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The  
Sayings and Wisdom  
of  
Imam 'Ali  
*Selection of his Teachings and Judgements*

*Collected by*  
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Muhammadi Trust  
*of*  
Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
*in association with*  
Zahra Publications



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First published in Great Britain in 1992 by  
Muhammadi Trust  
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Typeset by  
Crescent Graphics (Pvt) Ltd  
7, Hilltop Arcade, Gizri Blvd., Phase IV  
D.H.A., Karachi-75500, Pakistan.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
St. Edmundsbury Press  
Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk  
England.

ISBN 0 946079 91 9

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of God  
the Merciful  
the Compassionate*

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## Acknowledgement

The Muhammadi Trust would like to express their deepest gratitude to the translator, as well as to those who have helped in the reviewing and editing of the English text for their unstinting efforts towards the realisation of this volume. They are especially indebted to the sponsor of this project without whose willing and generous support the project would not have been made possible.

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## Introduction

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, was the person closest to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who said of him: ' 'Ali stands in relation to me as I to myself. Obedience to him is obedience to me, and disobedience to him is disobedience to me.'

In this sense, love for Imam 'Ali indicates belief, and hatred for him indicates hypocrisy.

There is no doubt that the proximity of Imam 'Ali to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, together with his love for and loyalty towards him, are the most important factors in accounting for his spiritual stature and his capacity for receiving both outer and inner gnoses and penetrating judgement. They account too for his intimate knowledge of Allah (*wilayah*), his accession to the position of Spiritual Guardian, his inheritance of the prophetic knowledges, and for his unparalleled eloquence in, and mastery of, the Arabic language.

Various attempts have been made through the passing centuries to make compilations of Imam 'Ali's sayings and speeches. One of the most important of these pioneering works is the anthology compiled by Ash-Sharif Ar-Radi, entitled *Nahj Al-Balaghah*, which has been translated into several languages and published in both Beirut and Tehran. This anthology contains some of Imam 'Ali's speeches, commands, treatises, letters, judgements, and advice.

Other attempts to make compilations in addition to the material

gathered by Ash-Sharif Ar-Radi include *Mustadrik Nahj Al-Balaghah* by Shaykh Hadi Kashif Al-Ghita and the work by Al-Qadi Abu Abdullah Al-Qada'i.

There are many other, shorter books which bring together this wisdom and which contain passages from these speeches and teachings selected by reliable scholars. One of the most important of these is the selection of Ibn Abi Al-Hadid. This is a comprehensive and delightful collection of the sayings of Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, concerning history and philosophy and correct behaviour, for anyone who seeks enjoyment from them, and it is also an important publication for those who wish to study and learn about Islam.

There are other selections of Imam 'Ali's speeches, peace be on him, together with some of his shorter sayings and profound judgements, which cannot all be listed here, and which have been published in several languages, although mostly in Arabic and Farsi.

In spite of all these earlier efforts by those who understand Islamic thought to collect the sayings of Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, most of them do not make any distinction between what is historical, what deals with correct behaviour, what deals with legal knowledge, and what is philosophical.

Accordingly we have tried in this book, in order to make it easy and enjoyable to read, to arrange various selections of his teachings and judgements in such a way as to summarize different topics consecutively in different sections, thus making it easier to consult and derive benefit from them. We hope by Allah that what we have attempted to do is free of mistakes, which we have tried to eliminate, and that it will be of use to the Muslim Community (*ummah*) in giving further access to the teachings and judgements of Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, of whom the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: 'I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali is its gate.'

Allah is the One Who gives success.

## A Short Biography of Imam 'Ali (598–661 CE)

Imam 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, was a member of the tribe of Hashim and a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He became the Prophet's son-in-law, the fourth Caliph of Islam after the Prophet's death, and the first Shi'ite Imam. Today, as in his lifetime, he is still often referred to as Amir al-Muminin, the Commander of the Faithful.

Any attempt to describe the personal qualities of Imam 'Ali is a challenging task, for he has assumed, to Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims alike, an almost legendary stature as a paragon of virtue, a fount of knowledge, and a model of chivalry, widely renowned for his piety, nobility, and learning. Indeed it is at times difficult to find the true balance needed to love him without idolizing him: He once said, 'Some will go to the Garden for love of me, and some will go to the Fire for love of me.'

Imam 'Ali's courage in battle, his magnanimity towards his defeated enemies, his sincerity and straightforwardness, his eloquence, and his profound knowledge of the roots and meanings of Islam cannot be questioned, for they are a matter of historical record. He is reputed to have been one of the founders of the study of Arabic grammar and was one of the first reliable transmitters of the correct methods (there are seven) of reciting the Qur'an, all of which he knew by heart.

The sayings, discourses, and letters of Imam 'Ali, (especially as collected in the *Nahj Al-Balagha*, which is considered by many

Shi'ite Muslims as second only to the Qur'an in importance), are amongst the earliest writings on Islamic philosophy, metaphysics, and ethics, as derived directly from the Prophet Muhammad. It is for this reason that Imam 'Ali is so highly respected and loved by the Sufis—for his being the direct link to the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, the fountain head of gnostic and esoteric knowledge in this age.

Before he himself became Caliph, Imam 'Ali acted as counselor to the Caliphs preceding him, may Allah be pleased with them. Esteemed as the best of judges, his judicial decisions are highly regarded by both Sunni and Shi'ite experts in jurisprudence. 'Ali's caliphate is looked upon, especially by Shi'ite Muslims, as a golden age, when the Muslim community was led, as it always should be, by a divinely appointed Imam.

## Note on the Text

It is customary to invoke the blessings of Allah on the Prophet Muhammad whenever his name is mentioned, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all his sincere followers.

It is customary to invoke the blessings of Allah on Imam 'Ali whenever his name is mentioned, peace be on him, and on all the close companions, may Allah be pleased with them.

These invocations are intended throughout this book, even though they do not always actually appear in the text.

Definitions of all words appearing in italics in the text are to be found in the Glossary of Arabic Terms, at the end of this book.



## Sources

The number which appears after each saying in the text refers to the source—book from which it has been selected.

1. Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, *Al-Alif Al-Mukhtara*.
2. Asbahi As-Salih, *Nahj Al-Balagha*.
3. Ash-Sharif Ar-Radhi, *Nahj Al-Balagha*.
4. *Dastur Ma'alim Al-Hikma*.
5. Ath-'Tha'labi, *Al-Ijaz wa'l-Ejaz*.
6. Al-Amuli, *Asrar Al-Balagha*.
7. *Al-Hikam Al-Qasira Al-Warida fi Nahj Al-Balagha*.
8. Ibn Qutaiba, *Uyun Al-Akhbar*.
8. Al-Mubarrad, *Al-Kamil*.
10. Al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayan wa't-Tabyin*.



*Part One*

Allah and the  
Life Transaction (Religion)  
of Islam



# Allah

## Oneness and Lordship

After completing the night prayer Imam 'Ali would often say: 'I bear witness that the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them are signs which point to You, and that they are proofs which testify to what You have commanded people to do. Everything that comes from You is a proof testifying to Your Lordship. I seek refuge in You from indicating other than You with my heart or my tongue or my hand. There is no god but You, the One, the Single, the Unique, the Eternal, and we are submitted to You.'<sup>1</sup>

Shall I not show you the fruit of the Garden? It is '*La ilaha illa'llah*' (There is no god but Allah), provided that it is said with sincerity.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the *deen* is knowledge of Him. The perfection of knowledge of Him is affirmation of Him. The perfection of affirmation of Him is affirming His Oneness. The perfection of affirming His Oneness is being sincere towards Him. Whoever makes a comparison to Him has set up a second with Him. Whoever sets up a second with Him has divided Him. Whoever divides Him is ignorant of Him. Whoever tries to indicate Him has given Him limitations, and whoever gives Him limitations has rendered Him finite.<sup>2</sup>

He has no child in the sense that He gave birth to it, and He was not born, which would have given Him limitations. He is too majestic to have had any sons and too pure to have been in contact with women.<sup>2</sup>

He has no child, glory be to Him, so as to have a partner in His glory, and He was not born, so as to have become one who inherits. All praise belongs to Allah, Whose being was before the existence of the divine Seat, or the divine Throne, or the heavens or the earth, or *jinn* (invisible entities) or man. He cannot be conceived of by the imagination and He cannot be determined by comprehension. He cannot be perceived by the senses and He cannot be compared with any person. He is One but not numerable and He is Eternal without end. He is the One Who supports without being supported.<sup>2</sup>

Praise belongs to Allah, for Whom one state does not take precedence over another so that He is the First before He is the Last, or so that He is the Outwardly Manifest before He is the Inwardly Hidden. All things to which oneness is ascribed are insignificant in relation to Him, and all things to which exaltedness is ascribed are low in relation to Him, and all things to which strength is ascribed are weak in relation to Him.<sup>2</sup>

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, Alone, without partner. He is the First and there is nothing before Him, and He is the Last and there is no end to Him. He has no partner who shares in bringing the marvels of creation into being. Creation was perfected by His command and submitted in obedience to Him and responded to His call.<sup>2</sup>

On hearing a man say 'Surely we come from Allah and surely to Him we return', Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, said: 'Our saying "Surely we come from Allah" is an affirmation to ourselves that He has dominion over us, and our saying "Surely to Him we return" is an affirmation to ourselves that we are mortal and perishing.'<sup>3</sup>

O Allah, just as You have protected my face (honour) from prostrating to other than You, so protect my face (honour) from asking [for anything] from other than You.<sup>1</sup>

O my God, may it be honour enough for me that You are my Lord, and may it be glory enough for me that I am Your slave. You are as I desire, so make me as You desire.<sup>1</sup>

## The Attributes of Allah

He is the One on Whom [descriptive] attributes do not impose limitations, [for] no definition of Him exists. He cannot be measured in time, and there is no fixed term appointed for Him. Perfect purity of devotion to Him is not to define His attributes, because every attribute testifies to the fact that it is not itself that it describes, and because everything described testifies to the fact that it is not itself the attribute. Whoever defines the attributes of Allah, glory be to Him, has associated something with Him.<sup>2</sup>

He is Allah, the Clear Truth, truer and clearer than the eyes perceive. The intellects cannot reach Him by any definition, since that would be to compare Him; and the imagination cannot reach Him by any evaluation; since that would be to give Him a likeness. There is no beginning to His primacy and there is no end to His eternity. He is the First and the Eternal, and He is the Everlasting without end. Foreheads bow down before him and lips declare His Oneness. He gave all things limitations when He created them, so as to make it clear that He is not like them.<sup>1</sup>

The eyes cannot perceive Him with the sense of sight, but the heart can perceive Him through the realities of trust. He is close to all things without being associated with them. He is remote from them without being distanced from them. He speaks yet without speech. He wills yet without wanting. He creates yet without physical means. He is Subtle yet obscurity cannot be attributed to Him. He is Great yet aloofness cannot be attributed to Him. He is Seeing yet sensory perception cannot be attributed to Him. He is Compassionate but sentimentality cannot be attributed to Him.<sup>2</sup>

O Allah, You posses beautiful attributes, and many in number. If one reflects upon You, You are the best upon whom to reflect, and if one places hope in You, You are the best in whom to place hope.<sup>2</sup>

Blessed is Allah, the One Whom even the most far-reaching aspirations cannot reach, and Whom even the most swift of comprehension cannot attain. He is the First without any finality that terminates and the Last without any end that concludes.<sup>2</sup>

Time never changes for Him so as to cause a change in His state, and He is never in any particular place so as to entail His moving to another place. He knows of the secrets in the minds of the secretive, and the intimate meetings of those who meet behind closed doors, and the thoughts and opinions of those who speculate.<sup>2</sup>

Surely the wrongs that His slaves do by night and day are not hidden from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. He knows these things through His subtle awareness and encompasses them with His knowledge. Your limbs are His witnesses, your efforts are His army, your hidden thoughts are His eyes, and your times of seclusion are His clear seeing.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the First so that there is nothing before Him, and the Last so that there is nothing after Him, and the Outwardly Manifest so that there is nothing outside Him, and the Inwardly Hidden so that there is nothing inside Him. His knowledge penetrates the innermost hidden secrets and encompasses the mysteries of beliefs concealed in the heart.<sup>2</sup>

## The Greatness of Allah

Beware of comparison with the sublimeness of Allah in His greatness, and of simulation in respect of His might and power, for surely Allah abases everyone who is mighty and powerful, and humiliates everyone who is conceited.<sup>2</sup>

I attained realization of Allah, may He be glorified, by the dissolution of resolutions, and by the solution of complexities [untying knots].<sup>3</sup>

