

REFLECTIONS FOR MANAGERS

Quotations from Nahjul Balagha

**Compiled by
Yousuf Ali Ghadir**





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Suggestions for improvement and comments invited.

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*In loving memory
of
my parents*





The UNDP, United Nations Development Program, in its Arab Human Development Report 2002 advised the Arab countries to take Imam Ali ibne Abi Talib as an example in establishing a regime based on justice and democracy and encouraging knowledge. The report quoted various sayings of him from Nahjul Balagha, a book comprising of collection of his sermons, letters and sayings.

The inspiration came from this report. While delivering lectures to business administration students, I started quoting Ali ibne Abi Talib on different subjects, to remind them of our glorious past and our intellects.

This collection of words of wisdom is from Nahjul Balagha and related to topics often discussed in business administration classes. This would therefore help not only the students of business and those in the business profession, but nearly each and every one to take guidance from the one who was brought up, educated, groomed and trained by none other than the Holy Prophet of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

1895

NAHJUL BALAGHA

An introduction

It is a common belief among Muslims that after the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), Nahjul Balagha is the most revered and widely read book throughout the Islamic world.

In Arabic, the word "Nahj" means path, road, manner and "Albalagha" means eloquence, rhetoric and maturity. Thus "Nahjul Balagha" means the "Path of Eloquence".

According to the historian Masudi (Murooj-uz-Zahab Masudi, Vol. II, p. 33, Egypt), Ali ibne Abi Talib (A.S.) is credited with not less than 480 treaties, lectures and epistles on a variety of subjects dealing with philosophy, religion, law and politics as collected by Zaid ibne Wahab (Died 90 AH) in the Imam's own life time. So highly valued are these contributions both for their contents and their intrinsic literary worth that some of his master pieces have found inroads into subjects of study in centers of Muslim learning, through the course of Islamic history.

Indeed, Ali ibne Abi Talib's reputation seems to have traveled to Europe at the time of the Renaissance; for, we find that Edward Powcock (1604 - 1691), a professor at the University of Oxford published the first English translation of his sayings and delivered in 1639 a series of lectures on his "Rhetoric",¹

Thus 'Nahjul Balagha' is a compilation, which contains sermons, letters, orders and some sayings of Ali ibne Abi Talib (A.S.). These sermons and letters of Ali ibne Abi Talib (A.S.), were so highly valued and venerated in the Islamic world that within a century of his death they were taught and read as the last word on philosophy of monotheism, as the best lectures for character building, as exalted sources of inspiration, as very persuasive sermons towards piety, as guiding beacons towards truth and justice, as marvelous eulogies of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Holy Quran, as convenient discourses on the spiritual values of Islam as awe-inspiring discussions about the attributes of God, as master-piece of literature, and as models of the art of rhetoric.

1- Allama Rasheed Turabi: A Great Historical Document, 3rd Edition, 1954 -The Lugab Press, McLeod Road, Karachi, page 1

Nine famous scholars and theologians of Arabia from 1st century to the 5th century had compiled sermons, letters, sayings, maxims and poems of Ali ibne Abi Talib and these books were read, referred to and quoted by such great biographers as Ibn-e-Nadeem, Nujjashi and Toosi.

The famous Christian moralist, author and poet Polos Salamah in his famous book, "Awal-lay-Muhammad-oe-Arabia" (printed at Al Naseer Press, Beirut) says, "The famous book Nahjul Balagha is the work, which makes one realize the great mind of Ali ibne Abi Talib. No book can surpass it, but the Quran. In it you will find pearls of knowledge strung in beautiful chains, flowers of language making one's mind fragrant with sweet and pleasing smell of heroism and nobility, and streams of chaste language sweeter and cooler than the famous stream of the Kausar flowing constantly and refreshing minds of the readers".

Aijaz Ali Beg Mirza

Former Chairman Sindh Text Book Board

Former Secretary Board of Secondary

Education Karachi

The famous French historian and Orientalist Gabriel Enkiri writes in his famous book 'Le chevealier de Islam':

"In the extremely superfine, grand and noble character of Ali, there were two traits which, it is difficult to believe that can be united in one man. Besides Ali, history cannot show any other man who has displayed these two qualities at one and the same time, and each one, in such a marked way that none can surpass him.

1. He was the greatest marshal of his time (even of all time) and,
2. He was the wisest man who could explain and expound religion, philosophy, science, sociology and ethics, in a style which was not and which cannot be improved; what is more, he was such a great speaker that his speeches enchant you even fourteen centuries after his death".

