



**Compilation of
Imam 'Ali's Words**

Author

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Preface



Ever since the early years of Islam, the eloquent wordings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.), especially his unparalleled sermons, have attracted the attention of the literati as well as the common man. Those familiar with the intricate beauties of the Arabic language, had collected or compiled these precious bezels of wisdom, starting from the lifetime of the Commander of the Faithful. As the historian Abu al-Hasan Mas'udi (d. 346 AH) says:

"What the people had memorised or preserved of (the sayings of) Imam 'Ali (A.S.) and according to which they acted in word and deed, were 400 sermons as well as 80 - odd sermons which had

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delivered extempore." 1

According to the bibliographical works, centuries before Sayyid Razi compiled his magnum opus Nahj al-Balaghah, several scholars had collected in book-form the sayings and judgements of Imam Ali (A.S.). The list is long and is out of scope of this article. However, it would suffice to mention the names of some of the prominent persons whose collections were well known before Razi took up the task:

1. 'Ubaydullah bin Abi Rafi': Shaykh Tusi has stated in al- Fihrist. "'Ubaydullah bin Abi Rafi' is the author of the book Qazaya Amir al-Mu 'minin.
2. Zayd bin Wahab Juhani: Shaykh Tusi in al-Fihrist states: "Zayd bin Wahab is the author a book on the sermons of Amir al- Mu'minin (A.S.), titled Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.) 'ala al- Manabir fi al-Jumu 'ah wa al-A'yad wa Ghayriha."3
3. Muhammad bin Qays Bajalli: According to Shaykh Tusi, he is the author of the book Qazaya Amir al-Mu'minin ('a).4
4. Asbagh bin Nubatah: Shaykh has written in al-Fihrist: "Asbagh ibn Nubatah was one of the close companions of Amir al- Mu'minin (A.S.) who survived the Imam and has narrated the epistle which was written to Malik al-Ashtar on being appointed the governor of Egypt. He is also the narrator of the Imam's long wasiyyah (will) to his son Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah."5
5. Isma'il bin Mihran: Shaykh Tusi says about him: "He was a companion of Imam Reza (A.S.) and has narrated from him. He is the author of several books including the one titled Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu 'minin (A.S.)."
6. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Hashim al-Qummi: Shaykh Tusi says about him: "He was a companion of Imam Reza (A.S.), and of the books which he wrote mention could be made of al-Nawadir and Kitab Qazaya Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.)."
7. Salih bin Abi Hammad Razi: al-Najashi in his Rijal states: "He was a companion of Imam Hadi ('a) and is the author of several books including Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu 'minin ('a)."8
8. Hisham Kalbi (d. 206): al-Najashi says about him: "He is the author of several books including Kitab Khutab Amir al- Muminin ('a)."9 Ibn Nadim also confirms this in his al-Fihrist that Hisham al- Kalbi was the compiler of the sermons of Amir al-Mu'minin ('a).
9. Ibrahim bin Nahmi: Shaykh Tusi and al-Najashi say that he was the author of several books including Kitab al-Khutab.

10. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Mada'ini al- Akhbari: Khawansari says that he was the author of as many as 200 books of had'ith and history including Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). '

11. 'Abd al-' Aziz Jalludi: al-Najashi says in al-Rijal-. He is the author of several books. As related by scholars among his books (on the wordings of Imam 'Ali) are Musnad Amir al- Mu'minin, Kitab al-Khutab (sermons), Kitab al-Shi'r (poems), Kitab al-Qaza' (judgements), al-Rasa'il (letters), Maw'azah(maxims) and Du 'a ' (supplications).

12. 'Abd al-'Azim al-Hasani: His tomb in Rayy is a site of pilgrimage revered as Shah 'Abd al-'Azim, and according to al- Najashi he compiled the book titled Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). 14

13. Ibrahim Thaqafi (d. 283): According to al-Najashi he wrote several books including books on the Rasa 'il, Akhbar and Khutab of Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.).'S

14. Muhammad bin Khalid al-Barqi: According to al-Najashi he wrote several books including Kitab al-Khutab.'6

15. Muhammad bin Ahmad Kufi Sabuni: According to al- Najashi he is the author of several books including Kitab al-Khutab.'7

16. Muhammad bin Isa Ash'ari: He was a companion of Imam Reza and Imam Jawad (A.S.) and has related hadith from them. He is the author of Kitab al-Khutab.'8

17. Jahiz (d. 255): He has collected 100 of the short sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) under the title "Matlub Kull Talib min Kalam Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib". He says in the introduction to his work: "Every single word (of Imam 'Ali) is equal to 1000 words of wisdom expressed by the Arabs." Ibn Maytham Bahrani Rashid al-Din Watwat and "Abd al-Wahhab have written three famous commentaries on this collection."

Furthermore, 'Allamah Tehrani in al-Dhan'ah has listed a great number of the books titled 'Usul" which contained the sermons of Imam 'Ali (A.S.). 20 Nahj al-Balaghah was a high water mark in this regard and created a lively trend in the writing of commentaries on the sayings of the Commander of Faithful. But Razi, as he says in his introduction to Nahj al-Balaghah, had not collected all that was said by Imam 'Ali (A.S.), since it was difficult for him to have access to all that was related from Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). Thus, scholars who came after Razi, continued this trend of collecting and selecting the sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.). Among them mention could be made of the following authors and their works:

1. 'Abd al-Wahed bin Muhammad Tamimi Amudi (d. 510). He compiled the book Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim in which he has collected 11,050 of short sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.), compared to 480 selected by Razi.