I am amazed at the one who has doubts about Allah, when the creation of Allah is there for him to see.<sup>3</sup>

It is amazing that anyone can go out into the garden to marvel at the power of Allah! Does not his contemplation of the One Who has this power distract him from contemplating what He does with His power?<sup>1</sup>

Just marvel at man: he sees by means of some gristle, and

speaks by means of some flesh, and hears by means of a bone, and breathes by means of a perforation!<sup>3</sup>

## Praise and Gratitude towards Allah

Gratitude towards Allah and piety are shields which clarify speech.<sup>4</sup>

Surely Allah has blessed His slaves in accordance with His sovereignty, and He has made gratitude an obligation for them in accordance with their capability.<sup>1</sup>

If the most abundant of benefits reach you, then do not drive them away by your lack of gratitude.<sup>5</sup>

If a blessing descends on you, then make it last by being grateful.<sup>1</sup>

Thank Allah for what He has guided you towards, and praise Allah for what He has tested you with.<sup>4</sup>

Gratitude is the adornment of the rich.<sup>4</sup>

The proper way to treat any blessing is to avoid whatever might destroy it.<sup>1</sup>

Surely Allah has a right over every blessing. Whoever fulfils it then He increases him in it, and whoever ignores it runs the risk of losing his blessing.<sup>3</sup>

Beware of being ungrateful for blessings, lest retribution be your rightful lot.<sup>4</sup>

Praise to Allah, the One Whose glorification is beyond all words and speech, and Whose blessings cannot be reckoned by those who count, and Whose prerogatives cannot be fully served by those who strive. He is the One Who cannot be perceived by the most far reaching yearnings, and Who cannot be comprehended by the wisest intellect. I praise Him, seeking the fulfilment of His blessings, and submitting to His eminence, and desiring to be held back from disobedience to Him, and asking for help from Him in my need so that He is enough for me.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the First before every other first, and the Last after every other last. With His primacy there cannot be any first

before Him, and with His everlastingness there cannot be any last after Him. I testify that there is no god but Allah, witnessing thereby that what is secret corresponds to what is manifest, and that what is in the heart is on the tongue.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the One Who gives evidence of His existence through His creation, and Who by making His creation come into being indicates His eternity, and Who by the similarities in it indicates that He has no likeness.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, of Whom gnosis by contemplating His attributes is not possible, and Whose greatness cannot be grasped by the intellect, so that you have no access to the furthest extent of His dominion.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the One from Whom no part of the heavens nor any part of the earth is hidden.<sup>2</sup>

We praise Him for all that has been, and we ask Him for help in our affair in all that will be. We ask Him to be forgiving with regard to our religious affairs, just as we ask Him for His forgiveness with regard to our bodily affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Among the noble qualities of the words 'Al-hamdulillah' (Praise be to Allah) is that Allah the Exalted has placed them at the opening of His Book, and He has made them the seal of the supplication of the people of the Garden by saying: 'And the last of their supplication is "Truly all praise belongs to Allah the Lord of the worlds."'<sup>2</sup>

## The Decree and Destiny

When Imam 'Ali was asked about Destiny he replied: 'It is a dark path, so do not follow it; it is a deep ocean, so do not enter it; it is the secret of Allah, so do not burden yourselves with it.'<sup>3</sup>

And He has prescribed for everything a measure, and for every measure an appointed time, and for every appointed time a written record.<sup>2</sup>

All affairs are subject to what has been decreed, so that even death is part of this arrangement.<sup>3</sup>

Once what has been decreed has set in, warning is of no avail.<sup>6</sup>

For every affair, there is an outcome, be it sweet or bitter.<sup>3</sup>

Surely with every person there are two angels guarding over him. When what has been decreed happens then they leave him alone with it: surely the appointed time is a protecting shield.<sup>3</sup>

## Seeking Help from Allah and Relying on Him

Do not ask from other than Allah, for surely if He gives to you it will free you from all want.<sup>1</sup>

No one has become affluent by Allah's grace but that others have become dependent upon him.<sup>1</sup>

Seek help from Allah, the Majestic and Mighty, concerning your affair, for surely He is the best of helpers.<sup>4</sup>

Moving a mountain would be easier than avoiding an approaching change of fortune, so seek help from Allah and be patient, for surely the earth belongs to Allah and whomever He wishes will inherit it.<sup>1</sup>

Do not put your hopes in other than your Lord, and have no fear except about your wrong actions.<sup>7</sup>

If you are able to act so that no one possessing favours and fortune comes between you and Allah, then do so.<sup>4</sup>

If you need something from Allah, may He be glorified, then begin by asking blessings on His Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and then make your request, for surely Allah is too generous not to be asked for two things without granting one request along with the other.<sup>3</sup>

Seek protection in Allah the High, and ask Him for good in your affairs, for surely He will not forsake the one who seeks protection, and He will not withhold from those who ask for good.<sup>1</sup>

Make your self turn to your God in all your affairs, for then you are giving it refuge in a fortified sanctuary and an impregnable stronghold.<sup>4</sup>



## Prophethood: The Message and Spiritual Succession

### The Message and Prophethood

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, bearing witness with trust and certainty, and with sincerity and obedience, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, sent by Him and given knowledge of guidance by Him. When the open way of the life transaction (religion) had been effaced, he transmitted, and the revealed Book which was recorded, and shining light, and dazzling radiance, and the command which he openly declared.<sup>2</sup>

### The Messengers and the Prophets

He sent His Messengers amongst them, and from time to time He sent His Prophets to them, to call them to fulfil their natural contract with Him, and to remind them of His blessings, of which they had become oblivious, and to explain the message they were conveying to them, and to transmit the hidden treasures of the intellect to them, and to show them the signs of what has been decreed.<sup>2</sup>

Allah sent His Messengers with the particular guidance which

He gave to each of them, and made them examples for His creation, lest the absence of any proof provided an excuse to ignore them. Thus He invited people to the Right Path by the language of Truth.<sup>2</sup>

And if you want, remember what I have often said about Moses (Musa), the word of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when he said: 'My Lord, surely I am in need of whatever good You send down.' By Allah, he would not ask for anything except bread to eat, for he used to eat the plants of the earth. The greenness of the plants could be seen through the transparency of the skin of his belly, due to his emaciation and the wasting-away of his flesh. And if you want, remember what I have said about Jesus ('Isa), the son of Mary, peace be on him, for surely he would use a stone as a pillow, and wear coarse clothes, and eat coarse food. The seasoning of his food was hunger, and his light at night was the moon, and his shelter in the winter was the East and the West of the earth, and his fruits and vegetables were the plants that the earth produces for animals. He had no wife that might be a trial for him, and no son that might cause him grief, and no wealth to distract him, and no desires to beguile him. His legs were his riding-beast, and his hands were his servant.<sup>2</sup>

Allah, may He be glorified, has never left His creation without a Prophet sent by Him, or a Book revealed by Him, or a clear proof of Him, or a true way to Him. They are the Messengers, who cannot be ignored just because they are few in number, or because there are many who deny them. The one who came before always named the one who came after him.<sup>2</sup>

He is the One who has filled the world with His creation, and has sent His Messengers to the *jinn* (invisible entities) and human beings, to remove its veils for them.<sup>2</sup>

## Muhammad the Messenger of Allah

To continue, surely Allah, may He be glorified, sent Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, when not one of the Arabs

recited from a book or possessed prophethood or divine guidance. He fought along with those who obeyed him against those who refused to obey him. He led them to their means of salvation and made provision for them before the Hour which would come to them.<sup>2</sup>

He chose him from the family tree of the Prophets, from a niche of radiance, from the eminently sublime, from the centre of the earth's plain, from lights shining in the darkness, and from the springs of wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

When the conflict intensified, we would seek the protection of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, and there was not one of us who was closer to the enemy than him.<sup>8</sup>

O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, whenever those who remember remember him, and bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, whenever those who are forgetful forget to remember him. O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as much as the number of Your words, and as much as the extent of Your knowledge, with blessings that have no end and no limit to their extent.<sup>1</sup>

Allah sent Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, as a witness, and a bringer of tidings, and a warner. He was the best of creation as a child, and the most noble in maturity, and the most apparent of those who are pure in nature, and the most generous of those who constantly request favours for others.<sup>1</sup>

I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger, and a blessing to His slaves. Whenever Allah caused people to split into two groups, He put him in the better of the two, the one in which there was no adulterer taking part, and in which no immoral man had room to move.<sup>2</sup>

My father and my mother be your ransom, O Messenger of Allah, with your death prophethood and prophecy and revelations from the heavens have most surely come to an end, as they have never come to an end through death before, for you directed your attention towards giving comfort and solace to everyone else, and you dealt with all of them so that all people became equal in your sight.<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad despised and disdained the world, and belittled it and derided it. He was aware that Allah had removed it from him deliberately, and made it freely available to others disdainfully. So he turned away from the world with his heart, and killed any reminder of it in his self. He longed for its adornment to be hidden from his sight, in case he put on its fine clothing, or hoped for importance in it. He conveyed the message of his Lord while asking for himself to be excused, and he gave good advice to his community while giving them warning. He called them to the Garden, giving them tidings about it, and he made them fear the Fire by cautioning them against it.<sup>2</sup>

Imam 'Ali said, peace be on him, at the grave of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, as he was being buried: 'Surely patience is beautiful except when being away from you, and surely grief is ugly except when it is for you. Surely whoever is grief-stricken for you is exalted, and surely what was before you and after you is of no consequence.'<sup>3</sup>

## The Imamate and Spiritual Succession

I am a slave of Allah and a brother of the Messenger of Allah. No one will say this after me without being a liar.<sup>1</sup>

I am to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him, as the upper arm is to the shoulder, and as the forearm is to the upper arm, and as the hand is to the forearm. He looked after me when I was small, and was a brother to me when I was older, and surely he transmitted in trust to me what none of his other companions and the Family of his Household received. I will say something that I have not said to anyone before today: I once requested him to ask for forgiveness for me, so he said: 'I will do so.' Then he stood and prayed, as he held up his hands in supplication I listened to him and heard him saying: 'O Allah, by 'Ali's claim with You, grant 'Ali forgiveness.' So I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, what is the meaning of this?' And he replied: 'Is there anyone more honoured by Him than you? So I seek intercession with Him

accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

They, the Family of the Prophet, are the foundation of the life transaction (religion) and the pillars of certainty, to whom the deeply devoted and faithful followers pay their true allegiance. They in particular are rightly the owners of spiritual guardianship, and in them rests spiritual succession and inheritance. Now, this right has been returned to its people, and it has been given back to those from whom it was taken.<sup>1</sup>

Surely there is nothing that the Imam has to do except what he has been entrusted with by the command of his Lord: to deliver warnings, to strive to give good advice, to revive the lifestyle of the Prophet (*sunnah*), to inflict the prescribed punishments (*hudood*) on those who deserve them, and to distribute the share of wealth to those who are entitled to it.<sup>2</sup>

O people, surely I have given you the same warning as the Prophets gave to their respective peoples, and I have fulfilled the same duties as their spiritual successors did after them.<sup>2</sup>

[They said:] When news of the pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr at-Saqifah after the death of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, reached the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him, he said: 'What did the Helpers (*ansar*) say?' They replied: 'They said: "A leader (*amir*) from us and a leader from you." ' He said, peace be on him: 'O people, surely the person who has the truest claim in this affair is the one who is the most upright, and who is the most knowledgeable about the command of Allah in it. If anyone tries to instigate sedition, he should be censured, and if he refuses to cease he should be fought.'<sup>2</sup>

'By Allah, a certain person has put on the robes [of this affair], and surely he knows that my right to it is like the right of the axle to the grindstone. The flood pours down from me and no bird can rise up to me, so I have put on another robe, and I have turned away from it.'<sup>2</sup>

The Messenger of Allah passed away, may Allah bless him and his family, while his head was resting on my chest, with his breath flowing into the palm of my hand, which I then passed over my face. I was entrusted with washing him, may Allah bless him and

his family, and the angels helped me. There was a commotion in the house and the courtyards as one group of them descended and another group ascended, and where they met I heard them saying softly 'Ameen' uninterruptedly. They continued to bless him until we had buried him in his grave. Be sincere in your intentions in your struggle against your enemy, for by the One—and there is no god but Him—surely I am on the path of truth, and surely they are in the slipperiness of falsehood. I am indeed saying what you hear, and I seek the forgiveness of Allah for myself and for you.<sup>2</sup>

By Allah, I had no desire to be the ruler (*khalifah*), and no wish to govern. However you called me to it and entrusted me with it, so when it came to me, I looked to the Book of Allah and what it prescribes for us, and how it commands us to govern, and I followed it. Whatever the Prophet did, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them peace, I have emulated him.<sup>2</sup>

