next depends upon these qualities, and a failure to achieve these attributes brings about total failure in both the worlds.

I order you to use your head, heart, hands and tongue to help the creatures of Allah because the Almighty Allah holds Himself responsible to help those who sincerely try their best to help Him. Allah has further ordered you to keep

your desires under control, to keep yourself under restraint when extravagant and inordinate yearnings and cravings try to drive you towards vice and wickedness because usually your 'self' tries to incite and drag you towards infamy and damnation unless the Merciful Lord comes to your help.

Let it be known to you, Maalik, that I am sending you as a governor to a country which has seen many regimes before this. Some of them were benign, sympathetic and good, while others were tyrannical, oppressive and cruel. People will judge your regime as critically as you have studied the activities of other regimes and they will criticize you in the same way as you have censured or approved other rulers.

You must know that a good and virtuous man is known and recognized by the good that is said about him and the praise which Allah has destined him to receive from others. Therefore, make your mind the source and fountain-head of good thoughts, good intentions and good deeds. This can only be attained by keeping a strict control on your desires and yearnings, however much they may try to incite and coerce you. Remember that the best way to do justice to your inner self and to keep it out of harm is to restrain it from vice and from things which the 'self' inordinately and irrationally desires.

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

Remember, Maalik, that amongst your subjects there are two kinds of people: those who have the same religion as you have; they are brothers to you, and those who have religions other than that of yours, they are human beings like you. Men of either category suffer from the same weaknesses and disabilities that human beings are inclined to, they commit sins, indulge in vices either intentionally or foolishly and unintentionally without realizing the enormity of their deeds. Let your mercy and compassion come to their rescue and help in the same way and to the same extent that you expect Allah to show mercy and forgiveness to you.

Maalik! You must never forget that if you are a ruler over them than the caliph is the ruler over you and Allah is the Supreme Lord over the caliph. And the reality is that He has appointed you as the governor and tested you through the responsibility of this rulership over them.

Never think of raising yourself to such a false prestige that you can declare war against Allah because you cannot ward off His Wrath and you can never be free from the need of His Mercy and Compassion.

Do not feel ashamed to forgive and forget. Do not hurry over punishments and do not be pleased and do not be proud of your power to punish. Do not get angry and lose your temper quickly over the mistakes and failures of those over whom you rule. On the contrary, be patient and sympathetic with them. Anger and desire of vengeance are not going to be of much help to you in your administration.

Never say to yourself, "I am their Lord, their ruler and all in all over them and that I must be obeyed submissively and humbly" because such a thought will unbalance your mind, will make you vain and arrogant, will weaken your faith in religion and will make you seek support of any power other than that of Allah . If you ever feel any pride or vanity on account of your sway and rule over your subjects then think of the supreme sway and rule of the Lord over the Universe, the extent of His creations, the supremacy of His Might and Glory, His Power to do things which you cannot even dream of doing and His control over you which is more dominating than that which you can ever achieve over anything around you. Such thoughts will cure your mental weakness, will keep you away from vanity and rebellion (against Allah), will reduce your arrogance and haughtiness and will take you back to the sanity which you had foolishly deserted.

Take care never to think of bringing yourself at par with Allah, never to think of matching your power with Him and contesting His Glory and ever to pretend that you possess might and power like Him because the Mighty Lord will always humble pitiless tyrants and will degrade all pretenders of His Power and Might.

So far as your own affairs or those of your relatives and friends are concerned take care that you do not violate the duties laid down upon you by Allah and do not usurp the rights of mankind, be impartial and do justice to them because if you give up equity and justice then you will certainly be a tyrant and an oppressor. And whoever tyrannizes and oppresses the creatures of Allah, will earn enmity of Allah along with the hatred of those whom he has oppressed; and whoever earns the Wrath of Allah loses all chances of salvation and he has no excuse to offer on the Day of Judgement.

Every tyrant and oppressor is an enemy of Allah unless he repents and gives up oppression. Remember, Maalik! that there is nothing in this world more effective to turn His Blessings into His Wrath quicker than to insist upon oppression over His creatures because the Merciful Allah will always hear the prayers of those who have been oppressed and He will give no chance to oppressors.

You must always appreciate and adopt a policy which is neither too severe nor too lenient, a policy which is based upon equity will be largely appreciated. Remember that the displeasure of common men, the have-nots and the depressed persons more overbalances than the approval of important persons, while the displeasure of a few big people will be excused by the Lord if the general public and the masses of your subjects are happy with you.

Remember, Maalik! that usually these big personages are mentally the scum of the human society, they are the people who will be the worst drag upon you during your moments of peace and happiness, and the least useful to you during your hours of need and adversity, they hate justice the most, they will keep on demanding more and more out of the State resources and will seldom be satisfied with what they receive and will never be obliged for the favour shown to them if their demands are justifiable refused, they will never accept any reasonable

excuse or any rational argument and when the time changes, you will never find them staunch, faithful and loyal.

While the common men, the poor and apparently the less important section of your subjects are the pillars of Islam, they are the real assemblage of Muslims and the power and defensive force against the enemies of Islam. Keep your mind on their affairs, be more friendly with them and secure their trust and goodwill.

But be careful in forming your contacts (whether with the most important persons or the commoners); keep such people away from you and think them to be the enemy of the State who are scandal-mongers and who try to find fault with others and carry on propaganda against them because everywhere people have weaknesses and failings and it is the duty of the government to overlook (minor) shortcomings. You must not try to go in search of those weaknesses which are hidden from you, leave them to Allah, and about those weaknesses which come to your notice, you must try to teach them how to overcome them. Try not to expose the weaknesses of the people and Allah will conceal your own weaknesses which you do not want anybody to know.

Do not give cause to the people to envy each other (man against man, tribe against tribe or one section of the society against the other). Try to alleviate and root out mutual distrust and enmity from amongst your subjects.

Be fair, impartial and just in your dealings with all, individually and collectively and be careful not to make your person, position and favours act as sources of malice. Do not let any such thing or such person come near to you who does not deserve your nearness and your favour. Never lower your dignity and prestige.

Remember that backbiters and scandal-mongers belong to a mean and cunning group, though they pretend to be sincere advisers. Do not make haste to believe the news they bring and do not heed to their advice.

Do not accept the advice of misers, they will try their best to keep you away from acts of kindness and from doing good to others. They will make you frightened of poverty.

Similarly do not allow cowards to act as your advisers because they will make you timid in enforcing your orders, will scare you from handling important affairs boldly and will make your enterprises and invasions timid and timorous attempts. At the same time avoid greedy and covetous persons who would aspire to the position of acting as your counsellor because he will teach you how to exploit the community and how to oppress people to get their wealth. Remember that miserliness, cowardice and greed appear to be different wicked qualities but they all arise from the same evil mentality of having no faith and no trust in Allah.

Your worst ministers will be the men who had been ministers to the despotic rulers before you and who had been a party to atrocities committed by them. Such persons should not be taken into your confidence and should not be trusted

because they have aided sinners and have assisted tyrants and cruel rulers.

In their stead you can comfortably find persons who are equally wise and learned but who have not developed sinful and criminal mentalities, who have neither helped the tyrants in their tyrannies nor have they assisted them to carry on their sinful deeds. Such persons will prove the least troublesome to you. They will be the most helpful. They will sincerely sympathise with you. If you take them in your confidence they will sever their connections with your opponents. Keep such people with you as your companions in your informal company as well as in official gatherings in audience. From amongst such honest and humane companions and ministers some would receive your fullest confidence and trust. They are those who can always speak out the bitter truth to you and unreservedly and without fear of your status, can refuse to assist you or associate with you in the deeds which Allah does not like His good creatures to commit.

Select honest, truthful and pious people as your companions. Train them not to flatter you and not to seek your favour by false praises because flattery and false praises create vanity and conceit and they make a man lose sight of his real self and ignore his duties.

You should not treat good and bad people alike because in this way you will be discouraging good persons and at the same time emboldening the wicked to carry on their wickedness. Everyone should receive the treatment which his deeds make him deserve.

Try carefully to realize that a ruler can create goodwill in the minds of his subjects and can make them faithful and sincere to him only when he is kind and considerate to them, when he reduces their troubles, when he does not oppress them and when he never asks for things which are beyond their power.

These are the principles which you should keep in mind and act upon. Let your attitude be such that they do not lose faith in you because a good faith on their part will reduce many troubles of administration and will relieve you of many worries and anxieties. And so far as your confidence and trust is concerned, let it rest with those people whom you have tested in difficulties and whom you have befriended, but you should always mistrust those people whom you have wronged or who have proved themselves undeserving, inefficient or unfaithful.