2. Abu 'Abdullah Qaza'i (d. 454): He has collected the sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) spread over nine chapters in his book titled: Ma 'alim al-Hukama ' wa Mathurah Makarim al-Shiyam.²¹

3. Shaykh al-Tabrisi (d. 548): He has arranged the sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) in alphabetical order in his book Kitab Nathr al- Lial'i.²²

4. Ibn Abi al-Hadid Mu'tazili (d: 655): In his voluminous commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, he has selected 1,000 sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) that were not mentioned by Sayyid Razi. ²³

Classification of Nahj al-Balaghah

Nahj al-Balaghah is a vast and deep ocean of knowledge that cannot be fathomed easily. Although scholars and researchers have tried to delve into this ocean of wonder, they have not yet succeeded in fully locating or comprehending the pearls of knowledge that the words of Imam 'Ali contain.

The topics or subjects of this immensely rich book are so broad and varied that they cannot be easily enumerated. Thus, those who have focused their research on Nahj al-Balaghah, have endeavoured to identify the subjects of this book to their best ability, yet it could be said that they have succeeded fully in their efforts. Some of the prominent efforts made in this field are as follows:

A. Martyr Murtaza Mutahhari says in his valuable book "Sayri dar Nahj al-Balaghah", that there are quite many subjects and topics in this book which could be broadly defined as follows: ²⁵

1. Theology and the Supernatural / Ilahiyyat wa Mawara ' al-Tabi'ah
2. Manners and Worship / Suluk wa Ibadat
3. Government and Justice / Hakumat wa Idalat
4. World and worldliness / Dunya wa Dunya-Parasti
5. Epic and Bravery / Hamasah wa Shaja'at
6. Poetical Saga and Mysteries / Malahim wa Maghibat

7. Supplications /Du'a wa Munajat
8. Criticism of People's Behaviour
9. Social Principles
10. Islam and Qur'an
11. Ethics and Self-Reform
12. Personalities

B. The Syrian Researcher, Labib Bayzun in his book, Tasnif Nahj al-Balaghah has presented a more precise categorization in this regard. Actually he has categorized the contents of Nahj al- Balaghah under nine general definitions, each of which consists of several subjects -49 in all- and each subject is made up of numerous specific topics numbering 376. His definitions are as follows:

1. Fundamentals of Religion / Usul al-Din
2. Practical Laws of Religion / Furu ' al-Din
3. Leadership and Leaders / al-Imamah wa al-Aimmah
4. Lifestyle of Imam 'Ali ('a) / Sirah al-Imam
5. Wars of the Imam during his caliphate / Hurub al-Imam
6. State Policy / Siyasa al-Dawlah
7. Social Affairs / al-Shu'un al-Ijtima'iyah
8. Man and Personal Affairs / al-Insan wa Shu'unuh
9. Maxims and Advices / al-Mawa'iz wa al-Irshadat

C. In the book al-Dalil 'ala al-Mawzu 'at Nahj al-Balaghah 27 Nahj al-Balaghah has been categorized into 7 broad definitions and 132 specific subjects. The definitions are as follows:

1. Divinity and Universe / al-Ilahiyyat wa al-Ka'inat
2. Prophethood / al-Nabuwwah
3. Fundamentals of Religion and Practical Laws / al-'Aqa'id wa al-Ahkam
4. Leadership and Government / al-Imamah wa al-Khilafah
5. History / al-Tarikh
6. Society, Politics and Economy / al-Ijtima ' wa al-Siyasa wa al-Iqtisad
7. Ethics / al-Akhlaq

D. Uways 'Abd al-Karim Muhammad in his book al-Mu'jam al-Mawzu'i li Nahj al-Balaghah is critical of the methods used by earlier scholars to classify Nahj al-Balaghah. He has pointed out the deficiency in their approach and has categorized Nahj al- Balaghah into 22 sections, each of which contains a number of subjects, which in turn cover many topics. He has listed 604 topics in all.28 The 22 sections in which he has divided the book are as follows

1. Wisdom and Knowledge / al-Aql wa al-Ilm
2. Islam, Faith, Certainty, Disbelief, Polytheism and Doubt / al-islam wa al-Iman -wa al-Yaqin wa al-Kufr wa al-Shirk wa al-Shakk.

