REFLECTIONS
FOR MANAGERS
Quotations from Nahjul Balagha

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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).
Лев Куша
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.

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 chevalier 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".
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.

Ali Ibn Abi Talib