By the One Who splits the seed and creates the breeze, surely the untutored Prophet promised me: 'Surely the Muslim Community (*ummah*) will be faithless towards you after me.'<sup>1</sup>

## The Family of the Prophet

Surely the likeness of the family of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, is that of the stars in the sky: when one star fades, another appears. And so Allah has perfected the creation through you, and has shown you what you hoped to see.<sup>2</sup>

They are the place of His mysteries, and the sanctuary of His command, and the storehouse of His knowledge, and the refuge of His judgement, and the caves of His scriptures, and the mountains of His life transaction (religion). By them the bent back of religion was straightened, and the trembling of its limbs was removed.<sup>2</sup>

We, the Family of the Prophet, have access to the gates of judgement and the radiance of the command. Surely the paths of the life transaction (religion) are one, and its ways are moderate. Whoever takes them will arrive at the truth and win the booty,

and whoever avoids them will go astray and feel regret.<sup>2</sup>

'So where are you going?' and 'How you turn away with your lying!' The waysigns have been set up and the signs are clear, and the light house has been raised up, so where is there for you to wander astray, and how can you err when the Family of your Prophet is amongst you! They are the guiding reins of truth, and the waysigns of the life transaction (religion), and the tongues of truthfulness. So come to rest with them in the best of what has been revealed, the Qur'an, and come to drink from their source like the thirsty wanderer.<sup>2</sup>

Look to the Family of your Prophet, and behave like them, and follow in their footsteps, for they will never make you leave guidance, and they will never lead you back to destruction. If they remain in a place, then remain there with them, and if they set out, then set out with them. Do not overtake them and get lost, and do not fall behind them and perish.<sup>2</sup>

No one from this Muslim Community (*ummah*) can compare with the Family of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, and no one on whom similar blessings have been bestowed will ever be their equal.<sup>2</sup>

All the ill-feeling directed by the Quraysh at the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, has been displayed towards me, and it will continue to be shown towards my son after me.<sup>1</sup>

'This is my hand—meaning Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah—and these are my eyes—meaning Hasan and Husayn—and man will always use his hand to shield his eyes.' Imam 'Ali said this to someone who said to him: 'Surely you are exposing Muhammad to being killed, and casting him out to be sacrificed by the enemy, instead of his two brothers.'<sup>1</sup>

## The Companions of Imam 'Ali

Is it not strange that Mu'awiya calls upon the coarse common people, who then follow him without good cause or reward, while

I call upon you—and you have submitted to Islam and are the surviving people—to a good cause and some reward, and yet you disperse from me and dispute with me. You are for Allah! Is there no life transaction (religion) that unites you, no feeling of dignity that strengthens you? <sup>1</sup>

O people, with selves that disagree and hearts that differ. What is present is their bodies and what is absent are their intellects. I turn you towards the truth, and yet you flee from it. <sup>1</sup>

O people, whose bodies are present and whose intellects are absent, whose desires differ and whose leaders are tested through them: your master obeys Allah and you disobey him, and the master of the people of Sham disobeys Allah and they obey him. <sup>1</sup>

I have called you to the struggle (*jihad*) but you have run away, and I have asked you to listen but you have not heard. I have invited you to the truth in private and in public but you have not responded, and I have given you good advice but you have not accepted it. Are those who witness the same as those who are absent? Are slaves the same as masters? <sup>1</sup>

'What harm has been done to our brothers whose blood was shed at *Siffin*? Would they prefer to be alive today, choking with anguish and drinking bitterness? By Allah, they have met with Allah, Who has granted them their reward in full, and brought them to the abode of safety after their fear. Where are my brothers who rode the path leading to the truth? Where is Ammar? And where is Ibn at-Tayhan? And where is Dhu Shahadatayn? And where are their like from amongst their brothers who made a pact with death and whose heads were sent to the wicked?' Then Imam 'Ali wept and said: 'Alas for my brothers who recited the Qur'an and judged by it, and who reflected on what is obligatory and established it. They revived the lifestyle of the Prophet (*sunnah*) and put an end to heresy. They were called to the struggle (*jihad*) and they responded, and they trusted their leader and followed him.' <sup>1</sup>

When he heard the saying of the Khawarij, 'There is no rule but Allah's', he said, peace be on him: 'These are true words being used to express a falsehood. Yes, surely there is no rule but Allah's, but they also say that there is no command but Allah's,

and surely the people must have a leader (*amir*), be he good or evil, under whose command the believer (*mu'min*) can work and the unbeliever (*kafir*) can be at ease.<sup>2</sup>

O you who look like men but are not men, with the minds of children and the intellects of bridesmaids, I wish I had not seen you and had not known you at all; by Allah, this would cause regret and occasion grief, may Allah make you perish! You have filled my heart with purulence and overwhelmed my breast with anger.<sup>2</sup>

If I command you to go against them when the days are hot, you say: 'This is the hottest part of the summer; give us a respite until we are relieved of the heat.' If I command you to go against them in the winter, you say: 'This is a time of intense cold; give us a respite until the cold has left us.' All this is merely fleeing from the heat and the cold. So if you flee from the heat and the cold like this, then by Allah, how much more you will flee from the sword!<sup>2</sup>

Imam 'Ali said, peace be on him, when news of Muhammad bin Abi Bakr's death reached him: 'Surely our grief for him is as great as their joy at his fate. Surely they are rid of someone we love.'<sup>3</sup>

Talking about Malik al-Ashtar, he said: 'To continue, I have sent you a slave . . .'<sup>3</sup>

One of Imam 'Ali's sayings is: 'You are the princes of the Arabs, and the crowns of nobility, and the leaders in eminence, and the exalted peaks.'<sup>1</sup>

You are the supporters of the truth, and brothers in the life transaction (religion) of Islam, and a shelter on the Day of Fear, and close friends—unlike other people.<sup>1</sup>

## The Knowledge of the Imam

Ask me questions before you lose me, for by the One in Whose hand my self is, you will not ask me about anything between your time and the Final Hour, or about any group that guides a hundred people or leads a hundred people astray, but that I will

tell you their spokesman, and their leader, and their commander, and where their stables are, and where they rest on their journies, and who of them will be killed in battle, and who of them will die a natural death. And if you lose me, and a hateful matter befalls you, or a difficult affair arises, then many of those who ask will leave the path, and many of those who are asked will be faint-hearted and fail. So it will be, when your battles diminish and lessen, and the world becomes a very constricted place for you; for you will live long days of trial, until Allah gives victory to the righteous amongst those of you who still remain.<sup>2</sup>

O people, ask me questions before you lose me, for surely I know more about the ways of the heavens than I do about the ways of the earth—before war tramples you underfoot while still tethered, and destroys the dreams of its people.<sup>2</sup>

Where are those who assert that they and not I are firmly established in knowledge? They are liars and do us an injustice. Surely Allah has raised us up and has put them down, and has given to us and has withheld from them, and has made us enter and has turned them out. It is through us that guidance should be sought, and it is by us that the blind may seek light.<sup>2</sup>

Even if the veil were lifted for me, this would not increase my certainty.<sup>3</sup>

If I speak then they say: 'He is greedy for power.' If I am silent then they say: 'He is anxious about death; come away with you after such lengthy discussions!' By Allah, the son of Abu Talib is more intimate with death than a baby with its mother's breast. Surely I have penetrated the most secret knowledge, and if I were to reveal it to you, you would tremble like quivering ropes in a deep well!<sup>3</sup>

When asked about the distance between the East and the West, Imam 'Ali replied: 'It is as far as the sun travels in a day.'<sup>3</sup>

## The Promised Day of Return

### Death

Increase your remembrance of death, and of the Day you will come out from your graves, and of the Day you will stand before Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, and calamities will be lessened for you.<sup>1</sup>

Visit graves and by this remind yourself of the next world. Wash the dead and your heart will be moved, for surely an empty body is a profound lesson. Pray over the dead and perhaps it will make you sad, for surely the sad person is close to Allah.<sup>1</sup>

When giving instructions to his son Hasan, Imam 'Ali said: 'O my son, increase your remembrance of death, and remember what you will enter into, and what you will be led on to after your death, so that when it comes to you, you are well prepared and well fortified against it, and so that it will not come upon you suddenly and catch you unaware.'<sup>2</sup>

I am amazed by him who forgets death while he sees the dead.<sup>2</sup>

I advise you to remember death and to avoid being forgetful of it. How can you be forgetful of something that will not forget you? How can you put your hopes in something that will not give you any respite?<sup>2</sup>

Remember that which destroys delights, and that which embitters desires and makes them futile, and that which severs hopes, whenever you are heading towards abominable actions.<sup>2</sup>

Benefit from remembrance and from warnings, for it is as if you have already been joined to your death, and separated from your

desires. Every self has a driver and a witness with it. The driver drives it to the Place of Gathering, and the witness testifies about its actions.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever an affliction overwhelms someone, he should remember death and it will surely be lightened for him, and whoever feels constriction in some matter should remember the grave, and it will surely be expanded for him.<sup>2</sup>

Surely Allah has an angel who calls out every day: 'Prepare for death, and amass for annihilation, and build for ruin.'<sup>3</sup>

See what you would like to be doing when death comes to you—and do it now, for you cannot be sure that you will not die soon.<sup>1</sup>

You do not know when this thing will come upon you, but what stops you from preparing for it before it takes you by surprise?<sup>1</sup>

Imam 'Ali overheard a man who was praying for his companion, saying: 'May Allah never cause you to face any trouble.' So he said: 'Surely you have prayed for his death, for truly whoever lives in this world has to face troubles.'<sup>1</sup>

Know that the One Who has authority over death is the One Who has authority over life, and that the One Who is the Creator is the One Who makes you die, and that the One Who annihilates is the One Who brings you back to life, and that the One Who afflicts is the One Who removes the harm.<sup>2</sup>

Surely, by Allah, I am prevented from fun and entertainment by the remembrance of death.<sup>2</sup>

What is worse than death is something which, when it takes place, makes you long for death; and what is better than life is something which, when you lose it, makes you hate life.<sup>1</sup>

Every time has its sustenance, and you are the sustenance of death.<sup>4</sup>

If you are on the retreat, and death is advancing, then how swift the meeting will be.<sup>3</sup>

Every life has its appointed time.<sup>4</sup>

Every thing has its sustenance, and you are the food of worms.

Surely the destination of whoever walks on the surface of the earth is to return inside it.<sup>1</sup>

Old age is an excuse for death.<sup>1</sup>

You will come to know the reality of its state, but in such a way that you will not be able to tell anyone about it.<sup>1</sup>

Often someone strives to go to rest somewhere, unaware that his fate awaits him there.<sup>1</sup>

Often someone seeks out his own end.<sup>1</sup>

You will be driven towards what you are going to meet.<sup>1</sup>

## This World and the Next

Imam 'Ali wrote to Salman al-Farsi: 'To continue, surely the likeness of this world is that of a snake: it is soft to the touch, and deadly poisonous. The ignorant child is distracted by it, and the one with an understanding intellect is cautious of it. So turn away from what fascinates you in it, for how little of it stays with you.'<sup>4</sup>

Beware of this deceptive and misleading world, which decorates itself with its attractions, and seduces you with its vanities, and deceives you with expectations. It beautifies itself invitingly, so as to shine like an unveiled bride, to whom all eyes are turned, and with whom everyone is passionately in love, and whom all hearts desire.<sup>4</sup>

This world afflicts whoever puts his trust in it, and whoever is wary of this world strikes it a blow!<sup>1</sup>

This world is a transitory place on the way to the place of permanent abode, and there are two kinds of people in it: the man who sells self and destroys it, and the man who exchanges his self and liberates it.<sup>3</sup>

Take whatever comes to you from this world, and turn away from whoever turns away from you.<sup>3</sup>

When this world turns towards a person, it invests him with the good qualities of others, and if it turns away from him, it deprives him of his own good qualities.<sup>3</sup>

This world is the riding—beast of the believer (*mu'min*), and he rides on it to his Lord, so look after your riding—beast well, that it may bring you to your Lord.<sup>1</sup>

This world was created for other than itself, and it was not

created for its own sake.<sup>3</sup>

A man reviled the world in Imam 'Ali's presence, so he said: 'This world is the home of sincerity for whoever is sincere towards it, and it is the home of safety for whoever understands it, and it is the home of wealth for whoever takes his provision from it. It is the place of descent of Allah's revelation, and the place of prayer of His angels. It is the mosque of His prophets, and the market—place of His friends (*awliya*), whose profit in it is divine mercy, and whose reward from it is the Garden.'<sup>9</sup>