3. The Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah / al-Qur'an wa Sunnah al-Nabawiyah
4. Fundamentals of Religion / Usul al-Din
5. Worship, /al- Ibadat
6. Piety and the Pious / al-Taqwa wa al-Muttaqin
7. Fear and Hope /al-Khawf wa al-Raja '
8. Repentance, Forgiveness of Sins / al-Tawbah wa Ghufran al-Dhunub
9. Supplications / al-Du'a wa al-Ad'iyah al-Ma'thurah 'anh
10. Asceticism / al-Zuhd
11. Advices and Moral Lessons /al-Maw'izah wa al-I'tibar
12. Enjoining of Good and Forbidding of Evil / al-Amr Bi al- Ma'rufa al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar
13. Jihad, Battle Technique and Martyrdom / al-Jihad wa Fann al-Harb wa al-Shahadah
14. Islamic Ruler and his Qualities / al-Hakim al-Islami wa Khasa'isuh
15. Economic issues in Nahj al-Balaghah / al-Janib al- Iqtisadi fi al-Nahj al-Balaghah
16. The Greater Jihad or Self-Reform / Jihad al-Akbar aw Tahdhib al-Nafs
17. Ethics / al-Akhlaq
18. Family, Kinsfolk, Spouse, Educating Children and Neighbours / al-Usrah wa al-Aqraba' wa al-Mar'ah wa Tarbiyah al-Abna ' wa al-Jar
19. Friendship and Friends / Al-Sidaqah wa al-Asdiqa '
- 20 Historical Issues / al-Qazaya al-Tarikhhiyyah
21. Judgement and Verdict/ al-Qaza ' wa al-Ifta '
22. Miscellaneous Issues / Mawazi ' Mutafarraqaqah

In addition to the above mentioned scholars and their definitions of the subjects found in Nahj al-Balaghah, several other researchers have listed their own categorization of the jewels of knowledge that this great book contains. Following are names of some of these works and their authors:

1. Faharis (Indices) Nahj al-Balaghah, Subhi Salih 29
2. Al-Had'i ila Mawzu 'at Nahj al-Balaghah, 'Ali Meshkini 30
3. Farhang-e Aftab, 'Abd al-Majid Mu'adikhawah 31'''
4. Qamus Nahj al-Baliighah, 32 Muhammad 'Ali Sharqi"

It is worth noting that in addition to the above-mentioned books and their authors, several researchers have written works on specific topics of Nahj al-Balaghah. The names of some of these books are mentioned below:

1. Hikmat Nazari wa 'Amali dar Nahj al-Balaghah by 'Abdullah Jawadi Amuli; 34
2. Insan Kamil dar Nahj al-Balaghah by Hasan Hasanzadeh Amuli: 35
3. Ilahiyyat dar Nahj al-Balaghah by Lutfullah Safi; 36
4. Dunya dar Nahj al-Balaghah by Sayyid Mahdi Shams al-Din;"37
5. Jahiliyyat az Didgah Qur'an wa Nahj al-Balaghah by Ahmad Sadiqi Ardestani:38
6. Jihad az Didgah Imam 'Ali dar Nahj al-Balaghah by 'Abbas 'Ali 'Amid Zanjani; 39
7. Khawarij az Didgah Nahj al-Balaghah by Husayn Nuri;40
8. Jami'ah az Didgah Nahj al-Balaghah by Waliyyullah Barzegar; 41

9. Hukumat-i Islami dar Nahj al-Balaghah,
produced by a team work. 42

Notes:

1. Mas'udi, Muruj al-Dhahab, vol. 2, p. 19.
2. Tusi, Muhammad bin al-Hasan, al-Fihrist, p. 107, No. 456.
3. Ibid., p. 72, No. 291; al-Najashi, al-Rijal, p. 236.
4. Ibid., p. 131, No. 579.
5. Ibid., p. 37.
6. Ibid., pp. 11 & 32.
7. Ibid., p. 4, No. 3.
8. Al-Najashi, al-Rijal, p. 140.
9. Ibid., p. 306.
10. IbnNadim, al-Fihrist, p. 108.
11. Tusi, p. 6, No. 8; al-Najashi, al-Rijal, p. 14.
12. Khawansari, Muhammad Baqir Musawi, Jannat, vol. 5, p. 199.
13. Al-Najashi, al-Rijal, pp. 167-168
14. 'Allamah Hilli, al-Rijal, p. 130.
15. Al-Najashi, al-Rijal, pp. 13-14.
16. Ibid., p. 236.
17. Ibid., p. 265.
18. Ibid 239
19. This collection was researched and edited by Muhadith Urmawi and published by Tehran University, l 390 AH.
20. Tehrani, Aqa Buzurg, al-Dhari'ah, vol. 7, p. 187, vol. 14, pp. 111-112.
21. This is an offset version by Maktabah al-Mufid of the original edition published in Egypt.
22. Al-Dhari'ah, vol. 24. P. 53.
23. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 4, pp.530-573.
24. The Introduction written by Sayyid Razi to Nahj al-Balaghah.
25. Mutahhari, Murtaza, Sayri dar Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 30-31.
26. Labib Bayzun, Tasnif Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 9-26.
27. Ansariyan, 'Ali, al-Dalil 'ala al-Mawzu'at Nahj al- Balagah, pp. 9-15.
28. Al-Mu'jam al-Mawzu' li Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 464-500.
29. Lebanese researcher Subhi Salih has provided a list of indices at the end of Nahj al-Balaghah and arranged in alphabetical order the subjects he has derived from the book. Under each subject he has referred to the relevant text in Nahj al-Balaghah. There is also a subject-wise list of sermons and letters, while a third list classifies such subjects as matters related to faith, Shari'ah laws, philosophy, theology and social Issues.