REFLECTIONS FOR MANAGERS

Quotations from Nahjul Balagha

**Like your
body your
mind also
gets tired
so refresh
it by wise
sayings.**



**Remember
that the
reckoning of
Allah is far
more severe
than any
audit which
man can
carry out.**

**...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.**

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

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**There is no
greater wealth
than wisdom, no
greater poverty
than ignorance;
no greater
heritage than
culture and no
greater support
than
consultation.**

**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.**

**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.**

**To keep silent
when you can
say something
wise and useful
is as bad as
keeping on
propagating
foolish and
unwise
thoughts.**

**A wise man first
thinks and then
speaks and a
fool speaks first
and then thinks.**

**The wiser a man
is, the less
talkative will he
be.**

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

**One who says
unpleasant
things about
others, will
himself
quickly
become a
target of their
scandal.**

**A fool's mind
is at the
mercy of his
tongue and a
wise man's
tongue is
under the
control of his
mind.**

**The advice
of old men
is dearer
than the
bravery of
young
men.**

**He who listens
to a backbiter
loses a friend.**

**Better be dumb
than lie.**

**Misrepresentation
spoils narration.**

**One who
imagines
himself to be
all-knowing
will surely
suffer on
account of his
ignorance.**

**Listen and
you will
teach
yourself:
remain
silent, and
you risk
nothing.**

**Never
speak
when it
is not the
time for
speech.**

**Whatever
harm accrues
of silence can
be remedied
but whatever
harm is done
because of
speech
cannot be
remedied.**

**Do not speak
in a state of
ignorance.**

**Refrain from
unnecessary
talk.**

**Often your
utterances
and
expressions
of your face
leak out the
secrets of
your hidden
thoughts.**

**Do not be misled
by appearances
for these are apt
to be deceptive.**

**A hypocrite's
tongue is clean,
but there is
sickness in his
heart.**

**Do not close your
eyes from glaring
mal-practices of
the officers,
miscarriage of
justice and
misuse of rights,
because you will
be held
responsible for
the wrong thus
done to others.**

Justice also has four aspects depth of understanding, profoundness of knowledge, fairness of judgment and dearness of mind; because whoever tries his best to understand a problem will have to study it, whoever has the practice of studying the subject he is to deal with, will develop a clear mind and will always come to correct decisions, whoever tries to achieve all this will have to develop ample patience and forbearance and whoever does this has done justice to the cause of religion and has led a life of good repute and fame.

**If you are
confused
about good or
bad effects of
an action, then
study carefully
the cause and
you will know
what effects
will be.**

**Do not be hasty
and precipitate
in your decisions
and actions and
when time
comes for an
action to be done
or a decision to
be taken then do
not be lazy, do
not waste time
and do not show
weakness.**

**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.**

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.

**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.**

**Whatever you
like for
yourself, like
for others, and
whatever you
dislike to
happen to you,
spare others
from such
happenings.**

**Abstain from
an action
which you
will have to
do covertly
and secretly
and which
you feel
ashamed to
do openly.**

**Do unto
others as
you wish
others to
do unto
you.**

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.

**If you take
a lesson
from the
past then
you can
guard your
future very
well.**

**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.**

**Out of your hours
of work fix a time
for 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.**

**Treat them
courteously, hear
their grievances
smilingly and if
are forced to
refuse their
demands then
refuse in such a
way that your
refusal may
please them as
much as your
grants.**

**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.**

...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.

**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.**

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.

**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.**

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.

**And your
subjects
will only
love you
when they
have no
grievance
against you.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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
counselor because
he will teach you
how to exploit the
community and
how to oppress
people to get their
wealth.**

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.

**That
knowledge
which remains
only on your
tongue is very
superficial.
The intrinsic
value of
knowledge is
that you act
upon it.**

**Knowledge is
power and it
can command
obedience.**

**Remember
that
knowledge is a
ruler and
wealth is its
subject.**

**A man of knowledge
during his lifetime can
make people obey and
follow him and he is
praised and venerated
after his death.**

**Knowledge is better
than wealth because it
protects you while you
have to guard wealth.**

**It decreases if you keep
on spending it but the
more you make use of
knowledge the more it
increases.**

**What you get
through wealth
disappears as
soon as wealth
disappears but
what you
achieve
through
knowledge will
remain even
after you.**

**Your
supremacy
over others
is in
proportion
to the extent
of your
knowledge
and wisdom.**

**One who takes
lessons from the
events of life
gets vision one
who acquires
vision becomes
wise and one
who attains
wisdom
achieves
knowledge.**

**Knowledge and
practice are
twins, and both
go together.
There is no
knowledge
without
practice, and no
practice
without
knowledge.**