Do not give up those practices and do not break those rules which good Muslims have evolved or introduced before you, which have created unity and amity among the various sections of the society and which have benefited the masses.

Do not break them and do not introduce innovations because if you do away with those good rules and traditions, the reward of having introduced them will go to those who evolved them and the punishment of having despoiled them will be your lot.

You must know, Maalik, that the people over whom you rule are divided into classes and grades and the prosperity and welfare of each class of the society

individually and collectively are so interdependent upon the well-being of the other classes that the whole set-up represents a closely woven net and reciprocal aspect. One class cannot exist peacefully, cannot live happily and cannot work without the support and good wishes of the other.

Amongst them there are the soldiers of the army of Allah who defend His cause, the next class is that of the secretaries of the State to whom duties of writing out and issuing special or general orders are assigned, the third group is of the judges and magistrates to administer justice, the fourth is of officers who maintain law and order and guard the peace and prosperity of the country. Then there are common men, the Muslims who pay the taxes levied by the government, and non-Muslims who pay the taxes levied by the government, and non-Muslims who pay tribute to the State (in lieu of taxes). Then comes the class of men who carry on various professions and trades and the last but not the least are the poor and the have-nots who are considered as the lowest class of the society. The Merciful Allah has fixed rights and duties of each one of them. They have been either mentioned in His Book or explained through the instructions of the Holy Prophet (s). A complete code of them is preserved with us.

As far as the soldiers are concerned, they are by the commands of Allah a fortress and stronghold to guard and defend the subjects and the State. They are the ornaments of the ruler and the country. They provide power and protection to the religion. They propagate and preserve peace among mankind. In fact, they are the real guardians of peace and through them good internal administration can be maintained. The upkeep and maintenance of an army depends upon the taxes collected by the State out of which Allah has fixed for them a share. With this amount they provide for their requirements, maintain themselves and their arms in sound position to defend the religion and the cause of justice.

The army and the common men (common citizens who pay taxes or tributes) are two important classes, but in a Welfare State their well-being cannot be guaranteed without proper functioning and preservation of the other classes, the judges and magistrates, the secretaries of the State and the officers of various departments who collect various revenues, maintain law and order as well as preserve peace and amity among the diverse classes of the society. They also guard the rights and privileges of the citizens and look to the performances of various duties by individuals and classes. And the prosperity of this whole set-up depends upon the traders and industrialists. They act as a medium between the consumers and the suppliers. They collect the requirements of the society. They exert to provide goods. They open up shops, markets and trading centres. Thus providing the consumers with their necessities, they relieve the citizens of the need of running after their requisites of life.

Then comes the class of the poor and the disabled persons. It is absolutely necessary that they should be looked after, helped and well-provided for. The Merciful Allah has explained the ways and means of maintaining and providing for each of these classes. And everyone of this class has the right upon the

ruler of the State that at least minimum necessities for its well-being and contented living are provided.

Remember, Maalik that Almighty Allah will not absolve any ruler from his obligations unless he sincerely tries his best to discharge his duties, invokes Allah to help him in their performance, remains steadfast and diligent on the path of truth and justice and bears all this whether the performance of these duties is congenial or hateful to him.

So far as the army is concerned its chief and commander should be a person who is most sincere and faithful to Allah, to the Holy Prophet (s) and to your Imam who is most pious, who is famous for his forbearance, clemency and gentleness, who is neither short-tempered nor does he get angry quickly, who sympathetically treats sincere excuses and accepts apologies, who is kind and compassionate with the weak, but severe against the strong and the powerful, who has no vindictiveness which might lead to violence or any inferiority complex or weak-mindedness which makes them helpless and dejected. To find and select such persons you should have contacts with pious and noble families with high ideals and exalted traditions, families well-known for their bravery and courage and generosity and magnanimity. They are the people who may be considered as sources of magnificence and sublimity of character and fountain-heads of piety and good deeds.

When you have found and selected such persons then keep an eye over them and watch them as parents watch their children so that you may find out if there appears any change in their behaviour. Treat them kindly and sympathetically. Do not grudge highest considerations to them (if they rightly deserve) and do not refuse small mercies. This kind of treatment will create reciprocal tendencies in them and they will trust you and will be faithful to you. Under the impression that you have paid enough attention to their major necessities and wants, do not close your eyes to their minor requirements and needs because small favours often bear better fruits though careful attention to major necessities is very important. Among the military officers those should receive your highest respect and consideration who pay most attention to the needs of the soldiers under their command who come forward to help the soldiers with their personal means and property so that the soldiers may lead a happy and contented life and may have full confidence of the future of their families and children.

If the soldiers are thus satisfied and are free from anxieties and care then they will bravely and wholeheartedly face the conflicts. Your constant attention towards the officers and soldiers will make them love you more and more.

The thing which should most gladden the heart of a ruler is the fact that his State is being ruled on the principles of equity and justice and that his subjects love him. And your subjects will only love you when they have no grievance against you. Their sincerity and loyalty will be proved if they gather around you to support your government, when they accept your authority

without considering it an unbearable burden on their heads and when they do not secretly wish your rule to come to an end. So let them have as many justifiable hopes in you as they can and fulfil as many as you reasonably can. Speak well of those who deserve your praise. Appreciate the good deeds done by them and let these good actions be known publicly.

The correct and timely publicity of noble actions and golden deeds creates more zeal in the minds of the brave and emboldens the cowards and the weaklings. You must know and realize the good deeds done by every single individual so that the credit of noble deeds done by one may not be given to another. Do not underestimate and underpay the good work done. Similarly do not overpay a work simply because it has been done by a very important person and do not let his position and prestige be the cause of overvaluation of the merit of his work and at the same time do not undervalue a great deed if it is done by a very ordinary person or a commoner. Let equity, justice and fairplay be your motto.

When you are faced with problems which you cannot solve or with a difficult situation from which you cannot escape or when uncertain and doubtful circumstances confuse and perplex you, then turn to Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) because Allah has thus ordered those whom He wants to guide. The way to turn to Allah is to act diligently according to the clear and explicit orders given in His Holy Book and to turn to the Holy Prophet (s) means to follow those of his orders about which there is no doubt and ambiguity and which have been generally accepted to be correctly recorded.

So far as dispensing of justice is concerned, you have to be very careful in selecting officers for the same. You must select people of excellent character and high calibre and with meritorious records. They must possess the following qualifications: Abundance of litigations and complexity of cases should not make them lose their temper.

When they realize that they have committed a mistake in judgement they should not insist on it by trying to justify it. When truth is made clear to them or when the right path opens up before them, they should not consider it below their dignity to correct the mistake made or to undo the wrong done by them. They should not be corrupt, covetous or greedy. They should not be satisfied with ordinary enquiry or scrutiny of a case, but should scrupulously go through all the pros and cons, they must examine every aspect of the problem carefully, and whenever and wherever they find doubtful and ambiguous points, they must stop, go through further details, clear the points, and only then proceed with their decisions. They must attach the greatest importance to reasoning, arguments and proofs. They should not get tired of lengthy discussions and arguments. They must exhibit patience and perseverance in scanning the details, in testing the points presented as true, in sifting facts from fiction and when truth is revealed to them they must pass their judgements without fear, favour or prejudice.

They should not develop vanity and conceit when compliments and praises are showered upon them. They should not be misled by flattery and cajolery. But

unfortunately they are few persons having such characteristics. After you have selected such men to act as your judges, make it a point to go through some of their judgements and to check their proceedings. Pay them handsomely so that their needs are fully satisfied and they are not required to beg or borrow or resort to corruption. Give them such a prestige and position in your State that none of your courtiers or officers can overlord them or bring harm to them. Let judiciary be above every kind of executive pressure or influence, above fear or favour, intrigue or corruption. Take every particular care of this aspect because before your appointment this State was under the sway of corrupt, time-serving and wealth-grasping opportunists who were lewd, greedy and vicious and who wanted nothing out of a State but a sinful consent of amassing wealth and pleasures for themselves.

Then come the officers of your State. You must supervise their work. They must be appointed after a careful scrutiny of their capabilities and characters. These appointments must be made originally on probation without any kind of favouritism being shown or influence being accepted otherwise tyranny, corruption and misrule will reign in your State. While selecting your officers take care to select experienced and honourable persons, members of respectable families who had served Islam during its early days because these are usually of noble character and good repute. They are not greedy and cannot be easily bribed. They mostly have before them the ultimate result of their thoughts and their deeds. Keep them also well-paid so that they may not be tempted to lower their standard of morality and may not misappropriate the cash of the State which they hold in their trust and if after being paid handsomely they prove dishonest, then you will be right to punish them. Therefore keep a careful watch over their system of work and rule.