30. The author has arranged the topics in Nahj al-Balaghah in alphabetical order, and under each topic, he has presented the relevant text from the book.
31. This is a 10-volume work is a lexicon in alphabetical order on the concepts mentioned in Nahj al-Balaghah. Under each entry, the relevant text from Nahj al-Balaghah together along its Persian translation has been given.
32. Although, this 4-volume book deals with definitions and interpretations of the words of Nahj al-Balaghah, it could also be called a subject-wise classification, since under each phrase, the relevant text is given.
33. There are other classifications, which are under process and have not yet been completed. Refer to "What do we know about Islam?" Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 105-108 & pp. 111-114.
34. Jawadi Amuli, 'Abdullah, Hikmat Nazari wa 'Amali dar Nahj al-Balaghah, Qum, Daftar-i Intisharat Islami, 1362 S, 168pages.
35. Hasanzadah Amuli, Hasan, Insan Kamil dar Nahj al- Balaghah, 3rd edition, Nashr-i Roshangar, 1365 S, p. 176 pages. This book has been translated into Arabic by 'Abd al-Razzaq Iftikhari under the title "al-Insan al-Kamil fi Nahj ul-Bulaghah", and published by Mu'assasah al-Ma-arifal-Islamiyyah. 1416 AH,229 pages.
36. Safi Gulpayegani, Lutfullah, Ilahiyyat dar Nah al-Balaghah, first edition, Bonyad-i Nahj al-Balaghah. 1361 S, 343 pages.
- 37 Shams al-Din, Mahdi, Dunya dar Nahj al-Balaghah, first edition. Ministry of Islamic Culture & Guidance, Tehran, 1365 S, 147 pages.
38. Sadiqi Ardestani, Ahmad, Jahiliyyat az Didgah-i Qur'an wa Nahj al-Balaghah, Nashr-i Muhammad. Qum, 1362 S, 112pages.
- 39 'Amid Zanjani, 'Abbas 'Ali, Jihad az Didgah-i Imam Ali dar Nahj al-Balaghah, 5th edition, Ministry of Islamic Culture & Guidance, Tehran, 1366 S, 174 pages.
40. Nuri, Husayn, Khawarij az Didgah-i Nahj al-Balaghah, Daftar-i Intisharat-i Islami, Qum, 1361 S, 175 pages.
- 41 Barzegar, Waliyullah, Jami'ah az Didgah Nahj al-Balaghah, Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami, Tehran, 1372 S, 447 pages.
- 42 Hukumat-i Islami dar Nahj al-Balaghah, by a group of researchers, Bonyad Nahj al-Balaghah, Tehran, 1368 S, 216 pages.

The Characteristics of the Just and Rightly Guided Imam in Nahjul Balagha

There is a famous tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) recorded by both - the Shias and the Ahle Sunnah traditionalists:

'One who dies without recognizing the Imam of his time, dies the death of ignorance.'

This means that even if a person accepts and conforms to all the Islamic beliefs and puts in practice all the edicts, but dies without recognizing the Imam of his time, his death will be on ignorance and apostasy. Such a person is condemned to eternal Hellfire regardless of his deeds in

this world. This is because good deeds will only benefit a person provided his beliefs are correct, as espoused by the Quran and traditions. Hence, any person, who wants to secure himself from the raging fire of hell, should necessarily possess the recognition of the Imam of his time and not simply rely on his worship and virtuous deeds.

Two kinds of Imams

The Holy Quran has mentioned two types of leaders (Imams). The first type is the one who leads the people towards Hell. Allah declares in Surah Qasas, verse 41,

'And We made them Imams who call to the Fire, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall not be assisted.' It means that the end of the one who accepts such an Imam will be in Hell.

The second group of Imams guides the people by Allah's command. Surah Sajdah, verse 24 points out 'And We made of them Imams to guide by Our command when they were patient, and they were certain of Our communications.' 'Say: Is there any of your associates who guides to the truth? Say: Allah guides to the truth. Is He then Who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed, or he who himself does not go aright unless he is guided? What then is the matter with you; how do you judge?'

(Surah Yunus, Verse 35)

Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) has described the characteristics of both kinds of Imams in his orations. 'The reality of people is not understood by their names but by the pattern of their behavior and mannerisms. Just as clothes hide the defects of the body, external manners cloak the defects of the soul. A connection of the soul is a necessity between the Imam and the follower. If a person (i.e. Imam) is not pious in his own heart, he will not be able to guide his followers towards piety and servitude. Hence if we desire Heaven and want to safeguard our eternal life from the chastisement of the Hellfire, then we have to search for an Imam whose inner and outer selves both are complete manifestations of divine command.

Such an Imam must necessarily be adorned with piety completely, i.e. must be an infallible.

We will discuss the characteristics of the Imam of Hellfire and the Imam who guides to the truth, in the light of the sermons of Hazrat Ali (a.s.).

The Imam of the Hellfire

'...certainly, the worst man before Allah is the oppressive Imam who has gone astray and through whom others go astray. He destroys the accepted Sunnah and revives abandoned innovations. I heard the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) predict - On the Day of Judgment the oppressive Imam will be brought without anyone to support him or anyone to advance excuses on his behalf, and then he will be thrown into Hell, where he will rotate as the hand-mill rotates. Then eventually he will be confined to its hollow.'

(Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 164, vol. 1, pg. 608-609, Ansariyan Publications)

An oppressor is not only the one who usurps the rights of others and persecutes others. The Quran declares, '...and whoever exceeds the limits of Allah these it is that are the unjust.'

(Surah Baqarah, Verse 229)

These include those disobedient of Allah's commands, who have violated His edicts and exceeded His limits. The Quran further proclaims, 'and whoever did not judge by what Allah revealed, those are they that are the unjust.' (Surah Maidah, Verse 45)

If somebody makes additions to the religion or forbids an obligation, he has violated the divine command which tantamount to injustice. Therefore, any person who has not been appointed an Imam by Allah and he claims this position for himself, he has transgressed the limits of Allah and has disregarded Allah's orders. He is a tyrannical and an oppressive leader, whose end has been described above in Hazrat Ali's (a.s.) sermon. Indeed the Holy Quran condemns even those people as oppressors who befriend such persons - '...and whoever makes friends with them, these are the unjust.'

(Surah Mumtahanah, Verse 9)

Imam of light and guidance

Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) outlines the characteristics of the just and rightly guided Imam, 'You

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should know that among the creatures of Allah, the most distinguished person before Allah is the just Imam who has been guided (by Allah) and guides others. So, he stands by the recognized ways of the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) behavior (Sunnah) and destroys the innovations. The (Prophet's (s.a.w.a.)) ways are clear and they have signs, while innovations are also clear and they too have signs.' (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 164, vol. 1, pg. 608, Ansariyan Publications)

In another sermon, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) declares,

'Certainly the Imams are the vicegerents of Allah over His creatures and they introduce Allah to His creatures. None will enter Paradise except he who recognizes them (Imams) and knows Allah, and no one will enter Hell except he who rejects them and denies Him. (Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 152, vol. 1, pg. 554, Ansariyan Publications)

He elaborates on this further, 'O my Allah! You know that it was neither our (Ahle Bait) objective to seek power, nor to acquire anything from the treasures of the world. Rather we wanted to restore the signs of Your religion and to spread prosperity into Your cities so that the oppressed among Your creatures may be safe and Your forsaken commands could be established. O my Allah! I am the first who was inclined (towards Thee) and who heard and responded (to the call of Islam). No one preceded me in prayer except the Prophet (s.a.w.a.).'

'You certainly know that he who is in charge of honor, life, booty, (enforcement of) legal commands and the leadership of the Muslims should not be a miser as his greed would aim at their wealth. Similarly he should not be ignorant as he would then mislead them with his ignorance, nor should he be rude as he would estrange them with his rudeness. He should not be unjust in distributing wealth by preferring one group to another, nor should he accept bribes while taking decisions, as he would forfeit the rights of some and decree without decisiveness, nor should he ignore the Sunnah as he would ruin the people.

(Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 131, vol. 1, pg. 496, Ansariyan Publications)

By referring to these brilliant sermons, it becomes abundantly clear that the leader and Imam who possesses the following characteristics can alone guide the people towards the truth.

1. He is guided.
2. He guides others towards the true path.
3. He enlivens the Sunnah.
4. He destroys innovations.
5. His recognition is the cause of deliverance for the people.
6. His rejection is the cause of eternal chastisement.
7. He does not desire worldly power and authority.
8. He does not crave for the treasures of the world.

9. He makes manifest the signs of religion.
10. He establishes peace and tranquility in Allah's cities.
11. He provides shelter to His oppressed servants.
12. He revives the forgotten commands.
13. He is not a miser.
14. He is not ignorant.
15. His traits and mannerisms are not evil and wicked.
16. He is not a coward.
17. He is not a corrupt.
18. He does not destroy the Sunnah.

Imam Ali (a.s.) highlights the above points in another sermon, 'Certainly, there is no obligation on the Imam except what has been devolved on him from Allah, namely to convey warnings, to exhort and advice, to revive the Sunnah, enforce penalties on those liable and issue shares to the deserving.'

(Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 105, vol. 1, pg. 400, Ansariyan Publications) The Ahle Bait (a.s.) If we search for the cha

racteristics of the rightly guided Imam, we find that these traits are present only in the pure and infallible members of the Ahle Bait (a.s.). Hazrat Ali (a.s.) exhorts, 'Look at the people of the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) family - Ahle Bait (a.s.). Adhere to their direction. Follow their footsteps because they will never misguide you, and never throw you into destruction. If they sit down, you too must sit down, and if they rise, you also rise. Do not go ahead of them, as you will go astray and do not lag behind them, as you will be ruined.'

(Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 97, vol. 1, pg. 378, Ansariyan Publications)

'Where are those people who have lied and have tormented us and have deceitfully claimed that they are 'the ones firmly rooted in knowledge' and not us? (They lie against us and covet over position) because Allah, the All-Merciful has exalted our status and has made them inferior to us. He has conferred upon us an eminence from which He prevented them from surpassing us. He allowed us entry to the transcendental sphere of divine revelation, which He denied them. Remember that guidance could be acquired and ignorance could be dispelled through us only. Undoubtedly the Imams shall be from the Quraish, from the Bani Hashim. This divine appointment has been made for this august progeny, and none else deserves this sublime and sacred rank.'

(Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 144, vol. 1, pg. 528, Ansariyan Publications)

These assertive and decisive statements make it abundantly clear that the rightful possessors of

Imamat and Caliphate are the Ahle Bait (a.s.). No one else is deserving of this honor and station. Only the Ahle Bait (a.s.) can direct the people to the path of guidance and lead them to paradise. If somebody considers a person other than them as his leader, guide and Imam, he has deviated and is far from guidance.

When Imam Ali (a.s.) appointed Janab Mohammad Ibne Abi Bakr as governor of Egypt, he (a.s.) wrote a letter to him in which he said:

'The leader towards guidance, and the leader towards destruction, the friend and the enemy of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.), can never be alike.'

(Nahjul Balagha, Letter No. 27, vol. 2, pg. 314, Ansariyan Publications) Imam Ali (a.s.) has tried to awaken the consciousness of man with this powerful statement. The statement appeals to the people to open their eyes and refer to their intellects and then decide with deep reflection - Are the leaders of guidance and the path bearers to paradise equal to the guides towards the hell fire and darkness? Never! Awaken and decide for yourselves.

Chain of guidance

It is crystal clear that Imamat is the exclusive right of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) and anyone who claims this right for himself/themselves is a liar and an oppressor. There is a well-known tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) widely narrated by all scholars and traditionalists in their books. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) prophesied,

'This nation will have twelve leaders and guides and all of them will be from the Quraish. The one who leaves them will not harm them.' (i.e. the one who has distanced himself will be among the losers, because his death will be that of ignorance). (Musnad-e-Ahmad b. Hanbal, vol.5, pg. 312)

The tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) clearly highlights that there will only be twelve Imams till the Day of Judgment and all these leaders will be from the tribe of Quraish. Within the Quraish, the Imams will be from Bani Hashim. From the traditions mentioned above we conclude that after the demise of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) till the Day of Resurrection, this nation will have twelve Imams and all of them will be from Bani Hashim.

Regarding the tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) - 'I leave among you two weighty things

(Saqalain), the Book of Allah and my progeny', Imam Ali (a.s.) was asked - Who is the progeny? He (a.s.) replied:

I, Hasan (a.s.), Husain (a.s.) and the nine Imams (a.s.) from the progeny of Husain (a.s.), of whom the ninth one will be the Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and the Qaem (a.t.f.s.). Neither will they separate from the Book of Allah nor will the Book of Allah separate from them, till they meet the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) at the Pool of Kausar.'

(Kamaluddin, vol.1, pg. 240-241)

Aamir bin Kasir asked Imam Ali (a.s.): O Ameerul Momineen (a.s.)! You have made us aware of the guides of disbelief and the caliphs of evil, now introduce to us the guides of truth and the real guides after you.' Imam Ali (a.s.) informed him, 'Yes, surely it is the promise of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) to me that this religion will have twelve Imams and leaders, nine of whom will be from the progeny of Husain (a.s.). The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) has narrated, 'When I went to the heavens for Meraj, I saw written on the pillar of the Arsh
'There is no god except Allah, Mohammad (s.a.w.a.) is His Messenger, and I have aided him through Ali (a.s.) and I have helped him through Ali (a.s.)'

And I saw twelve Lights. I asked:

O My Lord! Whose lights are these?

The reply was - These lights are of Imams from your progeny.

Then I (Ali (a.s.)) asked: O Messenger of Allah, will you not tell me their names?' The Holy Prophet replied,

'Yes, certainly. You are Imam and Caliph after me, you will repay my debts and fulfill my promises. After you will be your two sons, Hasan (a.s.) and Husain (a.s.), and after Husain (a.s.) will be his son Ali - Zainul Abedeen (a.s.), after Ali (a.s.) will be his son Mohammad (a.s.) whose title is Baqir. After Mohammad (a.s.) will follow his son Jafar (a.s.) whose title is Sadiq. After Jafar (a.s.), will be his son Moosa (a.s.) whose title is Kazim. After Moosa (a.s.), will be his son Ali (a.s.) whose title is Reza. After Ali, his son Mohammad (a.s.) will succeed him and his title is Zaki. After Mohammad (a.s.) will follow his son Ali (a.s.) whose title is Naqi. After Ali (a.s.) will come his son Hasan (a.s.) whose title is Ameen and Askari. After him will be the son of Hasan (a.s.), Qaem (a.t.f.s.), whose name will be my name and who will bear maximum similarity with me. He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it would have been filled with oppression and injustice.'

(Vol. 1, pg. 138, Imam Ali (a.s.) narrated about the condition of Imam Mahdi (a.s.))

There isn't just one tradition like this. We find several traditions on these lines and the number goes up to 20. For instance, Imam Ali (a.s.) recounts from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) who has categorically stated that from the time of his (s.a.w.a.) death till the Day of Qiyamat there will only be twelve Imams, and then each has been mentioned by his name.

The entire arrangement was made so that people would know that Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.a.) had already selected the Imams. It was not that anyone could be an Imam according to the wishes of the Islamic nation. It was not that an Imam who was supposed to follow his father in the chain of Imamah, died in his father's lifetime, leaving the chain of Imamah suspended until the people appointed the deceased's son as the Imam in his place. All the above traditions, were narrated when Janabe Ismail b. Jafar Sadiq was not even born. The list of Imams (a.s.) narrated by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and Imam Ali (a.s.) does not show Janabe Ismail's name. Therefore, if he was never destined to be an Imam then where does the question of usurping his Imamah arise?