**No wealth is
more useful
than
intelligence
and wisdom.**

**No knowledge
is superior to
deep thinking
and prudence.**

**Remember
that your
lack of
understanding
is due to
insufficiency
of your
knowledge.**

**...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....**

**When God wants
to humiliate a
person He
deprives him of
knowledge.**

**The knowledge
which does not
benefit anybody is
useless, not
valuable and not
worth learning and
remembering.**

**He who does not
know should not
be ashamed to
learn.**

**Experience is
knowledge gained.**

**Ignorance harms
a man more than a
cancer.**

**Those who amass
wealth, though alive,
are dead to realities of
life, and those who
achieve knowledge, will
remain alive through
their knowledge and
wisdom even after their
death, though their
faces may disappear
from the community of
living beings, yet their
ideas, the knowledge
which they had left
behind and their
memory, will remain in
the minds of the people.**

**Whoever wants to be
a leader should
educate himself
before educating
others. Before
preaching to others
he should first
practice himself.**

**Whoever educates
himself and improves
his own morals is
superior to the man
who tries to teach and
train others.**

**Silence will create
respect and dignity;
justice and fairplay
will bring more
friends; benevolence
and charity will
enhance prestige
and position;
courtesy will draw
benevolence; service
of mankind will
secure leadership
and good words will
overcome powerful
enemies.**

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.

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.

You certainly know that he who is in charge of honour, life, booty, (enforcement of) legal commandments and the leadership of the Muslims should not be a miser as his greed would aim at their wealth, nor be ignorant as he would then mislead them with his ignorance, nor be of rude behaviour who would estrange them with his rudeness, nor should he deal unjustly with wealth thus preferring one group over another, nor should he accept a bribe while taking decisions, as he would forfeit (others) rights and hold them up without finality, nor should he ignore sunnah as he would ruin the people.

**When you do not find
a true way to do the
thing on hand then do
not persist on the
wrong way and when
you find a correct
solution then do not
be lethargic in
adopting it.**

**In short, do
everything in its
proper time and
proper way and keep
everything in its
proper place.**

**A person, who
keeps in mind the
consequences
and reactions of
his acts and
deeds and who is
busy moulding
his life with the
ultimate
destination in
view, has no time
for vice and
wickedness.**

**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.**

**Glory be to
Almighty Allah
who has not
created you
without a
purpose and
has not left you
without duties,
obligations and
responsibilities**

**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.**

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.

**See that they
know and realize
their proper
place and rank.
Because one who
does not realize
his place and
position will
never
understand
those of others.**

**Remember
unless you try to
improve yourself
and help yourself
to secure His
favour no advice
and education
can improve you;
unless you
chastise your
mind, no outside
chastisement can
improve you.**

**Success is the
result of foresight
and resolution,
foresight depends
upon deep
thinking and
planning and the
most important
factor of planning
is to keep your
secrets to
yourself.**

**Our affairs
are attached
to the destiny
decreed by
Allah, even
our best
plans may
lead us to
destruction.**

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

**One, who adopts
patience, will
never be
deprived of
success though it
may take a long
time to reach
him.**

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.

**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
Judgment, when
you will be poor
and helpless.**

**...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.**

**Deep thinking
will present the
clearest picture
of every
problem.**

**It is no justice
to decide a case
on mere
conjecture.**

**If matters get
mixed up then
scrutinize the
cause and you
will know what
the effects will
be.**

**Obstinacy will
prevent you
from a correct
decision.**

**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.**

**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.**

**Opportunities do
not repeat
themselves.**

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

**Failures are often
the results of
timidity and fears;
disappointments
are the results of
bashfulness;
hours of leisure
pass away like
summer-clouds,
therefore, do not
waste opportunity
of doing good.**

**One who does not
realize his own value
is condemned to utter
failure.**

**He who does not
know his own worth
is deemed to
ignominy.**

**You must remember
that even our strength
and capabilities are
His Blessings granted
to us.**

**Weaknesses and
shortcomings
are not the
things to talk
about.**

**So long as
fortune is
favouring you,
your defects will
remain covered.**

**Try not to
expose the
weaknesses of
the people and
Allah will
conceal your
own weaknesses
which you do
not want
anybody to
know.**

**One who takes
account of his
shortcomings
will always
gain by it; one
who is
unmindful of
them will
always suffer.**

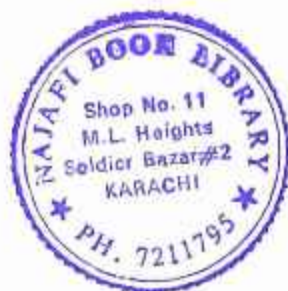
**Returns of hard
but respectable
labour of a craft
or profession,
though small in
quantity, are
better than the
wealth which
you amass
through sin and
wickedness.**

**You must
finish a day's
work in that
day only
because each
day will
bring its own
special work
for you.**

Reserve your best time for prayers to the Lord, though every work of the state is the work of God, specially, if you are sincere and honest and if your subject is happy with your rule and safe from your oppression.

**Then 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
diligent enough to
face large amount
of work.**

**There is
enough
light for
one who
wants to
see.**



Like your body
your mind also
gets tired so
refresh it by wise
sayings.

All time Ahi Vailb