You may also appoint trustworthy and honest men to keep a watch over the activities of these officers. The knowledge that they are being watched secretly will keep them away from dishonesty, misrule, malpractice and tyrannizing the subjects. Protect your government from dishonest officers. If you find any of them dishonest and your confidential intelligence service submits acceptable proofs of his dishonesty, then you must punish him. This may be corporal punishment besides dismissal from service and taking back from him all which he has dishonestly collected. He must be humiliated and must be made to realize the infamy of his wicked deeds. His humiliation and punishment must be given publicly so that it may serve as a lesson and a deterrent to others.

So far as collection of land revenues and taxes are concerned you must always keep in view the welfare of the tax-payers which is of primary importance than the taxes themselves because these taxes and the tax-payers are the original sources on which the welfare of your State and its subjects depend.

A State really lives upon the revenues collected from the tax-payers. Therefore, more importance should be attached to the fertility of land than to the collection of taxes because actual taxable capacity of people rests upon the fertility of the land. The ruler, who does not pay attention to the prosperity of his subjects and fertility of the land but concentrates only on

collection of revenues, lays waste the land and consequently ruins the State and brings destruction to the creatures of Allah. His rule cannot last for long.

If the tax-payers complain to you of the heavy incidence to taxation, of any accidental calamity, of the vagaries of the monsoons, of the recession of the means of irrigation, of floods or destruction of their crops on account of excessive rainfall and if their complaints are true, then reduce their taxes. This reduction should be such that it provides them opportunities to improve their conditions and eases them of their troubles.

Decrease in State-income due to such reasons should not depress you because the best investment for a ruler is to help his subjects at the time of their difficulties. They are the real wealth of a country and any investment on them even in the form of reduction of taxes, will be returned to the State in the shape of the prosperity of its cities and improvement of the country at large. At the same time you will be in a position to command and secure their love, respect and praises along with the revenues. Will that not be a lasting happiness?

Not only this, but your benign rule and humane treatment will so affect them that they will come to your help at the time of your difficulties and you will be able to rely on their support. Your kindness, your clemency and your justice will be a kind of moral training to them, and the contented, happy and prosperous life, for which they will be grateful to you, will be the best support, strongest protection and the greatest treasury for you.

Later if such circumstances arrive that you find yourself in need of their support, their help, their confidence, their wealth and their man-power, then they will have no grudge against you.

Remember, Maalik! If a country is prosperous and if its people are well-to-do then it will happily and willingly bear any burden.

The poverty of the people is the actual cause of the devastation and ruination of a country and the main cause of the poverty of the people is the desire of its ruler and officers to amass wealth and possessions whether by fair or foul means. They are afraid of losing their posts or positions and sway or rule and want to make the most during the shortest time at their disposal. They never learn any lesson from the history of nations and never pay any attention to the commands of Allah.

You will also have to be very careful about your secretaries. You should entrust your work only to those who are the best among them.

Specially the affairs which are of confidential nature and which deal with secrets, and the security of the State should be entrusted only to men of noble character because men who are intoxicated with power, position and prestige carry on propaganda and speak against the government in public, they openly misbehave with you and consider themselves so important as to ignore you or your orders in financial transactions essential to the State, they avoid

placing necessary papers before you or attending to important correspondence.

Particular care should be taken that when the officers make contracts on behalf of the government or sign agreements, these contracts and agreements are not defective or harmful to the State, if they are negotiating any treaties and alliances they do not overlook or forsake the interests of the State or if they find the State in a weak and embarrassing position on account of unfavourable terms of treaties or due to intrigues, they should be able to find sensible ways out of them. See that they know and realize their proper place and rank, because he who does not realize his place and position will never understand those of others.

One more thing about these officers: You must remember not to select them for very important posts and not to trust them completely simply because you have found them honest, diligent, trustworthy and intelligent and have formed a good opinion about them because there are some people who, when it suits them, pretend honesty, diligence and fidelity and can put on the garb of piety and virtue and thus find their ways in the hearts of the rulers, though actually they are neither honest nor diligent nor wise nor sagacious. Therefore, you must always look to the record or reputation of the services of such men during previous regimes; more importance should be attached to their good reputation. This kind of selection and supervision will prove that you are faithful to Allah and that you wish your Imam well.

Thus you must appoint one officer as the Head of each important branch of your government. He should have knowledge and wisdom enough to cope successfully with all the intricate problems of his department and should be diligent enough to cope with extensive work.

Remember well that if there is any defect in your officers and you are tolerating it, then you and only you are responsible for all those evils.

I want to advise you about your businessmen and industrialists. Treat them well, and order your officers to follow the same policy.

There may be local businessmen carrying on their trade in certain places or those who send their merchandise from one place to another. There may even be those who import and export goods. Similarly there may be industrialists and manufacturers as well as industrial labour or men engaged in the handicrafts. They all deserve sympathy, protection and good treatment.

They all are the sources of wealth to the country. They provide goods for the consumers. Most of these traders carry and convey these goods from across deserts, seas and over open lands and mountains, their consignments are brought from distant lands, often from places which are not easy to approach and where usually people do not care or do not dare to go. These businessmen are usually peace-loving people, not given to mischievous disturbances and seditious fomentation. You must look after their interest and protect them whether they are trading in your cities or towns or whether they are travelling over the countries carrying goods from place to place.

One more thing about these traders and industrialists. While treating them most sympathetically you must keep an eye over their activities as well.

You know they are usually stingy misers, intensely self-centered and selfish, suffering from the obsession of grasping and accumulating wealth.

They often hoard their goods to get more profit out of them by creating scarcity and by indulging in black-marketing. Such a condition is extremely injurious to the public on one hand and disgraceful to the ruler on the other.

You must put a stop to all such practices because the Holy Prophet (s) has explicitly prohibited such practices. Remember that trade should go on between the buyers and sellers according to correct measures and weights and on such reasonable terms that neither the consumers nor the suppliers should have to face losses. But even with all the sympathetic treatments accorded to them and with all the facilities provided to them, if the traders and industrialists carry on hoarding and black-marketing, then you must punish them according to the intensity of their crime.

Then I want to caution you about the poor. Fear Allah about their conditions and your attitude towards them. They have no support, no resources and no opportunities. They are poor, they are destitute and many of them are cripples and unfit for work. Some of them come out begging and some (who maintain self-respect) do not beg, but their conditions speak of their distress, poverty, destitution and wants. For the sake of Allah, Maalik, protect them and their rights. He has laid the responsibility of this upon your shoulders. You must fix a share for them from Baytul Mal (the Government Treasury). Besides this reservation in cash, you must also reserve a share in kind of crops etc. from government granaries in cities where food-grains are stored as are cultivated on State-owned land because in these storage the share of those living far away from any particular city is equal to the share of those living nearby.

Let me remind you once again that you are made responsible for guarding the rights of the poor people and for looking after their welfare. Take care that the conceit of your position and vanity of wealth may not deceive you to lose sight of such a grave and important responsibility. Yours is such an important post that you cannot claim immunity from the responsibility of even minor errors of commission or omission with an excuse that you were engrossed in the major problems of the State which you have solved diligently.

Therefore, be very careful of the welfare of the poor people. Do not be arrogant and vain against them. Remember that you have to take particular care of those who cannot reach you, whose poverty-stricken and disease-ridden sight may be hateful to you, and whom society treats with disgust, detestation and contempt. You should be a source of comfort, love and respect to them. Appoint a respectable, honest and pious person - a person who fears Allah and who can treat them honourably, order him to find out everything about them and to submit a report to you.

Then treat these poor people in such a way that on the Day of Judgement you can plead your case successfully before Allah because of all classes of your subjects this class deserves more of your attention, sympathy and fair-deal.

Though everyone of these poor persons deserves your sympathy and you will have to do justice to His cause to achieve His favour, yet you should pay more attention to young orphans and old cripples. They neither have any support nor can they conveniently come out begging. They cannot reach you; therefore, you must reach them.

Remember that the fulfillment of this obligation and duty is considered as a tiresome burden by most of the rulers but to those who desire to achieve His Blessings and to enter into His Realm, even this work seems light and congenial. They bear it happily, dutifully and sincerely. They find pleasures in it and they believe in the promise made by Allah.

Out of your hours of work, fix a time for the complainants and for those who want to approach you with their grievances. During this time you should do no other work but hear them and pay attention to their complaints and grievances. For this purpose you must arrange public audience for them during this audience, for the sake of Allah, treat them with kindness, courtesy and respect. Do not let your army and police be in the audience hall at such times so that those who have grievances against your regime may speak to you freely, unreservedly and without fear.