In its beginning, this world is hardship; and in its ending, it is annihilation. Whatever is permitted in it has to be accounted for, and whatever is forbidden in it has to be punished. Whoever acquires wealth in it is tested, and whoever is in need in it stays at home away from it. Whoever gazes at it is blinded by it, and whoever reflects on it understands it.<sup>4</sup>

This world is a collection of troubles, and is bitter to swallow, and it does not let you enjoy each other's company.<sup>1</sup>

As regards provision, there are two elements: the seeker and the sought. Whoever seeks after this world is sought after by death until it removes him from it. And whoever seeks after the next world is sought after by this world until he has received his provision from it in full.<sup>3</sup>

Know that you will die and that you will be raised again after your death. You will be called to account for your actions and you will be rewarded for them, so do not let life deceive you, for surely it is an abode that is beset with afflictions, and known for its passing away, and characterized by its treachery.<sup>4</sup>

Know, O slaves of Allah, that surely whoever of you are in this world are on the path of those who have gone before you, people who lived for longer than you, and who built better than you, and whose remains lasted longer than yours. Their voices have faded away, and their lives have been stilled. Their bodies have decomposed, and their houses have collapsed, and their traces have been obliterated.<sup>2</sup>

O people, surely this world is a place of transition, and the next world is a lasting place, so take what you need from what is

passing for what will be lasting.<sup>2</sup>

Detach your hearts from this world before your bodies leave it, for you are tested in it, and you were created for other than it. Surely when someone dies, the people say: 'What has he left behind?' and the angels say: 'What has he sent ahead?' Your fathers have returned to Allah, so send something on ahead of yourselves that will be of benefit to you, and do not leave anything behind you for which you will have to pay later.<sup>2</sup>

The world wanted them, but they did not want the world, and it imprisoned them, so they bought their freedom from it.<sup>2</sup>

Surely this world in which you place your hopes and desires, and which is the cause of your anger and your pleasure, is not your home. It is not the resting—place for which you were created or to which you have been called.<sup>2</sup>

Reject its deceptions so as to remain wary of it, and avoid desire for it so as to remain cautious of it. Make haste in it towards the abode to which you have been called, and turn away from it in your hearts.<sup>2</sup>

Surely this world is the furthest that the blind can see.<sup>2</sup>

To continue, surely I tell you to beware of this world, for it is indeed sweet and green, surrounded by desires, and loved for what is transitory. It enchants you with trifles, and is decorated with vain hopes, and adorned with deceptions.<sup>2</sup>

So do not vie for glory and pride in this world, and do not admire its adornments and pleasures, and do not be impatient because of its adversities and hardships, for surely its glory and pride come to an end, and surely its adornments decay, and its difficulties and hardships vanish.<sup>2</sup>

The good of this world and the next is in two qualities: contentment and awe of Allah. And the bad of this world and the next is in two qualities: indigence and corruption.<sup>2</sup>

A slave cannot obtain one blessing without being separated from another, and he cannot turn to greet one day of his life-span without parting from another.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever begins the day with the next world on his mind will be rich without needing possessions, and will have intimacy without

having a family, and will have honour without having relatives.<sup>1</sup>

The bitterness of this world is the sweetness of the next, and the sweetness of this world is the bitterness of the next.<sup>2</sup>

You are in this world as if you do not exist, and you are in the next world as if you had not left it.<sup>1</sup>

I am amazed at the one who settles down in the abode that passes away, and ignores the abode that lasts for ever.<sup>3</sup>

This world tosses you about, casts you aside, disgraces you, makes you despair, and wounds you.<sup>1</sup>

The people of this world are like riders in a caravan . . . it carries them along while they are asleep.<sup>3</sup>

O Allah, do not make this world a prison for me, and do not make my parting from it a sorrow. I seek refuge in You from a world that may deprive me of the next world, and from vain hopes that may make me abandon useful actions, and from a life that may deny me the best of deaths.<sup>1</sup>

When this world comes to you, it approaches you on a burdened donkey, and when it turns its back on you it leaves you on a winged horse (*burag*).<sup>1</sup>

The happiness which really deserves that name is the happiness of the next world, and it has four elements: survival without extinction, knowledge without ignorance, power without incapacity, and wealth without property.<sup>1</sup>

This world is acquired through wealth, and the next world is acquired through good actions.<sup>7</sup>

This world is like a fool who only inclines towards his like.<sup>1</sup>

## The Resurrection

Do not think the Resurrection is far away, so that you live in ease, as if the length of time after your death will be very long, for after your return you will not be able to distinguish between a thousand years and one hour. Then Imam 'Ali recited: 'And on the Day they are gathered together it will be as if they had only tarried there for an hour of the day.'<sup>1</sup>

Imam 'Ali wrote to a representative of his: 'Act truthfully in readiness for the Day on which there will be no judgement but by what is true.'<sup>1</sup>

Surely the Day which makes grown men stupefied and turns young children grey . . . is very terrible.<sup>1</sup>

Surely everyone has a determined number of breaths, and a great many hopes, and a limited life-span, so it is inevitable that the life-span will terminate, and the breaths will all be accounted for, and hopes will end. Then Imam 'Ali recited: 'Surely there are two guardian—angels watching over you, noble scribes recording what you do.'<sup>1</sup>

Think about what you are saying, for surely it is as if you are dictating a book to your two recording angels, who will take it to your Lord. So consider to whom it is that you are dictating, and for Whom it is being written.<sup>1</sup>

I am amazed at the one who denies the second creation, when the first creation is there for him to see.<sup>1</sup>

The affair is near, and friends will be few.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing can avert the decree except supplication, and nothing will grant longer life except good action.<sup>1</sup>

The son of Adam will not move forward on the Day of Resurrection until he has been asked about his life—how did he pass it? And about his wealth—from where did he acquire it and on what did he spend it? And about how he acted—in regard to what he knew.<sup>1</sup>

While passing by a grave Imam 'Ali said: 'Surely whoever remembered the Day of Return, and was content with a little, and prepared for the Reckoning, is fortunate.'<sup>1</sup>

To continue, surely a man is joyful when he obtains what is unavoidable, and sad when what is unobtainable escapes him. So if Allah gives you something from this world, do not be excessively joyful about it, and if He withholds something from it from you, then do not be excessively sad about it. And peace be on you.<sup>1</sup>

O slaves of Allah, beware of the Day on which actions will be examined, and on which upheavals will be many, and on which children will turn grey.<sup>2</sup>

And on that occasion no one will be delivered except every unassuming believer (*mu'min*), the ones who are not recognized by those who see them, and who are not sought after when they are absent.<sup>2</sup>

## The Garden and the Fire

Describing those who have fear of God (*taqwa*), he said: 'The Creator appears Great to them, so what is other than Him appears to be small in their eyes. As for the Garden, it is as if they can see themselves already in it, surrounded by blessings; and as for the Fire, it is as if they can see themselves already in it, being punished, with their hearts full of grief, and their bad actions on record, and their bodies wasting away.'<sup>2</sup>

Does not any free man leave this insignificant world to its people? Surely the only price you should charge for your self is the Garden, so do not exchange it for other than that.<sup>3</sup>

Increase your remembrance for the trials that will unfold there: boiling water, and burning fire, and bubbling heat, and roaring flames, without restful respite, and without leisurely repose.<sup>2</sup>

May the Garden be enough for us as a reward and a gift, and may the Fire be enough for us as a punishment and a trial!<sup>2</sup>

Surely I have never seen anything less likely to make anyone sleep than the Garden for those who seek it, and the Fire for those who flee from it.<sup>2</sup>

## Islam

### The Life Transaction (Religion) of Islam

I am making a connection which no one has made before me: Islam is submission, and submission is certainty, and certainty is affirmation of the truth, and affirmation of the truth is acknowledgement, and acknowledgement is performance of what is obligatory, and performance of what is obligatory is appropriate action.<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing more noble than Islam.<sup>3</sup>

The life transaction (religion) of Islam is not about having opinions; it is most surely about following good example.<sup>3</sup>

Surely Islam is the life transaction (religion) of Allah which He has chosen for Himself. He has formed it with careful attention, and has chosen it for the best of His creation, and has established its foundations on love for Him. He has humbled other religions by its glory, and has humbled other creeds by exalting it. He has belittled His enemies through its glory, and has overcome His opponents with its help. He has destroyed the pillars of darkness with its support.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever follows a way of life other than that of Islam deserves hardship. He will lose his grip, and his mishaps will grow worse.<sup>2</sup>

The life transaction (religion) of Islam is a mark of the honourable, and the honourable always achieve dignity by following the life transaction of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

The crown of the life transaction (religion) of Islam is complete certainty.<sup>4</sup>

All good is in the sword, and this life transaction (religion) has not been established except by the sword. Do you understand the meaning of the words of the Most Exalted: 'And we have revealed the use of iron in which there is tremendous strength ? This refers to the sword.<sup>1</sup>

Know that surely you have become like the bedouin Arabs after the Emigration (*hijrah*), and like the tribes who dispersed after having come together in harmony. All you know of Islam is its name, and you know nothing but the bare outline of true belief.<sup>5</sup>

## The Noble Qur'an

Then the Book was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, a light whose radiance will never be extinguished, and a lamp whose illumination will never be hidden, and an ocean whose depths will never be measured, and a clear way which will never lead astray; a light-source whose rays will never be darkened, and a means of discrimination whose clarity will never fade, and an explanation whose basis will never be refuted, and a cure whose application will never cause illness; a source of power whose guardians will never be put to flight, and a source of truth whose followers will never be abandoned.<sup>2</sup>

Exalt yourselves with the Book of Allah, for surely it is a strong rope, and a clear light, and a beneficial cure, and a thirst-quenching source, and a protection for those who hold fast to it, and a source of freedom for those who cling to it.<sup>2</sup>

Know that this Qur'an is a source of advice that never deceives, and a guide that never leads astray, and an informer that never lies.<sup>2</sup>

Know that surely there is no more need for anyone after reading the Qur'an, and no one more in need before reading the Qur'an. So use it as a cure for your illnesses, for surely there is a cure in it for the greatest of illnesses—which are infidelity and hypocrisy, and deception and confusion. So call on Allah by it, and turn to Him out of love for it, and do not call on His creation through it. Surely the worshippers do not turn to Allah the Exalted by any

other means comparable to it. Know that it is surely the best intercessor of all intercessors, and the most eloquent of witnesses to the truth. Surely whomever the Qur'an intercedes for on the Day of Resurrection will have that intercession accepted, and whomever the Qur'an testifies against on the Day of Resurrection will have that testimony verified.<sup>2</sup>

Nobody sits down with this Qur'an without having experienced either an increase or a decrease when he stands up again: an increase in guidance, or a decrease in 'blindness'.<sup>2</sup>

You can see by the Book of Allah, and you can speak by it, and you can hear by it. One part of it explains another part of it, and one part of it confirms another part of it. It does not contradict itself about Allah, and it does not create contradictions between its companion and Allah.<sup>2</sup>

The Book is proof and argument enough for us.<sup>2</sup>

Allah, Allah, O people, heed what He has sought of you to preserve of His Book, and what He has sought to entrust to you of His rights. Surely Allah, may He be glorified, revealed this Book as a clear guidance about what is good and what is evil, so take the clear way of good, and you will be guided, and avoid the way of evil, and you will go straight to the truth.<sup>2</sup>

There are some words of hope in the Qur'an for the one who wrongs himself which fill me with gladness. It says: 'My punishment falls upon whomever I wish, and My mercy encompasses all things.' So He has made His mercy a general matter, and His punishment a particular matter.<sup>2</sup>

In the Qur'an there is information about what there was before you, and there is news of what there will be after you, and there is wisdom to settle what is between you.<sup>3</sup>

The likeness of the believer (*mu'min*) who recites the Qur'an is that of a citrus fruit, which has a sweet scent and a sweet taste; and the likeness of a believer who does not recite the Qur'an is that of basil, which has a sweet scent but a bitter taste; and the likeness of a corrupt person who does not recite the Qur'an is that of a desert gourd, whose taste is bitter and which smells of nothing.<sup>1</sup>

## Belief and the Qualities of the Believer

When he was asked about faith, Imam 'Ali said: 'Faith has four pillars: patience, certainty, justice, and struggle (*jihad*):

'Of these, patience has four divisions: longing, fear, abstinence, and expectation. So whoever longs for the Garden will turn away from desires, and whoever fears the Fire will avoid what is forbidden, and whoever is abstinent in the world will not care about misfortunes, and whoever expects death will be quick to do good.