Another thing that is evident is that the twelve Imams (a.s.) enumerated in the prophetic tradition mentions the first Imam as Imam Ali (a.s.) and the twelfth and last Imam as Hazrat Wali-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.), who is the Imam of our time and is alive on this earth today and is amongst us but we are deprived of his meeting due to our sins and disobedience.

Asbagh bin Nubata (r.a.) a very reliable companion of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) narrates, 'I presented myself before Hazrat Ali (a.s.). I saw that he was engrossed in some thought and marking with his blessed finger on the earth. I queried, 'O Ameerul Momineen (a.s.)! What is the matter, I find you today in some perplexity, making signs on the earth, do you love this earth? He (a.s.) replied:

I swear by Allah that it is not so. I have never befriended this world, rather I was reflecting about that son, the eleventh one from my progeny. He is the Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), who will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with injustice and tyranny. There is an occultation for him in which some people will be deviated while others will be guided.

(Kamaluddin, vol.1, pg. 288-297, A'laamul Wara, pg. 400)

How clearly Hazrat Ali (a.s.) has described and illuminated the chain of guidance and Imamah. Who could be more unfortunate and wretched that despite such a clear and illumined chain of guidance and Imamah, rejects it for those deviated guides who have usurped Hazrat Ali's (a.s.) right? Those who have harassed and persecuted Janabe Zahra (s.a.), burned down her door and waged war against her husband - the rightful Imam and celebrated on his martyrdom and were the main protagonists of the incident of Karbala. Their sons killed Imam Husain (a.s.) in Karbala, they made captives the Ahle Bait (a.s.) and martyred them one after the other.

Their lives were devoid of Islamic teachings, they opposed the Quranic commands secretly and publicly, they were steeped in sins and prohibited acts and abandoned the religious obligations completely. They were prisoners of their carnal desires and neglected the hereafter and in this manner deprived themselves of guidance. Then how was it possible for them to guide others?

Guidance has only one path and that path is the way of Hazrat Ali Ibne Abi Talib (a.s.), finally terminating in Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) who is the Imam today. There is no other path leading to true guidance and there is no other guarantee for success and happiness in the world and the hereafter.

We end this discussion with the declaration of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) inviting everyone to leave aside prejudices and rise above personal interests, to purify the intellect and consciousness, to decide about one's own end, lest the coming of the Angel of Death finds us perplexed and uncertain. Today there is time and tomorrow could be too late. Our decision will take us either to Paradise or to Hell. Let us not spoil our hereafter for this fleeting world.

'Observe this world, which you desire, towards which you move with desire and proximity, which sometimes angers you and at other times makes you happy. It is neither your actual abode nor the station for which you were created, nor is it the place towards which you are invited.' 'Take lesson, for it is not going to remain for you, nor are you in it forever. If it has beguiled you with its charm then it has also made you fearful with its wickedness. Do not be influenced by its scare and do not seek it greedily out of its fear.' 'Advance towards that abode towards which you have been invited and turn your hearts away from this world. None of you should lament like maids on deprivation of a thing of this world. Be patient on the obedience of Allah and wish for the completion of the bounties by safeguarding that which has been commanded by our Book to be safeguarded.'

'Pay heed, if you have safeguarded your religious beliefs then loss of anything of this world will not harm you. And if you have wasted and destroyed your religion then none of the worldly things, which you have safeguarded, can bring you any benefit.' (Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 173, vol. 1, pg. 644, Ansariyan Publications)

May Allah turn our hearts towards truth and give us the blessing of patience!

Freedom, Human Destiny, and the World in the Nahj al-Balaghah Dr. Syed Waheed Akhtar

The theme of freedom is repeatedly emphasized and elaborated in the Nahj al-Balaghah. We shall quote a few relevant passages to substantiate the points made so far.

. . . (God) has given inborn disposition to human minds to shape themselves either towards good or towards evil." (Khutbah 75) They were given complete liberty in this world, of thought and deed, to think as they like and to do as they desire, so that they may develop their minds, and with the help of such developed minds, free will, and the span of life allotted to them, find the purpose for which they were created 12 (Khutbah 86).

In Khutbah 86, Imam 'Ali (a) further says that human beings are given sound bodies and limbs with perfect senses to acquire the knowledge of the external world and the light of reason and wisdom, so that they are able to exercise their freedom of thought and action." This point forms a recurring theme of the Nahj al-halaghah, for a sound body, sound senses, and reason are necessary conditions for exercising freedom. Those who are deficient in these respects are not held responsible for their acts, such as insane persons and infants. Solely those endowed with these things are responsible for their acts:

. . . Lives of men who were enjoying themselves to their hearts' content and had perfect freedom of action have such useful lessons in them to teach . . (Khutbah 86)14

From the above-quoted passages, certain points can be inferred: man is given complete freedom with the ability to exercise it; freedom has a purpose: to realize and obey Allah and act in a just manner. Justice can be defined as maintaining equilibrium among various obligations and rights. One has to be just to oneself. There are many verses in the Holy Qur'an and innumerable passages in the Nahj al-Balaghah restraining men from indulging in excesses even in desirable deeds, such as generosity, excess of which is israf and is prohibited.