All this is a necessary factor of your rule because I have often heard the Holy Prophet (s) saying, "That nation or regime, where that rights of the depressed, destitute and suppressed are not guarded and where the mighty and powerful persons are not forced to accede these rights, cannot achieve salvation". You must remember that in those audiences the most common men will gather. therefore, if you find them misbehaving, becoming unmannerly or if you feel that their talk is irrelevant, tolerate them; do not be rude and do not insult them, so that Allah may be kind and merciful to you and may reward you for obeying His commands explicitly. Treat them courteously, hear their grievances patiently and if you are forced to reject their demands then reject them in such a way that your rejection may please them as much as your grants.

Then there are certain duties which only you will have to perform and which none of your officers can carry out. Among them are replies to the letters of your commissioners and governors and are beyond the jurisdiction or preview of your secretaries. If you find that your officers are not attending as much to the complaints of the public as they should, then you should personally attend to them. You must finish a day's work on that day only because each day will bring its own special work for you. Reserve your best time for prayers to Allah, though every work of the State is the work of Allah, especially, if you are sincere and honest, and if your subjects are happy with your rule and are safe from your oppression.

Among those duties that you are to perform diligently must be your daily prayers. These should be offered sincerely and persistently. You must fix times

for this during days and nights. You must tax your bodily strength for this duty though it may tire you. Your observance of prayers should be sincere and faultless and should neither be so long as to tire out those who follow you in these prayers nor so short as to be faulty and defective because amongst those who follow you during the prayers, there may be some sick persons, while others may have to attend to some important work. When the Holy Prophet (s) sent me to Yemen I asked him how to lead the prayers. He advised me, "Offer prayers like a weak and old person and be kind to the faithful" (so that weak and old persons may follow your prayers easily and happily).

You must take care not to cut yourself off from the public. Do not place a curtain of false prestige between you and those over whom you rule. Such pretensions and show of pomp and pride are in reality manifestations of inferiority complex and vanity. The result of such an attitude is that you remain ignorant of the conditions of your subjects and of the actual cases of the events occurring in the State.

You will fail to realize comparative importance of events taking place and may attach great significance to minor events and may slip over important facts, similarly you may attach importance to mediocre or insignificant people and may ignore real men of consequence; and what is more, you may lose the power of distinction between good and bad and may take one for the other or hopelessly mix up the two. After all a ruler is as much a human being as any other man and he may remain ignorant of facts of which his officers want to keep him in the dark (and on which the public may throw light). Thus truth may get mixed up with falsehood and may not be distinguished because there are no birthmarks on the forehead of truth that it may be easily differentiated from falsehood, one has to search for facts and sift realities from fictions, only then can one reach the truth. Think for yourself, there are only two categories of rulers and you may belong to one of them.

You may either be a pious, sincere and diligent ruler, doing the right thing at the right moment and following the principles of justice and equity and you may be protecting rights of others and doing your best to fulfil your obligations, in that case why hide from the public, why draw a curtain around yourself! Or you may be a miser refusing to be generous to anyone, in that case people will gradually come to know of this trait of your character and will gradually give up asking for favours from you but do not overlook the fact that most of their demands will have nothing to do with your private purse, they will be about the rights of people, obligations of the State, complaints against the State, oppressions, and solicitations of justice, then why try to avoid hearing these requests!

You should never overlook the fact that around the rulers there usually are certain privileged persons (relatives and friends). They may often try to take advantage of their status and may resort to selfishness, intrigues, fraud, corruption and oppression. If you find such people around you then do away with them (however closely connected they may be with you), immediately bring an end to the scandal and clear your surroundings of all such moral and spiritual

filth.

You must never give lands in permanent lease with all proprietary and ownership rights to your friends and relatives. You must never allow them to take possession of the source of water-supply or lands which have special utility for the communes. If they get possession of such holdings they will oppress others to derive undue benefits and thus gather all the fruits for themselves leaving for you a bad reputation in this world and punishment in the next.

Be fair in dispensing justice. Punish those who deserve punishment even though he may be your near relation or a close friend and even if such an action may give you pangs of sorrow and grief. Bear such a sorrow patiently and hope for Divine reward. I assure you this will bear good fruits.

If on account of your strict measures people get suspicious of your behaving like a tyrant and oppressor, then come out openly before them and explain to them the reasons of your actions and let them see the facts for themselves and realize the truth. This will give training to your mind, will be an act of kindness to the subjects and the confidence thus reposed in them will make them support justice and truth while you will achieve the end you have in view of obtaining their support in the cause of truth.

If your enemy invites you to a Peace Treaty that will be agreeable to Allah, then never refuse to accept such an offer because peace will bring rest and comfort to your armies, will relieve you of anxieties and worries, and will bring prosperity and affluence to your people. But even after such treaties be very careful of the enemies and do not place too much confidence in their promises because they often resort to Peace Treaty to deceive and delude you and take advantage of your negligence, carelessness and trust. At the same time be very careful, never break your promise with your enemy, never forsake the protection or support that you have offered to him, never go back upon your words, and never violate the terms of the treaty. You must even risk your life to fulfil the promises given and the terms settled because of all the obligations laid by Almighty Allah upon man (in respect to other men) there is none so important as to keep one's promises when made.

Though people may differ in their religions and ideologies and may have divergent views upon various problems of State, yet they all agree that promises when made must be fulfilled. Even the heathens take care to keep the promises made among themselves because they have seen and realised the evil effects of breaking promises. Therefore, take very particular care of promises made, never go back upon the words given, never go into the offensive without previously challenging and giving an ultimatum. Deception and fraud even against your enemy is a deception against Allah and none but a wretched sinner would dare do that.

Allah has given promises and treaties the high rank of being messengers of peace and prosperity and through His Kindness and Mercy has made them a common desire (of keeping promises) in the minds of all men and a common requirement for all human beings. He has made them such a shelter and asylum that everybody

desires to be under their protection.

Therefore, there should be no mental reservation, no fraud, no deception and no underlying meanings in between the lines when you make a promise or conclude a treaty. Do not use such words and phrases in your promises and treaties as have possibilities of being translated in more than one way or as may have various interpretations and many explanations, let there be no ambiguity in them, and let them be clear, precise and to the point. And when once a treaty has been finally concluded, do not try to take advantage of any ambiguous word or phrase in it. If you find yourself in a critical situation on account of the treaty made in the cause of Allah, then try to face the situation and bear the consequences bravely and do not try to back out of the terms that account, because to face such perplexing situations as may gain His Rewards and Blessings is better than to break your promises on that account and earn that about which you feel nervous and for which you will have to answer Allah and which may bring down His Wrath upon you in this world and damnation in the next.

Beware of the sin of shedding blood without religious justification and sanction because there is nothing quicker to bring down the Wrath of Allah, to take away His Blessings, to make you more deserving of His Wrath and to reduce the span of your life than to shed innocent blood. On the Day of Judgement Allah will first attend to sins of bloodshed carried out by man against man. Therefore, never try to strengthen your power, position and prestige by shedding innocent blood. Such murders instead of making your position strong will not only considerably weaken it but may also transfer your power totally, taking it away from you and entrusting it to somebody else.

If you have intentionally murdered a man then no excuse shall be acceptable to Allah or to me because punishment of such a crime is necessary.

And if you kill a man by mistake without any intention or motive of killing or while delivering legal penalties, your whip, sword or hand unintentionally and inadvertently deals a fatal blow because even a forcefully delivered slap or box on the ear may cause death, then do not, on account of your prestige and position, refuse paying the compensation to the heirs.

Beware and do not develop the trait of self-admiration and self-appreciation. Do not get conceited of the good points that you find in your good character or good deeds that you have done. Do not let flattery and cajolery make you vain and egoist. Remember that of all the cunning ruses of the devil to undo good deeds of the pious people and to affect their piety, flattery and false praises are the ones on which it relies the most.

Do not boast of the favours and kindnesses that you have done to your subjects and do not try to make them realise this, do not think too much of the good that you have done to them, and do not go back upon the promises made, all these three habits are very ugly features of one's character. The practice of boasting over the favours done undoes the good done, the habit of exaggerating and thinking very highly of our good actions will make us lose the guidance of

Allah, and the habit of breaking one's promises is disliked both by Allah and by man. The Merciful Allah says, "It is most hateful in the sight of Allah, to say something and not to practice it." [Qur'an, 61:3].

Do not be hasty and do not precipitate your decisions and actions, when the time comes for an action to be done, or a decision to be taken, then do not be lazy and do not waste time and do not show weakness. When you do not find a true way to do the thing on hand, then do not persist on the wrong way and when find a correct solution, then do not be lethargic in adopting it.

In short do everything at a proper time and in a proper way and keep everything in its proper place.