'And of these, certainty has four divisions: perceptive understanding, knowing wisdom, learning from lessons, and following the behaviour of the companions. So whoever perceives with understanding will have wisdom made clear to him, and whoever has wisdom made clear to him will comprehend lessons, and whoever comprehends lessons will be like the companions.

'And of these, justice has four divisions: profound understanding, penetrating knowledge, clarity of judgement, and firmly established forbearance. So whoever understands will know with a penetrating knowledge, and whoever knows with a penetrating knowledge will proceed along the paths of wise judgement, and whoever possesses forbearance will not exceed the limits in his affair, and will live amongst people in a praiseworthy manner.

'And of these, struggle (*jihad*) has four divisions: commanding what is good, forbidding what is evil, being truthful on the battlefield, and hating the wicked. So whoever commands what is good strengthens the vigour of the believers (*mu'minun*), and whoever forbids what is evil humbles the pride of the unbelievers (*kafirun*), and whoever is truthful on the battlefield is doing his duty, and whoever hates the wicked and is angry for Allah, then Allah will be angry for him, and will give him contentment on the Day of Resurrection.<sup>57</sup>

The belief of a worshipper is not sincere until he has more confidence in what Allah possesses than in what he himself possesses.<sup>3</sup>

Infidelity (*kuf'r*) has four pillars: being obscure, being contentious, deviation, and causing discord . . . So whoever is obscure never comes near the truth; and whoever is constantly contentious in ignorance remains blind to the truth; and for whoever deviates from the truth, wrong appears to be right and right appears to be wrong, so he becomes intoxicated with the stupor of going astray; and for whoever causes discord, the ways become difficult, and his affair becomes ever more full of obstacles, and any way out becomes impossible for him.

And doubt has four divisions: disputation, distrust, vacillation, and surrender. So for whoever makes disputation his habit, his night will never become day; and whoever distrusts whatever is in front of him will be on the retreat as a result, and whoever vacillates in doubts will be trampled on by the hooves of the devils (*shayatin*), and whoever surrenders himself to the destruction of this world and the next world will be destroyed in them.<sup>3</sup>

Faith (*iman*) is recognition in the heart, and confirmation with the tongue, and action based on all the capabilities.<sup>3</sup>

Surely belief appears like a taste in the heart, and as belief increases so does the taste.<sup>3</sup>

Surely this affair of ours—the Family of the Prophet—is a difficult and challenging one. No one will be able to bear it except a believing slave whose heart has been tested in its belief by Allah, and no one will understand what we say except those with trusting hearts and a serene outlook.<sup>3</sup>

When the believer (*mu'min*) observes something, he learns from it, and when he is silent he reflects, and when he speaks he remembers, and when he is enriched he is thankful, and when serious trouble befalls him he is patient.<sup>1</sup>

Do not sit with anyone except those who remind you of Allah and the vision of Him, and whose speech makes you increase your good actions, and whose actions make you long for the next world.<sup>1</sup>

The happiness of the believer (*mu'min*) is on his face, and his sadness is in his heart. His bosom is the most expansive of all else, and his self is more humble than anyone else. He dislikes high

rank and hates reputation. His affliction is long-lasting, his distress is far-reaching. He is silent a great deal and spends much of his time at work. He is thankful, patient, immersed in his contemplation, needing little, of easy disposition, and with a mild nature. His self is more impervious than a rock, and he is more humble than a slave.<sup>3</sup>

Of the ruler who is a believer (*mu'min*), Imam 'Ali said: 'Among the signs of the one who is trustworthy in the life transaction (religion) of Allah, besides lasting affirmation and right action, are these: he is prudent in his conduct, and truthful in his words, and just in his judgements, and concerned for those under his care. Power does not lead him to exploitation, nor mildness to weakness. His strength does not stop him from being generously forgiving, and requests for forgiveness do not make him neglect another's rights.'<sup>1</sup>

Pay careful attention to the opinions of the believers (*mu'minun*), for surely Allah the Exalted has placed the truth on their lips.<sup>3</sup>

What remains of the life of a believer has no value, for by it he can only understand what is already past, and he is only giving life to what will end in death.<sup>2</sup>

The strength of the believer is in his not being in need of people.<sup>4</sup>

Wisdom is the lost possession of the believer (*mu'min*), so take hold of wisdom . . . even if it comes from hypocrites.<sup>3</sup>

No one can be patient in times of war and truthful in their meetings except for three kinds of people: those who try to understand the life transaction (religion); those who zealously guard what should be protected; and those who are angered by degradation.<sup>1</sup>

For the believer there are three kinds of hour: an hour in which he confides to his Lord; an hour in which he deals with his daily needs, and an hour which he sets aside for himself and which gives him pleasure, in whatever is permitted and good. Anyone who is wise should pay attention to only three things: dealing with his daily needs; or taking a step in the right direction towards the Promised Day of Return; and finding pleasure in whatever is not forbidden.<sup>3</sup>

## The Pillars of Islam (the Acts of Worship)

Allah has imposed belief as a purification from worshipping other than Allah, and the prayer (*salat*) as a means of being free from arrogance, and the wealth tax (*zakat*) as a means of distributing provision, and the fast (*siyam*) as a test of sincerity of character, and the pilgrimage (*hajj*) as a means of becoming more closely acquainted with the life transaction (religion) of Islam, and the struggle (*jihad*) as a means of strengthening Islam, and the commanding-what-is-good for the benefit of the common people, and the forbidding-what-is-bad for the protection of the foolish, and maintaining good family relations to increase numbers, and just retaliation to prevent bloodshed, and inflicting the prescribed punishment (*hadd*) to emphasize the seriousness of what is forbidden, and abandoning the drinking of wine to protect the intellect, and the avoidance of stealing to impose good conduct, and staying clear of fornication to safeguard lineage, and the affirmation of Allah and His Messenger (*shahadah*) to distinguish those who deny it, and refraining from lying to open the way to truthfulness, and the greeting of 'Peace' as a means of assuring security from whatever causes fear, and trustworthiness for what is entrusted to make the community harmonious and orderly, and obedience to honour spiritual leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Surely Allah has imposed what is obligatory on you, so do not neglect it, and He has delineated boundaries for you, so do not go beyond them, and He has forbidden some things for you, so do not permit them, and He has remained silent about some things—and He did not leave them out due to forgetfulness—so do not burden yourselves with them.<sup>3</sup>

The prayer is the offering of everyone who is fearful of God's displeasure (*taqi*), and the pilgrimage is the struggle (*jihad*) of everyone who is weak. Everything has its due, and what is due from the body is the fast, and the struggle (*jihad*) for a woman is to be good to her husband.<sup>3</sup>

You do not draw near to Allah through voluntary acts of

worship if they get in the way of what is obligatory.<sup>3</sup>

Surely hearts draw near and retreat, so when they draw near, let them be concerned with voluntary acts of worship, and when they retreat, limit them to what is obligatory.<sup>3</sup>

## The Prayer

The prayer (*salat*) is what differentiates the believer (*mu'min*) from the unbeliever (*kafir*), so whoever leaves it and claims to have belief, his own action belies him, and it will be a witness against his own self.<sup>1</sup>

In the darkness before dawn, seek the shining face of Allah, the Exalted.<sup>4</sup>

Obey the command to perform the prayer, and keep doing it, and do more of it, and draw near to Allah through it, for surely it is: 'prescribed for the believers (*mu'minun*) at appointed times'. Listen to the reply of the people of the Fire when they are asked: 'What made you enter Hell?' They say: 'We never performed the prayer.'<sup>2</sup>

I asked the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them peace, when he sent me to Yaman: 'How should I perform the prayer with them?' And he replied: 'Pray with them as the weakest of them would do; and be merciful towards the believers.'<sup>2</sup>

Whoever does not prepare for the prayer before its time arrives is not honouring it.<sup>1</sup>

## The Fast

The fast is an act of worship which is between the slave and his Creator; no one other than Him knows of it, and likewise he is not rewarded for it by any one other than Him.<sup>1</sup>

The fast is not just abstaining from food and drink. The fast is abstaining from everything which is disliked by Allah, may He be

glorified.<sup>1</sup>

How many a person who fasts only has hunger and thirst from his fast, and how many a person who stands in prayer only has sleeplessness and toil from his standing in prayer. How pleasant is the sleep and the ending of the fast for those who understand.<sup>2</sup>

When speaking about the two festivals, Imam 'Ali said: 'Surely it is a festival indeed for the one whose fast has been accepted by Allah and whose standing in prayer is appreciated . . . and as for every day in which he does not disobey Allah . . . it is a festival!'<sup>2</sup>

## The *Zakat* and the *Khums* Taxes

Surely the wealth tax (*zakat*) has been imposed along with the prayer as an offering to be given by the people of Islam. So whoever gives it is doing their self good through it, for surely it has been imposed as a means of making amends, and as a protection and defence against the Fire.<sup>2</sup>

Protect your wealth by paying the wealth tax.<sup>2</sup>

Surely Allah, may He be glorified, has made it obligatory for the wealth of the rich to nourish the poor, for the hunger of the poor is only caused by the pleasure-seeking of the rich, and Allah, the Exalted, will question them about this.<sup>3</sup>

The wealth tax is a decrease in outer form, and an increase in inner meaning.<sup>1</sup>

And if they refuse to pay the one-fifth tithe (*khums*), they will be afflicted by years of drought.<sup>1</sup>

## The Pilgrimage

He has made it obligatory for you to make the pilgrimage to His protected House, which He has made a point to which all creatures turn, gathering at it just as animals gather to drink at a spring, and flocking to it just as pigeons do. He, may He be glorified, has made it a sign of their humility before His greatness,

and an indication of their submission to His mightiness. He has chosen from His creation those who hear and respond to His call, and confirm His words, and stand at the places where the prophets have stood.<sup>2</sup>

He, may He be glorified and exalted, has made it a sign of Islam, and a sanctuary for those who seek refuge. He has made it obligatory to honour its rights, and He has made it necessary to do the pilgrimage there, and has prescribed the form of greeting on arrival there. So He, may He be glorified, has said: 'And Allah has made it a duty on mankind for whoever is able to make the journey to go on the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the House; and for whoever rejects this, then surely Allah is not in need of any of the worlds.'<sup>2</sup>

By Allah, Allah, at the House of your Lord, do not leave what He has left you, for surely if you abandon it, you will have no respite!<sup>2</sup>

## *Jihad*

To continue, surely struggle (*jihad*) is one of the entrances to the Garden which Allah opens for His friends in particular. It is the clothing of fearful awareness (*taqwa*), and the protecting armour of Allah, and a trustworthy shelter. So whoever leaves it and dislikes it will be clothed by Allah in a robe of humiliation, and surrounded by affliction, and abased by contempt and insignificance. His heart will be struck by nonsense, and the truth will be removed from it for his having neglected the struggle (*jihad*). He will bear the mark of obliteration, and he will be denied equity.<sup>2</sup>

There are three kinds of struggle (*jihad*): there is struggle with the hand, then with the tongue, and then in the heart. And when the heart does not recognize what is good, and does not dislike what is evil, it is turned upside down, so that what was on top ends up on the bottom.<sup>4</sup>

By Allah, Allah, struggle with your wealth and your selves and your tongues in the way of Allah.<sup>2</sup>

And grit your teeth for the struggle (*jihad*), and do not be

distracted by the bleating of those who bleat at you.<sup>2</sup>

## Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil

Do not leave off commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil, or else the worst of you will be put in authority over you, and then when you call on them they will not answer you.<sup>2</sup>

Command what is good and you will be one of its people, and oppose what is evil with your tongue and your hand, and make things clear to whoever does it by your struggle against it.<sup>4</sup>

Surely there are examples all around you of the power and punishment of Allah, and of His authority over days and events, so do not expect His threat to be delayed on account of your ignorance of His ability to seize, and by your making light of His strength and disregarding His power, for surely Allah, may He be glorified, did not curse past generations before you until they stopped commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil.<sup>2</sup>

## Truth and Falsehood

Surely the truth is heavy but good for you, and surely falsehood is light but harmful.<sup>3</sup>

The right path (*sirat*) is a course full of pitfalls, so the one who has a sound character will go freely, and the one who stumbles will perish.<sup>3</sup>

Truth sets a good example, and falsehood confuses.<sup>4</sup>

Plunge into the depths until you reach the truth.<sup>4</sup>

The truth redeems, and falsehood dooms.<sup>4</sup>

The most difficult deception is to present falsehood disguised as the truth to someone with a discerning intellect.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing will give you intimacy except the truth, and nothing will make you feel lonely except falsehood. If you accept their world, they will certainly love you, and if you sever yourself from it, they will certainly give you security.<sup>2</sup>

By Allah, we most certainly dissect falsehood until the truth emerges from its remains!<sup>2</sup>

Surely what prevents one from speaking the truth is forgetting about the next world.<sup>2</sup>

No two claims disagree but one of them is in error.<sup>3</sup>

O people, whoever knows that a brother of his is firmly established in his life transaction (religion) and well-directed along a path, should not listen to other men gossiping about him. For surely a marksman may shoot and make a mistake in what he is aiming at, and words can be deceiving, and falsehood like that comes to nothing, and Allah is the One Who hears and the One Who witnesses. Surely there is not more than the width of four fingers between truth and falsehood (and that is the distance between the eye and the ear).<sup>2</sup>

If truth was liberated from the confusion of falsehood, then the tongues of the erring would be silenced, but they draw from this jumble of confusion, and from that jumble of confusion, so that everything is mixed up!<sup>2</sup>

The one who seeks the truth but misses it is not the same as the one who seeks falsehood and arrives at it.<sup>2</sup>

Do not flee from the truth, like the healthy flee from the one who has scabies, or like those who are well from those who are ill.<sup>2</sup>

Talking about those who had avoided going into battle with him, Imam 'Ali said: 'They have deserted the truth, and they have not made falsehood victorious.'<sup>2</sup>

When Imam 'Ali heard the saying of the Khawarij, 'There is no rule but Allah's', he said, peace be on him: 'These are true words.'