Doing justice to others, which ensures social and political morality, and just behaviour in relation to God, requires abstaining from overindulgence in ritual worship. By maintaining justice in all the three aspects-that is in relation to oneself, others and God-man is free to determine his destiny. In contemporary Western philosophy existentialism is credited with introducing the notion of man's freedom in shaping and molding his own destiny, but a glance at the Nahj al-Balaghah is sufficient to arrive at the conclusion that it was Imam 'Ali (a) who advanced this idea for the first time:

"If by destiny you mean compulsion (physical or otherwise) whereby we are forced (by nature) to do a thing, then it is not so. Had it been an obligation of that kind, then there would have been no question of reward for doing it and punishment for not doing it (such as breathing, sleeping and eating are physical necessities entailing no reward or punishment), and the promised blessings and punishments in afterlife will have no meanings. The Merciful Lord has given His creatures complete freedom to do as they like, and they are prohibited from certain actions and warned of the consequences of such actions.

These commands carry in them the least trouble and lead us towards the most convenient way of life He sees people disobeying Him and tolerates them, not because He can be overruled or be compelled to accept human supremacy over Him. He did not send His prophets to amuse Himself or provide amusement for them. He did not reveal His orders without any reason and purpose. Neither has He created the galaxies and the earth without any design, purpose, and program. A universe without plan, purpose, and program is the idea of the infidels and heathens; sorry will be their plight in the fires and the hell. . ." (Sayings: 78)

(Destiny) was an order of God to do it, like the order he has given in His Holy Book "You are destined to worship him and nobody else" .Here destined means "ordered", it does not mean physical compulsion.¹⁵

From this brief saying, many points relevant to philosophical and moral issues can be derived: determining one's destiny is an act of man's free will, different from physical compulsion; Divine commands are rationally designed and have a purpose; the universe itself has a design and a purpose; in this purposive scheme of creation man is free to act or not to act in accordance with the Divine purpose; voluntary acts of men deserve reward or punishment according to their nature; and that freedom brings in its wake responsibility.

Kant, who could not bring himself to accept the existence of God on the strength of ontological, causal, and teleological arguments, had to evolve a moral proof for the existence of God, in which God, freedom of human will, and life after death served as the essential postulates of morality. If we compare Imam 'Ali's approach to the problems of freedom, morality, purposiveness of creation, and the existence of God, we may come to a more convincing philosophy.

Imam Ali does not require any proof for the existence of God, but believes in Him on the ground of revelation and his own inner experience. This is the same stand which was taken in the West by Kierkegaard in the 19th century after realizing the inadequacy of reason in proving or disproving God. Recent theology in the West accepts the inner yearning of man to have faith in a Supreme Being as the only criterion of belief in God.

Starting from the same position 'Ali ('a) proves the purposiveness of creation, arguing that it is created by an intelligent, knowing, and just God with a design and a purpose, and all His commands are just and reasonable, for He does not command man to do something that is beyond his capacity. Human freedom is an essential constituent of this purposive world, without which man would not have been able to pursue certain goals. It is also necessary for morality, which comprises voluntary actions.

Thus freedom is not a postulate in Imam Ali's world-outlook, but an organic part of a just and purposive order. His firm faith in a just God makes him believe in the Hereafter. In this way, the

Islamic world-outlook he presents is more coherent and consistent than that of Kant or any other Western philosopher. In this system, human reason does not give rise to antinomies, because it is not required to trespass the region of faith or inner experience.

All the three axioms of morality which Kant derived from his moral philosophy follow in Ali's Islamic system of thought from faith in God and freedom of human will. In the world conceived by him all individuals are free and they form a "kingdom of ends," that is the beings sovereign in this world and only subordinate to Divine commandments. They are not subservient to other human beings and are masters of their own destiny. In this sense Imam 'Ali (a) considers this world of ours better than any conceivable worlds. There is a saying of his that refutes the commonly believed notion that the Imam ('a) despised the world and his approach to it was ascetic and pessimistic. He heard someone abusing the world and said to him that it was not the world which deceived man but it was man who was allured and enchanted by it, and subsequently debased himself and polluted the world. He said:

"Verily this world is a house of truth for those who look into it carefully, an abode of peace and rest for those who understand its ways and moods, and it is the best working ground for those who want to procure rewards for their life in the Hereafter. It is a place of acquiring knowledge and wisdom for those who want to acquire them, a place of worship for the friends of God and for angels. It is the place where prophets receive revelations of the Lord. It is the place for virtuous people and the saints to do good deeds and to be assigned with rewards for the same; only in this world they could trade with God's favours and blessings, and only while living here they could barter their good deeds with His blessings and rewards. Where else could all this be done?¹⁶ (Sayings: 130)

This passage may remind one of Leibnitz's saying: "Ours is the best of all possible worlds", which reflects an optimistic view of the physical world. 'Ali (a) regards it so because it is here and here alone that man's freedom is tested as to how far he acts justly. In the light of this passage we can justify Iqbal's view that man chose freely to leave Heaven and come to this world.