Do not reserve for yourself anything which is a common property of all and in which others have equal rights. Do not close your eyes from glaring malpractice of the officers, miscarriage of justice and misuse of rights because you will be held responsible for the wrong thus done to others. In the near future your wrong practices and maladministration will be exposed and you will be held responsible and punished for the wrong done to the helpless and oppressed people. Take care and keep control over you temper, your anger and your desire to be arrogant and vain. Take care of your hands when you are out to deliver punishment and of the sharpness of your tongue when you are saying harsh things. The best way to achieve this is not to be hasty in making remarks and to delay in delivering punishment so that you may keep your temper under control and are not overexcited.

And you cannot achieve this unless you constantly remember that you have to return to Allah and unless His fear overcomes every other sentiment.

You must always try to remember the good and useful things done in the past, activities of a just and benign regime, good deeds done by it, good laws promulgated, instructions of the Holy Prophet (s), commands of Allah given in His Holy Book and things that you have seen me doing or have heard me saying. Follow the good actions and advice found therein. Similarly, follow carefully the pieces of advice contained in these orders. Through them I have tried to teach you all that can be taught about a good regime. I have done my duty towards you so that you may not go astray and your mind may not crave for base desires. If it does then you will have no excuse before Allah.

I beseech Allah that by His Limitless Mercy and by His Supreme Might He may grant our prayers, that He may lead both of us to the Divine Guidance of achieving His Pleasure, of successfully pleading our cases before Him, justifying our deeds before man, of gaining good repute, of leaving good results of our benign and just rule with ever expanding prosperity and ever increasing welfare of the State and of meeting our ends as martyrs and pious persons, as our return is towards Him only.

May the peace of Allah be upon the Holy Prophet (s) and His chosen descendants.

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Letter 54

This is a letter written by Imam Ali (a) to Talha and Zubayr and sent to them through Imran bin Hasin Khuza'i. Imran was a companion of the Holy Prophet (s). He had embraced Islam before the Battle of Khaybar and from then onwards he remained in his company. He was a very pious person and one of the very authentic narrators of the traditions of the Holy Prophet (s). Besides Nahjul Balaagha, this letter has also been narrated by Abu Ja'far Iskaafi in his famous book "Al-Maqamat fi Manaqib Amir al-Mu'minin".

You may try as much as you like to hide the fact and to draw a curtain over it but both of you know very well that I did not approach the people to get their oath of allegiance but they came to me with their desire to make me their Amir (ruler). I did not extend my hands towards them so that they might swear the oath of allegiance to me but they themselves extended their hands towards me. And you two were among those who had flocked around me to swear the oath.

You all came to me to take the oath not because you were afraid of my power to oppress or tyrannize you, nor did you expect any monetary gain from me. If you two had taken the oath of allegiance of your own free will and without any compulsion, then do not break this oath, come back to it, repent before Allah of your having broken the oath. And if your action of swearing the oath of allegiance was not a sincere act done with pleasure and free-will, then your behaviour of pretending obedience and fidelity in the beginning and revolting against me at a later time does not speak well of your character and which serves as an argument in my favour and against you.

Upon my life you had no more pressing need than other Muhajirs to hide your real intentions from me and to hypocritically pretend fidelity and allegiance. In fact there was more justification then for you not to swear the oath of allegiance and not to offer your fidelity than to go back upon your oath and promise now.

You two were wealthy people and had your clans to support and back you. Those clans were then as they are now, powerful tribes. You were not forced to come and take the oath. Do you know what made you then behave like a hypocrite and now like a freed-slave? They were your ulterior motives.

You are telling people that I am responsible for the murder of Caliph Uthman. To bear witness to the fact as to who is responsible for the murder of the Caliph, you two or I, there are people in Madina, who are impartial. They have never sided you or me and have kept themselves aloof from me from the very beginning. Shall we ask their opinion as to who is responsible for this assassination? Their opinion will settle the question once and for all, will lay the responsibility on proper shoulders and will disclose the part each one of us has played of helping the caliph as much as possible or exciting the people against him and aiding and abetting the murder.

My respected friends! Give up your present attitude though I know that by declaring the falsity of your position today you stand the chance of being

ridiculed and disgraced yet by persisting in your wrong and wicked attitude you will tomorrow certainly earn the disgrace in this world as well as the punishment in the next.

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Letter 55

A letter to Mu'awiya.

You must know and understand that Allah has made this world a place where one is to stay only to provide for a happy life for himself in the Hereafter by his deeds. People are put to test here so that they may be rewarded according to their merits.

Our life does not end here and we are not created only for this world. Nor are we ordered to concentrate our energies only to acquire pleasures, power and pomp here. We are brought here simply to be tested in accordance to our knowledge, intentions and activities.

You are being tested through me and I am being tested through you. Each one of us is to be an evidence of the demonstration of the intentions and deeds of the other - whether they have been pious or sinful. You began by misinterpreting the Holy Qur'an and on the basis of these misinterpretations you started grasping power and wealth and began oppressing and tyrannizing the people. Your next unholy action was to call me responsible for an action (murder of Caliph Uthman) of which my tongue and hands were both innocent.

You with the Syrians tried your best to bring this deed to my door. The learned from your side persuaded the ignorant and influential people, and drove the commoners to rise against me.

Fear Allah and do let Satan drive you wherever it wants, think of death and the life after death because that is the only resting-place for you and me and for every human being. Be afraid of the Wrath of Almighty Allah which may throw you into such a calamity that it will not only be an end of you but an end of your dynasty.

I swear, and my oath is such that I have no intention of breaking it, that if fate so arranges as to bring us face to face against each other then I shall not leave the battlefield: "Until Allah judges between us, and He is the best Judge" [Qur'an, 7:87].

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Letter 56

When Imam Ali (a) appointed Shuray bin Hani as commanding officer of the vanguard of his army, which was marching towards Syria, he gave Hani the following instructions.

Day and night keep the fear of Allah in your mind. Be afraid of this alluring and vicious world, never trust it. If you do not check yourself from the desire

of acquiring inordinate things then your mind will surely drive you towards losses. Therefore, have a complete watch and command over yourself and at the time of anger and annoyance see that you do not lose your temper.

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Letter 57

While leaving Madina for Basra, Imam Ali (a) wrote the following letter to the people of Kufa. It is a wonderful epistle. It invites people to judge his intentions and actions.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you that I am leaving this city either as an oppressor or oppressed, either I am revolting against the people or some of them have conspired to revolt against the people or against me. Whatever the case may be I invite in the Name of Allah those to whom this letter reaches, to come and see for themselves whether I am in the right or on the wrong. If they find me on the path of truth and justice they may help me and if they find that I am on the wrong then they can reason me out of it.

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Letter 58

A letter sent by Imam Ali (a) to the people of various provinces, giving them the causes of the Battle of Siffin.

The thing began in this way: We and the Syrians were facing each other while we had common faith in one Allah, in the same Prophet (s) and on the same principles and canons of religion. So far as faith in Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) was concerned we never wanted them (the Syrians) to believe in anything over and above or other than what they were believing in and they did not want us to change our faith. Both of us were united on these principles. The point of contention between us was the question of the murder of Uthman. It had created the split. They wanted to lay the murder at my door while I am actually innocent of it.

I advised them that this problem cannot be solved by excitement. Let the excitement subside, let us cool down; let us do away with sedition and revolt; let the country settle down into a peaceful atmosphere and when once a stable regime is formed and the right authority is accepted, then let this question be dealt with on the principles of equity and justice because only then the authority will have power enough to find the criminals and to bring them to justice. They refused to accept my advice and said that they wanted to decide the issue on the point of the sword.

When they thus rejected my proposal of peace and kept on sabre rattling threats, then naturally the battle, which was furious and bloody, started. When they saw defeat facing them across the battlefield, when many of them were killed, and many more wounded, then they went down on their knees and proposed the same thing, which I had proposed before the bloodshed had begun.

I accepted their proposal so that their desire might be fulfilled, my intentions of accepting the principles of truth and justice and acting according to these principles might become clear and they might have no cause to complain against me.

Now whoever adheres firmly to the promises made will be the one whose salvation will be saved by Allah and one who will try to go back upon the promises made, will fall deeper and deeper into heresy, error and loss. His eyes will be closed to realities and truth in this world and he will be punished in the next world.

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Letter 59

To Aswad bin Qatiba, the Governor of Hulwan.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you that if a ruler develops different inclinations and favours about different people over whom he rules, then his treatment with them will not be on the basis of equity and impartiality. And this will not allow him to be just and fair to all. But so far as justice and equity are concerned your treatment of all should be fair and unprejudiced. Remember that nothing can compensate for tyranny and oppression.

Keep yourself away from what you consider bad and evil in others. Try your best to fulfill the obligations laid down by Allah upon you and keep on hoping for His Reward and fear His Wrath because this world is a place for trials and tests and whoever wastes his time here will repent in the Hereafter.