To me the one who is humble is one of the mighty until he has received what is due to him, and to me the one who is powerful is one of the weak until what is due from him has been taken from him.<sup>3</sup>

Surely the most excellent of people with Allah is the one who acts by the truth out of love for it—even if it involves loss or hardship for him—in preference to falsehood—even if it would bring him benefit and gain.<sup>3</sup>

It is a falsehood when you say: 'I heard it', and it is the truth

when you say: 'I saw it'!<sup>3</sup>

Surely a distressing time will come to you after me in which nothing will be more hidden than the truth, and nothing will be more apparent than falsehood, and nothing will be more numerous than lies about Allah and His Messenger.<sup>2</sup>

## Charity

Cause sustenance to descend upon yourself by giving in charity.<sup>3</sup>

Giving in charity is a cure that works, and an action of the slaves that makes things happen for them here, directing their attention towards their appointed time hereafter.<sup>3</sup>

Attend to your faith by giving in charity.<sup>3</sup>

If you are poor then do business with Allah the Exalted by giving in charity.<sup>3</sup>



## The Individual and the Creator

### Obedience and Disobedience towards Allah

Surely Allah, may He be glorified, has appointed rewards for being obedient to Him, and punishments for being disobedient to Him, so that His slaves can be driven away from His retribution and be brought together in His Garden.<sup>3</sup>

Surely it is a vain expectation of Allah, when the slave persists in disobedience and yet hopes for Allah's forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>

The heart of the matter is gnosis of Allah the Exalted, and what supports it is obedience to Allah, the Mighty and the Majestic.<sup>4</sup>

Surely Allah, may He be glorified, has made obedience the booty of those who understand in spite of the wickedness of those who are incapable.<sup>3</sup>

Beware of being disobedient to Allah when you are alone, for surely the One Who witnesses is also the One Who judges.<sup>3</sup>

People do not abandon an obligation in their life transaction (religion) with the intention of bettering themselves in this world, without Allah bringing something on them which is more harmful than it.<sup>3</sup>

If you have been guided to your goal then be as humble as you can before your Lord. If you have become strong then be strong in your obedience to Allah, and if you have become weak then be weak in your disobedience to Allah, the Mighty and the Majestic.<sup>3</sup>

Surely the people who are closest to the prophets are those who

are most knowledgeable about what they brought with them . . . Then Imam 'Ali recited: 'Surely the people who are closest to Abraham (Ibrahim) are those who follow him and this Prophet and those who believe.' Then he said: 'Surely the friend of Muhammad is the one who obeys Allah, even if his ties of flesh and blood with him are remote, and surely the enemy of Muhammad is the one who disobeys Allah, even if he is closely related to him.'<sup>3</sup>

If someone who knows his Lord disobeys Him, then He will place someone whom he does not know in authority over him.<sup>1</sup>

If a day passes during which I do not increase those actions which bring me closer to Allah, then there is no blessing in the rising of the sun on that day.<sup>1</sup>

Get rid of your wrong actions before they get rid of you.<sup>1</sup>

Being thankful for every blessing is being careful to avoid what Allah has forbidden.<sup>4</sup>

The least of what Allah demands of you is that you do not use His blessings to disobey Him.<sup>3</sup>

Be in awe of Allah in your dealings with His slaves and in His lands, for surely you are responsible, even if it is for a small piece of land and a few animals. Obey Allah and do not disobey Him. If you see good then take hold of it, and if you see evil then turn away from it.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever finds joy in having wealth without being in authority, and in having plenty without being in company, should abandon the disgrace of disobedience to Allah for the honour of obedience to Him, for surely he will find all of this in that.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever wants to see what there is for him from Allah should consider what there is for Allah from him.<sup>1</sup>

Take care that Allah does not see you disobeying Him, or misses seeing you obeying Him, or else you will be one of the losers. If you become strong then be strong in your obedience to Allah, and if you become weak then be weak in your disobedience to Allah.<sup>3</sup>

The perfection of sincerity is avoiding disobedience.<sup>4</sup>

When talking to his son Hasan, Imam 'Ali said: 'To continue, surely whatever you possess in this world used to belong to someone else before you, and it is destined for someone else who will

have it after you; and surely whatever you accumulate will go to one of two kinds of men: the man who makes use of what you accumulated in being obedient to Allah, so that he shares in the good fortune of what you worked hard for; or else the man who makes use of it in being disobedient to Allah, so that you will have been unfortunate in having taken the trouble in what you accumulated for him. Do not prefer either of these two people above yourself, and do not carry their burden on your back . . . Pray that the one who has gone before you tastes the mercy of Allah, and that the one who survives after you receives provision from Allah.<sup>3</sup>

Whoever takes pleasure in disobeying Allah will inherit disgrace from Him.<sup>3</sup>

## Remembrance and Supplication

Well-being consists of ten parts. Nine of them are in being silent—except in the remembrance of Allah, the Exalted—and one of them is in leaving the company of the foolish.<sup>1</sup>

Remembering Allah in the company of the forgetful is like being a green tree surrounded by dry stubble, or like a house full of life in a ruined quarter.<sup>1</sup>

The noblest of the outer senses is eyesight, so do not use it carelessly so that you are diverted from the remembrance of Allah.<sup>2</sup>

Surely there are people who have chosen remembrance instead of this world, so that neither buying nor selling diverts them from it.<sup>1</sup>

You often ask for something but you are not given it, and then, sooner or later, you are given something better than it. What you wanted is withheld from you so that you can have what is better for you.<sup>4</sup>

Supplication is the key to divine mercy.<sup>4</sup>

If you persist in what you ask for, it will open the doors of divine mercy to you.<sup>4</sup>

Deflect the waves of misfortune by supplication.<sup>3</sup>

The sincere person cannot go wrong in asking for one of these three things: seeking forgiveness for a wrong action; hastening something good; averting something evil.<sup>1</sup>

Glory be to the One Who when we ask for something good is swift to respond, and Who when He calls us to something good makes it clear. His good is always descending on us, and our evil is always ascending to Him, and He is the Sovereign Owner and Powerful.<sup>1</sup>

Having hope in the Creator, may He be glorified, is stronger than being in fear of Him, for you fear Him because of your wrong action but you have hope in Him because of His goodness. So your fear is because of you, while your hope is because of Him.<sup>1</sup>

O my God, what is the extent of my wrong actions compared to Your generosity, and what is the worth of my worship compared to Your blessings? Surely I hope that You will drown my wrong actions in Your generosity, just as my actions are immersed in Your blessings.<sup>1</sup>

Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, used these words when asking for rain: 'O Allah, give us water to drink from the low-hanging clouds without causing any hardship.'<sup>3</sup>

O Allah, surely I seek refuge in You from making a claim which is not pleasing to You—by seeking something from anyone other than You; and I seek refuge in You from doing anything to please people that is displeasing to You; and I seek refuge in You from being set up as an exemplary warning to anyone in Your creation.<sup>1</sup>

I ask You by the glory of Your Oneness and by the nobility of Your Divinity, not to cut off Your blessings from me after my death, just as you have not ceased to look kindly on me during the days of my life. You are the One Who answers whoever calls on You, and Who does not disappoint whoever puts hope in You, and whoever calls on other than You goes astray.<sup>1</sup>

O Allah, surely I ask You for the sincerity of those who are certain, and for the companionship of those who are kind, and for resolution in everything good, and for security against everything

bad, and for access to the Garden, and for deliverance from the Fire.<sup>1</sup>

## Turning to Allah and Seeking Forgiveness

Do not fall into despair over wrong action, when the door of turning to Him in repentance is always open.<sup>1</sup>

Abandoning wrong action is easier than having to turn to Him in repentance.<sup>1</sup>

There is no intercession more effective than turning to Him.<sup>1</sup>

Intercession for the one who does wrong is to remain steadfast, and to turn to Him in asking to be excused.<sup>1</sup>

When you do something bad then be quick to wipe it out by turning to Allah.<sup>4</sup>

How many a one who persists in wrong action repents at the end of his life.<sup>4</sup>

I am amazed at the one who despairs when he is able to ask for forgiveness.<sup>3</sup>

It is amazing that someone can be destroyed when he has the means to escape. So someone said to Imam 'Ali: 'What is that, O commander of the believers?' He replied: 'Seeking forgiveness.'<sup>10</sup>

Seeking forgiveness removes wrong actions like falling leaves. Then Imam 'Ali recited His words, may He be exalted: 'And whoever does something bad or wrongs himself and then seeks forgiveness from Allah will find that Allah is forgiving and compassionate.'<sup>1</sup>

Someone said 'I seek forgiveness from Allah' in Imam 'Ali's presence and he said: 'May your mother be bereaved by you . . . Do you realize what it is to seek forgiveness? Seeking forgiveness is for those who have a very high station. It is a term which involves many meanings: the first one is feeling remorse for what has happened, and the second is resolving not to repeat it ever again; third, it is to honour what is due from you to created beings, so that you will meet Allah free of any outstanding obligations; fourth, it is to concern yourself with everything obligatory that

you have neglected so as to fulfil what is due in them; fifth, it is to concern yourself with that flesh of yours which has been nourished by what is unlawful, so as to melt it away with grief, until your skin clings to your bones and new flesh grows between them; sixth, it is to let your body taste the pain of obedience, just as you previously let it taste the sweetness of disobedience . . . And after that you can say: "I seek forgiveness from Allah." <sup>1</sup>

O Allah, show me what is good for me, and lead me by the forelock to what is right for me. O Allah, drive me towards Your forgiveness, and do not impel me towards Your justice.<sup>1</sup>

O Allah, surely my wrong actions do not cause You any harm, and surely Your showing mercy to me does not cause You any loss. So forgive me for what does not harm You, and give me what is of no use to You.<sup>1</sup>

O Allah, let me be free to fulfil what You have created me for, and do not let me be preoccupied with the responsibilities which You have given me in it. Do not deny me when I call on You, and do not punish me when I seek Your forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

O you whose wrong actions are many, surely your forefather was turned out of the Garden for just one wrong action.<sup>1</sup>

Perfume yourself with seeking forgiveness, and the stink of wrong action will not disgrace you.<sup>1</sup>

I seek forgiveness from Allah for what is within my power, and I seek goodness from Him in what is not within my power.<sup>1</sup>

O Allah, protect us from winking side-glances, and damaging comments, and mad desires, and slips of the tongue.<sup>6</sup>

## Being in Awe and Those who are in Awe

Be in awe of Allah with some degree of awe (*taqwa*), even if it is a little, and have a veil between you and Allah, even if it is thin.<sup>2</sup>

What is done out of awe of Allah is not insignificant . . . how can anything that is acceptable be insignificant?<sup>3</sup>

If you are not given enough provision to make yourself sufficient, then you will certainly not be denied awe of Allah.<sup>1</sup>

O slaves of Allah, surely awe of Allah protects the friends of Allah from what He has forbidden, and keeps their hearts restrained in fear of Him, so that they stay awake at night, and are thirsty during the day. They find rest in toil, and relief in being thirsty. They think the end of their time is near, and so they hasten to do good.<sup>2</sup>