Remember that nothing will ever make you independent of the Blessings of Allah and He has made it incumbent upon you to have complete control over your own self, that you, to the best of your ability, protect and guard the people over whom you rule. In this way you will be benefited more than others whom you benefit.

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Letter 60

The following is a circular-letter sent to those governors and State officers, through whose territory the armies of Imam Ali (a) were to pass.

From the creature of Allah Ali bin Abi Taalib (a) to the governors and the collectors of those provinces through which his armies are to pass.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s), be it known to you that I am sending some detachments of army which will, Allah willing shortly pass through your cities and provinces. I have issued them the orders which Allah wants them to obey: They should not molest anybody or harm any person or anything. I want to inform you and your subjects that if the soldiers misbehave themselves or if they take anything, their action is against my orders.

Except for the condition that they accidentally fall short of the ration and can find no way to appease their appetite, if they take anything from anybody they are to be punished. You may punish them. But take care and do not allow the foolish and insolent people of your place to quarrel with them or insult them or interfere with or obstruct the things that I have permitted them. I shall also be following the army. You may report to me of any excess or violence committed within your jurisdiction, of any awkward and difficult position in which you find yourself, or of any harshness or atrocity which was perpetrated in your province and which you cannot redeem without the help of Allah and your Imam. If you report all such affairs to me, Allah willing I shall attend to them and settle them to the satisfaction of all.

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Letter 61

A letter from Imam Ali (a) to Kumayl bin Ziyad Nakha'i, expressing his displeasure and rebuking him in leaving his province unguarded and allowing the army of the enemy to enter and carry on loot. He was the Governor of Hayit and had not properly defended the province against the Syrian guerrillas. After their attack and loot he wanted permission of Imam Ali (a) to take revenge upon the Syrian province of Kirkisiya. Imam Ali (a) replied to him in the following letter.

It is wrong to a person to disregard and neglect the duty entrusted to him and try to take up the work entrusted to somebody else and at a time when he is not required to do it. Such an attitude indicates a weak and harmful mentality. Your desire to invade Kirkisiya and to leave your province undefended and unattended shows the confusion of your mind. By such an action you will convert yourself into a kind of bridge which your enemy can cross conveniently to reach your friends.

Thus you will be a useless auxiliary who has neither power nor prestige nor dignity, who cannot stop his enemy's in-roads, nor can crush him, and who cannot defend his subject nor can he be of any use or help to his ruler.

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Letter 62

A letter to the Egyptians which Imam Ali (a) handed over to Maalik bin Haarith Ashtar to take with him when he was appointed as the Governor of that province.

The Almighty Allah, Glory be to Him, entrusted our Holy Prophet (s) with the mission of warning the people of the evil effects of their vicious actions and of bearing testimony to the truth actually taught and preached by other prophets. When the Holy Prophet (s) passed away, the Muslims started a tug-of-war for the caliphate. I swear by Allah that at that juncture it could not even be imagined that the Arabs would snatch the seat of the caliphate from the family and descendants of the Holy Prophet (s) and that they would be swearing the oath of allegiance for the caliphate to a different person.

At every stage I kept myself aloof from that struggle of supremacy and power-politics till I found the heretics had openly taken to heresy and schism and were trying to undermine and ruin the religion preached by our Holy Prophet (s). I felt afraid that, even after seeing and recognizing the evil, if I did not stand up to help Islam and the Muslims it would be a worse calamity to me than my losing authority and power over you, which was only a transient and short-lived affair. Therefore, when I stood up amidst the sweeping surge of innovations and schism the dark clouds of heresy dispersed, falsehood and schism were crushed and the religion was saved.

I swear by Allah that if I alone come out to face them and if all the world joins them, I shall neither feel nervous nor will I attach any care to their following. By the Grace of Allah, I know fully well what kind of reprobates they are and how they persist in vice and sin.

I am very anxious to reach the Realm of Allah and I earnestly hope and pray for His Blessings and Favours. But it grieves me to see that this nation and country is being ruled by uneducated, unwise and vicious rulers. They grasp the wealth of the country and drive its people into slavery. They hate pious and good people and quarrel or fight with them. They gather heretics and sinners around them and are happy in such company. You have had experience of some of them. One of them was punished for drinking wine. Among this crowd there is a man who did not embrace Islam until he found Islam to be not a faith or religion but a powerful State offering enormous possibility of gaining power and wealth.

If I had no desire of saving Islam and Islamic society from the influence and sway of such people, I would not have called you for Jihad, I would not have tried to make you see the reality of the situation, I would not have exerted myself to assemble you and I would not have persuaded you to defend the cause of Allah and finding you so indifferent towards the good of Islam and observing your reluctance to help its cause, I would have left you to your condition.

Do you not see and realize that the boundaries of your State are getting shorter and shorter daily and parts of your kingdom are being snatched and usurped, your properties are being confiscated and your cities are being invaded. May Allah have Mercy upon you. Come out to defend your country, your property and your religion from the in-roads of your enemies. Do not be lazy, careless and cowardly, otherwise your lot will be only disgrace.

Remember, a warrior is always wary and vigilant and never careless and negligent. Whoever is careless about his cause, his enemy will not sleep over this advantage.

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Letter 63

Abdullah bin Qays, better known in history as Abu Musa Ash'ari, was a man with weak faith, more inclined to look after his worldly interest than the cause of religion. At the beginning of the Caliphate of Imam Ali (a) he was in Kufa.

When he learnt that Talha and Zubayr along with Ummul Mu'minin, Aisha, had revolted against the Caliphate of Imam Ali (a) and had declared a war against him and had made Basra as their Headquarters and Imam Ali (a) had also started mobilising an army against them and had invited the people of Kufa to join that army, after realizing that the party of Talha and Zubayr was also a very rich and influential group and that it would be a wise action to be friendly with both the parties, he started saying, "Though Ali was the lawful caliph of Muslims, yet it was not correct for him to fight against other Muslims". Imam Ali (a) came to know that Abu Musa though professing his faith in him, was yet persuading people not to help him (Imam Ali (a)). Thereupon, he sent the following letter to Abu Musa through Imam Hasan (a).

From the creature of Allah, Ali bin Abi Taalib to Abdullah bin Qays (Abu Musa Ash'ari).

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) let it be known to you that I have received reports which may be considered favourable to you, and yet at the same time may be deemed against you (that you on one hand declare me to be a lawful caliph and in the same breath you persuade others not to come to my help). As soon as my messenger reaches you, get ready, come out of your retreat, invite your people to join me and come yourself. If you are convinced that I am on the right side, then you must come to my help and if you feel uncertain, nervous or timid, then get you gone.

I swear by Allah that I shall not let you waver or adopt a double-cross policy. I shall not allow you to sit peacefully at home with a double face, one for each party and I shall expose you to the people. You will find yourself under suspicion from either group and you will be forced to declare your true inclinations.

This revolt which has made Basra as its Headquarters is not an easy joke as you have imagined it to be. It is a great tragedy and it shall have very far-reaching effects. It has to be faced with the calamities which accompany it or which will follow it. It will have to be fought and to get the better of. Therefore, I advise you to think carefully, control your weak and wavering mind and face your lot bravely. And if you are not satisfied with me or have no faith in me then you can with complete freedom go to the other side. You have my unreserved permission. But I am sure you will not be welcomed there.

And if you remain in my camp I shall not allow you to enjoy a restful sleep when Islam itself is in troubles and at war with the rebels. I swear by Allah that this decision of mine is the right step of a faithful Muslim in the right direction.

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Letter 64

A reply to Mu'awiya's letter.

It is correct as you say that in pre-Islamic days we were united and at peace

with each other. But have you realized that dissensions and disunity between us started with the dawn of Islam. The reason was that we accepted and preached Islam and you remained heathen. The condition now is that we are faithful and staunch followers of Islam and you have revolted against it. Even your original acceptance was not sincere, it was simple hypocrisy. When you saw that all the big people of Arabia had embraced Islam and had gathered under the banner of the Holy Prophet (s) you also walked in (after the Fall of Makkah.)

In your letter you have falsely accused me of killing Talha and Zubayr, driving Ummul Mu'minin Aisha from her home at Madina and choosing Kufa and Basra as my residence. Even if all that you say against me is correct you have nothing to do with them, you are not harmed by these incidents and I have not to apologize to you for any of them.

You have threatened that you are coming out to fight against me with a large horde of Muhajirs and Ansar. Do tell me who these Muhajirs are? The door of Hegira (Migration of Muslims to save their lives from the hands of unbelievers of Quraysh) was already closed on the day your elder brother, Yazid bin Abi Sufyan was taken prisoner and Makkah was surrendered by your father and the process of migration had ceased as soon as your paganism ceased. (The Holy Prophet (s) had said that there would be no Hegira after the victory of Makkah).

Are you so anxious for a battle? Wait! You may get it to your heart's content. I may come out myself to meet you which will be a correct gesture on my part because Allah may have destined me to punish you for your inequities. And if you take the initiative to come out to fight, then it would mean, as a poet of Bani Asad has said "They are facing those furious summer winds which shower sand, rubble and gravel-stones". Remember that I still hold the sword which has sent your maternal grandfather, maternal uncle and your brother to the same resting-place, the Hell.

By Allah, I know you too well to argue with you or to advise you. Apostasy and avariciousness have taken a firm hold of your mind, your intelligence is of inferior order and you cannot differentiate what in the end is good for you and what is not.

It is correct to say about you that you have risen to such dangerous and sinful heights that your fall which is inevitable will lead to an eternal damnation because you are coveting a thing which morally does not belong to you and for which you are religiously most unsuitable and with which you have neither sincere affection nor any affinity or propensity. It had been once usurped from the right person and you now want to retain it for yourself.

How great is the difference between your words and deeds? How much you resemble your maternal and paternal uncles, whose ill-luck persuaded them to deny and repudiate the Holy Prophet (s) and to fight against him and everyone of whom was at last doomed to die. You know very well that they could not protect themselves or protect the cause they were challenging to men who were energetic and brave and were present in every battlefield to defend the cause of Islam.

You have also written so much about the murderers of Caliph Uthman. The correct thing for you to do is to take the oath of allegiance to me as others have done and present the case in my court of justice and then I shall pass my judgement according to the tenets of the Holy Qur'an. But what you are desiring now is a deceit usually played upon babies when they are to be checked from breast feeding.

May the Peace of Allah be upon those who deserve it.

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Letter 65

A letter to Mu'awiya.

There is still time left for you to see the realities which are bright enough to be seen and derive the benefit from the knowledge thus gained. But you are following in your ancestors' footsteps in trying to prove falsehood to be true, in seducing people with lies and false hopes, in claiming a thing far above your merits and capacities and in grasping things which religion prohibits to you.

This is so because you want to escape from truth, from religion and from Allah. And you have denied and refused to accept realities which, if you realize, are more important to you than your own flesh and blood. These are the realities about which you have been repeatedly told and often been made to understand.

Now tell me, if you disown truth and religion what will remain with you but plain and evident apostasy and utter reprobation, and if you refuse to accept the truth as told by Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) what you will believe in is but foolish, superstitious and irrational fears. Therefore, do not give away to doubts (about the truth which Islam has proclaimed) and do not be misled by schism into blind alleys. Beware that sinful temptation has drawn heavy curtains and the darkness they create in blinding you to your reason.

I received your letter. I do not know what to think about it. To me it appears to be an idiotic confusion of irrelevant ideas. Reconciliation, treaty and peace are not the things which you want to offer or to accept. What your letter contains is only disjointed words and meaningless phrases. It has been worded by somebody who has neither knowledge nor reasoning, who can neither offer anything nor invite an offer.

By writing such an idiotic letter you have placed yourself in the position of a man who has been stuck in a sack or one who is groping his way in darkness.

It will be a great misfortune for Muslims if you become their despotic ruler after me, be it the whole Islamic State or any small part of it. May Allah protect them in such a calamity. Allah forbids that I appoint you a governor of any province or willingly allow you to control destinies of Muslims of any part of the State.

Be reasonable and act rationally because if you miss this chance you will find

yourself in a very serious situation when faithful Muslims attack you and what can be accepted of you today will not then be acceptable.

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Letter 66

A letter to Abdullah bin Abbas. Ibn Abbas said that except the advice and sayings of the Holy Prophet (s) no other advice benefited him more than this. A variation of this letter has appeared earlier on - see Letter 22.

Sometimes a man feels very happy for getting a thing which was actually destined for him and feels sorry for not getting a thing which he was not destined to get. Therefore, you should not feel happy if your desires are fulfilled and should not feel sorry for deprivations. (Leave everything to the Will of Allah). You should not consider the achievements of the pleasures of life or opportunities of revenge for wrongs done to you as the main blessings bestowed upon you but you must feel happy for good deeds that you have provided for the Hereafter. You must feel sorry for the wealth that you have left without spending it on good causes and the opportunities you have lost of doing noble and pious deeds. Nothing should worry you but the idea of death and the life after death.

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Letter 67

A letter to Qutham bin Abbas (brother of Abdullah bin Abbas), who was the Governor of Makkah.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) be it known to you that you should make all the necessary arrangements for the festival of Hajj and remind people of the importance of the Days of Allah (days reserved for special religious functions, for instance, Eid, Hajj, Ramadhan, etc.) and how they are to be observed. Hold meetings and audiences (during these days) in the mornings and evenings. Give proper answers and guidance to those who ask questions about religion and religious observances and functions. Educate those who are ignorant. Hold discussions and exchange views with educated and learned people. None should carry your message to the people but your tongue and let none come between you and those who want to approach you (not even a door-keeper or a guard).

Do not let the deserving and needy people go from you with empty hands, if they come to ask favour of you. Remember that if you once send away a really needy person with a curt refusal, and if you grant the favour on his second approach, you will not get the credit of being sympathetic and generous to him.

Beware of the Public Treasury. Spend its money on the poor people of your province. Find them out (if they do not come to you) and meet their necessities. If any surplus amount is left over after such expenditure then send the amount to the centre so that it may meet the requirements of the poor throughout the State.

Order the citizens of Makkah not to charge rent of the quarters they give to the pilgrims because Allah has decreed that in this Holy City the permanent residents and the pilgrims have equal status and rights. May Allah enable us to do the things which He approves and likes.

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Letter 68

Imam Ali (a) wrote this letter to Salman al-Farsi, before his caliphate.

This world is like serpent - so soft to touch yet so lethal in its bite.

Therefore, try to avoid those things of this place which please you or allure you because this world will be with you for a very short time and will be of very little use to you. Do not keep your mind fully engrossed in mundane affairs because you know for certain that you will shortly leave this world.

Be most wary and cautious of this vicious world at times when it allures and pleases you the most because it is an old trick of this world that when a man is most happy with pleasure of owning and possessing it, it suddenly deserts him and when a man is most confident of its protection, help and love, it certainly forsakes him.

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Letter 69

A letter to Harith Hamdani.

Never forsake the orders, instructions and advice given by the Holy Qur'an. So far as presumptions of actions and things, lawful, legitimate and allowable or unlawful, forbidden and prohibited are concerned, accept the rulings of the Holy Book. Confirm and testify the truth said before (religions of ancient prophets). Take lessons from history for your future because history often repeats itself, and future nations of the world will mostly follow the footsteps of those who have passed. But this whole world is going to end and every individual has to leave it some day or the other.

Keeping in mind the Might of Allah, be particularly careful not to swear by Him unless you are taking an oath for a true and lawful affair. Always remember death and the life after death but never wish for death. If you want to face death then do it for a great cause.

Try to avoid all those things which a man may like for himself and may grudge for others. Abstain from an action which you will have to do covertly and secretly and which you feel ashamed to do openly. Refrain from a deed which you will have to accept as evil or bad or for which you will have to tender an apology or excuse.

Do not acquire a bad reputation and do not allow your good reputation to be sullied. Do not mention hearsay things as authenticated facts, such a practice will be sufficient for you to be regarded by others as liar. Do not develop the habit of contradicting and falsifying others on every occasion, it is a

disgusting habit.

Have a control on your temper. If you have power to retaliate, then forgive and forget. When in anger, be forbearing, patient and tolerant. When you are in possession of wealth, power and authority, then be forgiving, merciful and compassionate. These traits will help you to gain your salvation.

Be sincerely thankful for all the Blessings which the Merciful Allah has granted you, pray for their continuance, do not misuse them and do not waste them and you must show by your deeds the extent of your obligations to Him for His Blessings.

Remember that among the faithful Muslims the best is he who gives out alms and charities on his own behalf and on behalf of his family and his property.

Whatever you spend in this way is something that you send in advance for your life after death. You will then receive the reward of such deeds. And whatever you leave here will be used by others and you will get no benefit out of it.

Avoid the company of men who are weak in their decisions and views, who are superstitious and wicked because people are judged by the company they keep. If possible try to live in large cities because they are the centres of Islamic Culture and Islamic traditions. Avoid places where time is wasted in pastimes and amusements, where there are concentrations of ignorant people and where you find scarcity of companions or lack of society and surroundings to carry on your religious functions.

Keep yourself busy with your work and do not frequent abodes meant for vicious pursuits because they are centres of the activities of Satan and the places which spread vice and wickedness.