O slaves of Allah, I advise you to be in awe of Allah, for surely it restrains and supports. Take a firm grip of its bonds, and hold fast to its realities. Be in awe of Allah with the awe (*taqwa*) of a man who has understanding, whose heart is occupied with reflection, and whose body is filled with fear, and whose staying awake to stand in prayer robs him of his sleep.<sup>2</sup>

Be in awe of Allah with the awe of one who hears and fears, and who commits and confesses, and who apprehends and acts, and who is cautious and swift, and certain and better, and who is willing to learn and learns his lesson, and who is careful and takes care.<sup>2</sup>

O slaves of Allah, be in awe of Allah with regard to what He has created you for, and be very careful, as He Himself has warned you to be.<sup>2</sup>

He has made patience a means to His salvation, and awe (*taqwa*) of Him a preparation for what He has promised.<sup>2</sup>

Amongst the instructions Imam 'Ali gave to Hasan and Husayn are these: 'I tell you, be in awe of Allah, and do not desire the world, even if it desires you, and do not be sad about anything of it that is taken from you. Speak the truth, and work for your reward, and oppose whoever oppresses, and help whoever is oppressed.'<sup>2</sup>

Nothing breaks the back of Satan (Iblis) more than the words 'La ilaha illa'llah' (There is no god but Allah), the words of being in awe of Allah.<sup>1</sup>

Truly the best of people have gone on ahead to the Garden of Eden, not because of their excelling others in the prayer, or in fasting, and not because of their going on pilgrimage, or because of their religious visit to Makka, but because of their sensible understanding of the command of Allah, so that they made their obedience beautiful, and excelled in their piety, and perfected their

certainty, with the result that they outstripped others in their good fortune and were raised to a high station.<sup>1</sup>

Surely the friends of Allah are those who are concerned with the inner aspects of the world while other people are concerned with its outer aspects, and who are preoccupied with its eventual future while other people are preoccupied with its immediate present. So they kill what they are afraid will kill them, and leave alone what they know will surely leave them alone.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunate is the one who remembers the Promised Day of Return, and who acts with the Reckoning in mind, and who is content with what is just enough, and who is pleased with Allah.<sup>2</sup>

Surely there are some slaves of Allah on the earth for whom it is as if they can see the people of the Garden in their Garden, and the people of the Fire in their Fire: certainty and its light shine in their faces. Their hearts are full of sadness, and they are safe from their own evil. Their selves avoid what is forbidden, and their needs are few. They are patient in the few days that they have here, so that they will be able to rest for a long time to come.

As for the night-time, they stand on their feet, with tears streaming down their cheeks, beseeching Allah, may He be glorified, in their supplications to Him. The taste of communing with Him has been sweet, in their mouths and in their hearts, and they have found delight in its sweetness. Allah has sworn to Himself, by the Majesty of His Might, that they shall inherit the highest station in the place of truthfulness with Him.

As for the day-time, they are kind and understanding and just and in awe of Allah. It is as if they have been struck by lightning, so that the onlooker who sees them says: 'They are ill'—but they are not ill with any illness; or he says: 'They are confused'—and by my life they are certainly involved in a tremendous and glorious affair!<sup>1</sup>

## Fear and Hope

Among some examples of [hope] is the one who supplicates and claims that he has hope in Allah. By the One Who is great, he is

lying! Does he not care that his hope is not evident in his actions? For the hope of everyone who hopes can be recognized in his action. Every hope, except the hope that is placed in Allah the Exalted, is surely dubious; and every fear is real, except fear of Allah, for it is surely misconstrued.

Whoever places hope in Allah in big matters, and places hope in the slaves in small matters, is attributing to the slave what he denies his Lord! Why should it be Allah's concern, glory be to Him, that He is not offered what is offered to His slaves? Are you not afraid that in saying you have placed your hope in Him you are lying? Or are you saying that in your opinion there is no need to place your hope in Him?

Likewise, whoever fears one of His slaves, attributes something to him by his fearing him that he does not attribute to His Lord. He makes his fear of the slaves immediate, while his fear of his Creator is only slight and delayed. Similarly, whoever views the world as being very great, and confirms this greatness in his heart, has preferred it to Allah the Exalted, and has chosen it instead of Him, and has become its slave.<sup>2</sup>

Placing hope in the Creator, may He be glorified, is stronger than being in fear of Him. For surely you fear Him because of your wrong action, and you place your hope in Him because of His generosity. So the fear is because of you, and the hope is because of Him. Fear Allah until it is as if you have never obeyed Him, and place your hope in Allah until it is as if you have never disobeyed Him.<sup>2</sup>

## Worship

Surely there are people who worship Allah out of desire for reward, and this is the worship of traders. And surely there are people who worship Allah out of fear of punishment, and this is the worship of slaves. And surely there are people who worship Allah out of gratitude, and this is the worship of the free.<sup>3</sup>

Being patient in the difficulties of worship will raise you up to

the honour of the greatest success.<sup>1</sup>

The most excellent worship is being silent, and waiting patiently for relief.<sup>1</sup>

Perfect happiness comes with knowledge, and partial happiness comes with abstinence. Worship without knowledge and without abstinence merely exhausts the body.<sup>1</sup>

The most excellent worship is refraining from disobedience, and stopping when in doubt.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever there is wisdom, there is fear of Allah; and wherever there is fear of Him, there also is His mercy.<sup>1</sup>

## Fear of Allah

It is amazing that someone can fear the punishment of a ruler although it will come to an end, and not fear the punishment of the King although it lasts for ever.<sup>1</sup>

There is no safer refuge than piety.<sup>5</sup>

It is worthy for a man to fear Allah in private, and to guard himself from disgrace, and to increase his good actions as he grows older.<sup>1</sup>

Fear Allah in secret, and He will withhold what might harm you.<sup>4</sup>

Whoever fears Allah . . . is feared by everything.<sup>1</sup>

## Good Actions and Bad Actions

A bad action that distresses you is better in the eyes of Allah than a good action that makes you proud.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever enters the entrances of evil will be accused.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever thinks that he is wicked is benevolent, and whoever thinks that he is benevolent is wicked.<sup>1</sup>

## Success

The most glorious thing to come down from the heavens is divine succour, and the most glorious thing to rise up from the earth is sincerity.<sup>1</sup>

One thing that no one can do without is divine succour.<sup>1</sup>

Divine succour is a good guide.<sup>4</sup>

## Ease and Hardship

What do I care whether I am thrown into ease or into hardship? For surely it is my duty to Allah the Exalted to be pleased with my lot in times of hardship, and to be grateful in times of ease.<sup>4</sup>

What is the goodness of anything good if it is not attainable in spite of evil? And what is ease if it is not attainable in spite of hardship?<sup>4</sup>

Towards the limit of hardship is relief, and following the constriction of trials is ease.<sup>2</sup>

If you make things easy then all men will be your men, and if you make things hard even your own family will deny you.<sup>1</sup>

## Sustenance

There are two kinds of sustenance: the sustenance that you seek after, and the sustenance that seeks after you, so that if you do not go to it, it comes to you. So do not burden yourself with worrying about the year ahead of you on top of worrying about the day ahead of you . . . . What there is in each day is enough for you. For if the year ahead is going to be part of your life, then on each new day Allah the Exalted will give you what He has apportioned for you. And if the year ahead is not going to be part of your life, then what are you doing worrying about something that is nothing to do with you! No one else will beat you to your sustenance in seeking after it, and no one else will overcome you in struggling for it,

and nothing of what has been decreed for you will be delayed from reaching you . . .<sup>3</sup>

A man complained to Imam 'Ali, peace be upon him, about the difficulty in obtaining his sustenance so he said: 'Do not struggle for your sustenance with the struggle of the one who wants to win, and do not trust in the decree with the trust of the one who submits to judgement, for surely it is part of the lifestyle of the Prophet (*sunnah*) to seek after bounty, and acting honourably in seeking after it is a part of avoiding what is forbidden. Avoiding what is forbidden has never driven away sustenance, and greed has never attracted bounty, because sustenance has already been apportioned, and excessive greed leads people to do wrong.'<sup>1</sup>

Sustenance has already been apportioned, and the days are full of change, and people along the same road are equal. Adam was their father, and Eve was their mother.<sup>1</sup>

Be the companion of the one whose sustenance has come to him, for surely he has more of a right to be rich, and it is more fitting that good fortune has come to him.<sup>3</sup>

## Satan and Trial

When talking about Satan (Iblis), Imam 'Ali said: 'Can you not see how Allah belittled him through his pride, and brought him low after his having been raised up, and has made him rejected in this world, and has prepared a blazing fire for him in the next world?'<sup>3</sup>

They have obeyed Satan and so they have walked along his paths, and drunk from his sources. His banners have accompanied them and his flags have been with them in times of discord and sedition in which they have been abased by being trampled upon.<sup>2</sup>

Do not revile Satan (Iblis) in public if you are his sincere friend in secret!<sup>1</sup>

Extinguish whatever there is hidden in your hearts of the fires of partisanship and spite from the days of ignorance before Islam (*jahiliyya*), for surely such fury comes to a Muslim from the

insinuations of Satan, and from his false pride, and from his suggestions, and from his magic.<sup>2</sup>

It is better to have an oppressive tyrant than a long civil war.<sup>4</sup>

Whoever incites discord and sedition will be the one who will eat them.<sup>1</sup>

In times of discord and sedition be like a very young camel, whose back is too weak for it to be ridden, and who has no udders to be milked.<sup>2</sup>

Do not let any one of you say: 'O Allah, surely I seek refuge in you from trial', for surely there is not one of you who will not be exposed to trial, but let whoever seeks refuge seek refuge from the trials that lead you astray. For surely Allah, may He be glorified, says: 'And know that your wealth and your children are surely a trial for you.' The meaning of this is that surely He tests them through their wealth and children so that it is clear who is discontent with his sustenance and who is pleased with his share, even though He, may He be glorified, knows all this better than they themselves. However it is in order to show clearly which actions deserve to be rewarded or punished, for some of them love sons, but hate daughters . . . and some of them love wealth to bear fruit, but hate to see an adverse change in fortune.<sup>2</sup>

## Needs

Do not ask Allah to free you from being in need of people, for surely the needs of people are as closely interrelated as the limbs of the body . . . and when has any man not been in need of a hand or a leg? So ask Allah to free you from being in need of the most wicked of them.<sup>1</sup>

Do not ask for what you need from those who cannot meet it, and do not ask for it at the wrong time, and do not ask for what you are not entitled to, so that it has to be denied you.<sup>1</sup>

Do not delay in procuring for anyone in need what he needs until tomorrow, for surely you do not know what is going to happen tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>

Do not seek help in satisfying your need from someone who has more need of what you want than you do.<sup>1</sup>

Seek all that you need honourably, for surely the destiny of their fulfilment is in the hands of Allah.<sup>1</sup>

If you wish to be obeyed then only ask for what can be obeyed.<sup>1</sup>

Being gracious in seeking your needs is more satisfying than meeting them.<sup>1</sup>

Taking despair well is better than asking for anything from others.<sup>4</sup>

If anyone complains about their needs to a believer (*mu'min*), it is as if he had complained about them to Allah, and if anyone complains about them to an unbeliever (*kafir*), it is as if he had complained about Allah.<sup>1</sup>

Do not ask these three kinds of people to satisfy your needs: the liar, for surely he will make things seem near when they are distant; the fool, for surely he will want to help you but will only harm you; and the man whose own need is linked to your needs, for surely he will use your need as a means to secure his own need.<sup>1</sup>

The satisfaction of needs only occurs on three conditions: by their being made to look insignificant so that they only become significant when fulfilled; by their being concealed so that they are only revealed when fulfilled; and by their being handled expeditiously, so that they are only beneficial when fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever does not hope for other than what is necessary for him will have his needs met.<sup>1</sup>

Letting go of a need is better for you than seeking it from those who cannot meet it.<sup>2</sup>

Do not ask anyone to satisfy your need at night, for surely there is a feeling of shame when eyes meet!<sup>1</sup>

## Blessings

It is good to recall blessings that have been bestowed when people are ungrateful. If the tribe of Israel (*Isra'il*) had not denied the blessing they received, Allah would not have said to them:

'Remember My blessing with which I have favoured you.'<sup>1</sup>

For every blessing there is a key and a lock. The key is patience, and the lock is laziness.<sup>1</sup>

Do not deny the One Who grants favours, for surely the denial of favours is the basest infidelity.<sup>4</sup>

There is no greater blessing in this world than a long life and a healthy body.<sup>4</sup>