Always look to the conditions of people not so well off as you are because observation of their lives and positions will make you more content with your lot in life and more thankful to Allah for it.

Never start on a travel on Fridays without attending Friday prayers unless you are going out for Jihad or there is no alternative for you but to set out.

In all of your affairs keep the thought of Allah in your mind and act according to His Commands and interdictions because obedience to His Orders has priority over every other thing. By various means and in various ways persuade yourself towards prayers but do not be hard with yourself, be gentle and persuasive.

When you are free from other duties and you are having good health then spend your free hours in prayers. But the question of offering daily prayers (five times a day) is a different question. They have to be offered compulsorily and in time.

Take care that such a calamity may not overtake you that while you are trying to ignore religion and Allah and are running after a vicious world, death overtakes you.

Avoid the company of wicked people because bad company allures a person towards evil ways. Always keep the Might and Majesty of Allah in view and be a friend

of His friends. Be afraid of your own anger because out of the armies of Satan, man's anger is its strongest force.

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Letter 70

A letter written to Suhayl bin Hunayf, the Governor of Madina (and brother of Uthman bin Hunayf) about some Madinites who had left him and gone over to Mu'awiya. The two brothers, Uthman & Suhayl, were favourite companions of Imam Ali (a). Whenever he felt that they had made even a minor error (like attending the dinner of a rich man by Uthman) Imam Ali (a) warned them of the viciousness of such an action.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) be it known to you that I am informed that some Madinites are leaving you covertly and surreptitiously to join the hordes of Mu'awiya. Do not feel sorry for those who have left you and have thus refused you their help and assistance.

Their turning of faces away from Allah and His Guidance and of stealthily walking over to sin and vice is enough proof of their apostasy and schism and enough reason for you to be thankful for good riddance of bad rubbish. These are worldly-minded people. They are drawn towards the vicious world and are running fast after it. They have heard (from the Holy Qur'an, the Holy Prophet (s) and Imam Ali (a)) what equity and justice mean, they have seen a just and equitable rule; they have recognized the implications of these principles and they have fully realized how the use of these principles will bring them in level with the commonest and poorest person of the country and how they will be treated like every other human being. Therefore, they are rushing towards a society where corruption is at premium, where favouritism holds sway and where justice and equity are abhorred.

I swear by Allah that these people are not running away from injustice, inequity, oppression or tyranny, nor are they attaching themselves to truth, justice, equity and fair-play. I pray to Allah to ease the difficulties and remove the obstacles this exodus has created and make our work easy for us.

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Letter 71

Imam Ali (a) had entrusted to Munzir bin Jarud Abdi something which he misappropriated. Thereupon Imam Ali (a) wrote the following letter to him.

The fact is that piety, honesty and righteousness of your father made me misjudge your character. I thought you were a worthy son of a worthy father and were following him in his honesty and righteousness. But all of a sudden I received about you news which confirms the fact that you do not check and control your inordinate desires, that you do not attach any importance to your life after death and you want to adorn and beautify you life at the cost of your salvation and that you are forsaking your religion to provide for your relatives.

If all that is reported to me about you is correct, then the very camel you own or even the strap-shoe is superior to you. You and men of your calibre are not the persons to be confided with the financial affairs of a country or to be assigned to important vacancies of the State or to be entrusted to check and control dishonesty and disloyalty. Therefore, as soon as you receive this letter come back to me.

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Letter 72

A letter to Abdullah bin Abbas.

Remember Ibn Abbas that you cannot over live the span of life allotted to you, nor can you ever get that which has not been destined for you. You must know that this world has two aspects; one of its phases is that sometimes it serves you and works in your favour, and the other is that, it acts against you. This world is a place for empires to come and go; it is an abode of constant change. Here anything and everything which has been destined to do you good will reach you though you may not be strong and fit enough to try for it, and the loss, if it has been decreed for you, will come to you however hard you may try to avoid it.

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Letter 73

A letter to Mu'awiya.

I have become sick of reading your letters and of replying to them. I feel that I have made an error in giving them undue importance and taking them seriously. You are always unreasonable and often irrational. Your sole desire is to make me accept your demand (for allowing your oppressive, tyrannical and apostatic sway over a big province) and for this you have carried on an unending series of correspondence. Your condition is like that of a man who wants to live in a land of happy dreams and does not want to face facts or like the one who is confused and who does not know what to do and where to go and who is unaware of what the future (life after death) has in store for him. I know that you are not a fool but you resemble foolish and unreasonable people.

I swear by Allah that had I not been disinclined to bring harm to you I would have taken the initiative and would have punished you very severely. Beware that Satan has made you incorrigible, it has made you blind to good things as shown by the Holy Prophet (s) and deaf to his teachings.

May the Peace of Allah be upon those who deserve it.

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Letter 74

A treaty which Imam Ali (a) has worded for Bani Rabi'a tribe and the Yemenites to agree upon. Husham bin Sa'ib Kalbi has quoted this treaty.

This is the treaty which has been agreed upon by the Yemenite people, be they urban or rural and pastoral and the people of the Bani Rabi'a tribe, be they dwellers of cities or those living in villages or desert. Through this treaty both the parties have agreed that they will steadfastly adhere to their faith in the Holy Book, will accept its orders and tenets, will invite people towards it and will pass verdicts according to its teachings and rulings that they will accept the call of those who invite them towards this Book and will accept the judgement passed according to it that they will not accept anything in lieu of this Book and will not sell it at any cost, that they will forsake those who forsake this Book and that they will unite to fight against those who go against this Book.

They promise to help each other and to speak with a common voice on affairs of mutual interest. They will not break this agreement on account of excitement or anger of any person or because one participant considers the other humble, weak or powerless, or because one group speaks disparagingly of the other.

Every member of the covenanting party whether present or absent, whether educated or illiterate, wise or ignorant, will stand by this agreement faithfully.

Over and above the terms of this covenant is the promise of its observance which they have made to Allah and for which they will be held responsible.

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Letter 75

After the Muslims took oath of allegiance to Imam Ali (a), he wrote the following letter to Mu'awiya. Waqidi has quoted this letter in his book, al-Jamal.

After glorifying Allah and praising the Holy Prophet (s) be it known to you that you very well know my attitude towards your tribe, why in the beginning I fought against you all in the defense of Islam and how and why later on I kept myself aloof from you and from your activities; I had no concern about your tribe till there took place the incident which could not be prevented. It is a long story and much has been said and is being said about it. However, that was to be. Now you take the oath of allegiance to me from the people of your province and come on deputation to me.

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Letter 76

When Imam Ali (a) sent Ibn Abbas as his representative to Basra, he gave him the following instructions.

Treat people kindly, receive them in audience, do not be very harsh in issuing and enforcing orders, do not lose temper because this weakness is always a good opening for Satan to find its way into your mind. Always keep this in mind that the thing which takes you nearer to Allah will carry you away from Hell and the

thing which drives you away from Allah will drive you towards Hell.

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Letter 77

When Imam Ali (a) sent Ibn Abbas for discussions with the Kharijites, he, peace be upon him, gave him the following instructions.

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

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Letter 78

Abu Musa Ash'ari (Abdullah bin Qays) wrote a letter to Imam Ali (a) from the place where decision of the arbitration took place. Imam Ali (a) wrote to him the following letter in reply. Sayyid bin Yahya Amawi has quoted this letter in his book Al-Maghazi.

Verily there are many people in this world who have forsaken their salvation and in its place they have accepted the pomp and pleasure of worldly life. They are being driven by their unruly and inordinate desires and they work and speak on behalf of these desires only.

This affair has placed me in an awkward position. The people, who have united against me are those who want everything out of this vicious and wicked world for themselves and for their pleasures. They have drawn their swords against me. I am trying to undo the harm they have done but I am afraid lest the problem should become very serious and unresolvable.

You know very well that no one is more desirous of the Unity of Muslims than I and the only thing which I want to achieve by this unity is the Blessings of Allah and my salvation. I shall do what I have resolved to do even though you change the good opinion which you had about me when we last parted. Surely, unfortunate is he who possesses wisdom and acquires experience and yet does not care to make use of either.

I cannot tolerate lies and I cannot bear to see people undoing the good done by Allah through Islam.

Therefore you should give up forming opinion about things which you have not clearly understood or visualized because many people will try their best to influence you with their insinuations.

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Letter 79

This is the order issued by Imam Ali (a) to his generals when he took over rulership of the Muslim State.

Verily, previous rulers have come to sad ends because they prevented people from getting their just rights, they got corrupted and could be purchased, when they were tempted by sins and vices, they were lead astray and they followed the wicked lead.

— Letters from Nahjul Balaagh