## Paths of Salvation

There are three things that set you free: fear of Allah in secret and in public; moderation in times of poverty and wealth; and being just in times of anger and contentment.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever is given four things will not be denied four things: whoever is granted supplication will not be denied its being answered; whoever is granted turning in repentance will not be denied its being accepted; whoever is granted seeking forgiveness will not be denied being forgiven; and whoever is granted gratitude will not be denied increase.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Radhi said: 'Confirmation of this is in the Book of Allah. Allah says, about supplication: "Ask of Me and I will answer you." And He says, about seeking forgiveness: "And whoever commits evil or wrongs himself and then seeks forgiveness from Allah will find Allah forgiving and compassionate." And He says, about gratitude: "If you are grateful, I will surely give you increase." And He says, about turning in repentance: "Surely it is up to Allah to grant forgiveness to those who commit evil in ignorance and then soon turn in repentance; these are the ones to whom Allah turns and Allah is always knowing and wise."<sup>1 2</sup>

## Mercy

All in Creation are Allah's dependants, and the most beloved of people with Allah is the one who is most concerned with his de-

pendants.<sup>1</sup>

He is the One Whose chastisement towards His enemies intensifies in the midst of the extensiveness of His mercy, and Whose mercy towards His friends becomes extensive in the midst of the intensity of His chastisement.<sup>2</sup>

Surely Allah the Exalted can most certainly lead the one who is immoral to His life transaction (religion), the one who is reckless in His creation . . . and grant him the Garden by His generosity.<sup>4</sup>

Be merciful to those of you who are weak, for showing mercy to them is the means by which Allah will show mercy to you.<sup>1</sup>

Kindness blunts the sharpness of disagreements.<sup>1</sup>

Do good in what happens to other people, and it will be a protection in what happens to you.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever is not kind will not enjoy life.<sup>1</sup>

There are three kinds of people to whom mercy will be shown: a person of intellect who is subjected to the judgement of one who is foolish; a weak person who is in the hands of a powerful tyrant, and a person who is generous amongst his people and stands in need of someone who is mean.<sup>1</sup>

*Part Two*

Man and Society



## Man and His Characteristics

### Keeping Watch over the Self and Taking into Account

Whoever takes his self into account will profit, and whoever is heedless of it will lose, and whoever is fearful will be secure, and whoever reflects will discern, and whoever discerns will comprehend, and whoever comprehends will have knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Allah is merciful towards the slave who is in awe of his Lord, and who counsels his self, and who offers repentance, and who overcomes his desires, for surely his final end is hidden from him, and his hopes are deceptive, and Satan is watching over him.<sup>1</sup>

The best way of life is the one which does not make you do wrong or make you distracted.<sup>1</sup>

Remember what curtails pleasures—and the consequences that are lasting.<sup>2</sup>

The actions which the slaves are in such a hurry to do should be undertaken with their eyes fixed on their final end.<sup>4</sup>

Always observe your appearance in the mirror, and if it looks good consider it repulsive to associate an ugly action with it and so spoil it, and if it looks ugly consider it even more repulsive by combining the two forms of ugliness!<sup>1</sup>

## Faults of the Self and Correcting Them

Train yourself in good behaviour with regard to what you dislike in others.<sup>1</sup>

A man who overtly criticises himself is covertly praising it.<sup>1</sup>

Your private parts will not fornicate if you lower your gaze.<sup>1</sup>

The Satan of everyone is his own self.<sup>1</sup>

## The Heart

I am amazed at the heart of man: It possesses the substance of wisdom as well as the opposites contrary to it . . . for if hope arises in it, it is brought low by covetousness; and if covetousness is aroused in it, greed destroys it. If despair possesses it, self-pity kills it; and if it is seized by anger, this is intensified by rage. If it is blessed with contentment, then it forgets to be careful; and if it is filled with fear, then it becomes preoccupied with being cautious. If it feels secure, then it is overcome by vain hopes; and if it is given wealth, then its independence makes it over-extravagant. If want strikes it, then it is smitten by anxiety. If it is weakened by hunger, then it gives way to exhaustion; and if it goes too far in satisfying its appetites, then its inner becomes clogged up. So all its shortcomings are harmful to it, and all its excesses corrupt it.<sup>4</sup>

There are four things which make the heart die: wrong action followed by wrong action, playing around with foolish people, spending a lot of time with women, and sitting with the dead. Then they asked Imam 'Ali: 'And who are the dead, O commander of the believers?' He replied: 'Every slave who follows his desires.'<sup>4</sup>

Surely want is a trial, and having a sickness of the body is more difficult to bear than indigence, and having a sickness of the heart is more difficult to bear than having a sickness of the body. Surely being very wealthy is a blessing, and having a healthy body is better than being very wealthy, and having awe of Allah in your heart is better than having a healthy body.<sup>4</sup>

Ask your hearts about friendship, for surely it is a witness that cannot be bribed.<sup>1</sup>

The best hearts are those that best remember.<sup>1</sup>

Kindle your heart with courteous behaviour just as you kindle a fire with fuel.<sup>1</sup>

Surely hearts have desires, and they turn towards, and they turn away . . . so approach them by means of what they desire and what they turn towards, for surely if the heart is forced to do something against its will, it goes blind.<sup>2</sup>

Surely hearts grow tired just as bodies grow tired, so seek out the novelties of wisdom for them.<sup>2</sup>

If you have any doubts about a person's friendship then ask your heart about it.<sup>1</sup>

## The Intellect

The most self-sustaining wealth is the intellect.<sup>5</sup>

A person's intellect becomes apparent through his dealings, and a man's character is known by the way he exercises authority.<sup>1</sup>

The intellect is a king and characteristics are its subjects, so if it is weak in governing them, disorder overtakes it.<sup>1</sup>

The intellect is better than desire, for the intellect makes you a king over your destiny, and desire makes you a slave of your destiny.<sup>1</sup>

Bodies are sustained by food, and intellects are sustained by wisdom, and whenever either one of them is deprived of its sustenance then it perishes and disintegrates.<sup>1</sup>

Keep company with the people of intellect, whether they are your enemies or your friends, for surely one intellect is only confirmed by another intellect.<sup>1</sup>

There is no more profitable wealth than the intellect.<sup>2</sup>

The most precious treasure is an intellect which is accompanied by good fortune.<sup>1</sup>

Courteous behaviour is the outer form of the intellect.<sup>6</sup>

If the intellect is given free rein, and if it is not imprisoned by the desires of the self or by religious customs or by partisanship, then it will lead the one who possesses it to salvation.<sup>2</sup>

If you want to conclude a book, then look through it once again, and then you will conclude it only in accordance with your intellect.<sup>1</sup>

When Allah wishes to remove a favour from His slave, the first thing He changes in him is his intellect.<sup>1</sup>

The intellect is a natural disposition which learns from experience.<sup>1</sup>

The intellect is what arrives at what is correct through reasoning, and recognizes what has not yet happened through what has already taken place.<sup>1</sup>

The spirit gives life to the body, and the intellect gives life to the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The intellect is what remembers what it has experienced.<sup>4</sup>

Your messenger is what is interpreted by your intellect.<sup>4</sup>

Use your intellect to understand something when you hear about it—the intellect that examines, that is, and not just the intellect that repeats what it hears, for surely there are many who repeat the knowledge that they hear, and there are few who examine it.<sup>2</sup>

The one who has an intellect longs to be like the righteous people so that he can be one of them, and he loves them so that he can be united with them in his love, even if he falls short in emulating their actions.<sup>1</sup>

When the one who has an intellect says something, he follows his words up wisely and by example.<sup>1</sup>

The most excellent of men as regards their intellect, and the most perfect of them as regards excellence, is the one who spends his days in reconciliation and peace with his brothers, accepting whatever forgiveness comes to him in the course of time.<sup>1</sup>

The one who has an intellect does not openly display it except in one of two situations: when he is furthest away from seeking something in the world, and when he is furthest away from abandoning it.<sup>1</sup>

The one who has an intellect should not openly display it in seeking to win the obedience of others when the obedience of his own self eludes him.<sup>1</sup>

The person of intellect is the one who questions his own opinions, and does not trust what his self incites him to do.<sup>1</sup>

The person of intellect is the one who is taught by experience.<sup>4</sup>

Surely the words of the wise are a cure when they are accurate, and an illness when they are mistaken.<sup>2</sup>

The enmity between persons of intellect is the most severe and most damaging of enmities, for surely it does not occur until after excuses and warnings have already been made, and reconciliation between them has become impossible.<sup>1</sup>

Surely hated adversity has final objectives in which it will inevitably end, so the one who has an intellect should try to sleep over it until this happens, for surely any attempt to stop it before it has come to an end will only intensify that hated adversity even more.<sup>4</sup>

The most likable of people for the one who has an intellect is the enemy who has an intellect, for if he does have an intellect, then he will surely be safe from him.<sup>1</sup>

A rebuke from persons of intellect is harder to bear than the punishment of a potentate.<sup>1</sup>

The first opinion of the person of intellect is the last opinion of an ignorant person.<sup>1</sup>

The one who has an intellect finds harshness of life amongst persons of intellect more agreeable than a life of ease amongst the foolish.<sup>1</sup>

## The Tongue

The tongue of the believer (*mu'min*) follows his heart, and the heart of the hypocrite (*munafiq*) follows his tongue.<sup>1</sup>

The belief of a slave will not be straightforward until his heart is straightforward, and his heart will not be straightforward until his tongue is straightforward.<sup>1</sup>

By Allah I have not seen a slave in awe of Allah benefit from his awe (*taqwa*) until he guards his tongue.<sup>1</sup>

Surely this tongue is difficult to keep under control by the one who possesses it.<sup>1</sup>

Speak and you will be recognized, for surely a man lies hidden behind his tongue.<sup>2</sup>

The well-being of man lies in guarding the tongue.<sup>10</sup>

Your tongue demands of you what you accustom it to do.<sup>5</sup>

The tongue is like a lion—if you let it run free it will wound someone.<sup>2</sup>

Since the tongue is for expressing what occurs to the self, you should not try to use it to express what does not occur to it.<sup>1</sup>

Your speech is under your firm control as long as you do not speak, but if you speak you come under its control, so guard your tongue as you guard your gold and silver, for many a word is a blessing but leads to indignation.<sup>2</sup>

How seldom has the tongue been fair to you in making known what is ugly or beautiful.<sup>6</sup>

Take your words into account as part of your actions, and do not say anything unless it is good.<sup>1</sup>

Surely silence can sometimes be the most eloquent reply.<sup>7</sup>

When the intellect awakes, speech decreases.<sup>2</sup>

Putting things right after you have been too silent is easier than trying to retrieve what you have already said.<sup>4</sup>

The best words are those which are confirmed by actions.<sup>8</sup>

When a few words are enough, more words are tiresome, and when a few words are too little, more words are necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever talks a lot makes many mistakes, and whoever makes many mistakes loses his modesty, and whoever loses his modesty loses his scrupulousness, and whoever loses his scrupulousness, his heart dies, and one whose heart dies enters the Fire.<sup>2</sup>

## Human Nature

The enmity of the weak towards the strong, and of the foolish towards the wise, and of the evil towards the good . . . is a natural

state of affairs that cannot be changed.<sup>1</sup>

Habits are overwhelming, so whoever forms a bad habit in secret and seclusion will be disgraced by it out in the open and in public.<sup>1</sup>

Habit is an all-powerful second nature.<sup>1</sup>

A bad habit lies hidden in an ambush from which one is not safe.<sup>1</sup>

He has distinguished the human race by the diversity of its limitations and capabilities, and its innate dispositions and appearances. He has manifested this creation in the wisest of forms, and given it its original nature in accordance with what He intended and innovated!<sup>2</sup>

## Man's Allotted Life-Time

Whoever lives for a long time will be happy with what he sees happening to his enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever a man reaches his fortieth year it is said to him: 'Beware of the descent of what has been decreed, for surely you cannot make any excuses now.' However, those who are forty do not have to take any more care than those who are twenty, for there is only one thing that seeks them, and it will not stop seeking them, and it is death. So act in the knowledge of what terrors lie ahead of you, and avoid elaborate speech.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever reaches his seventieth year complains without any cause.<sup>1</sup>

The allotted life-time is sufficient protection.<sup>1</sup>



## Education and Conduct

### Searching for Knowledge

Knowledge is the most precious of treasures, and the most beautiful. It is easy to carry, tremendously useful, beautiful in its completeness, and delightful in its uniqueness.<sup>1</sup>

Acquire some knowledge, for surely it is an adornment for the rich, and an aid for the poor—and I am not saying that it goes out looking for them, but that it shows them how to be content.<sup>1</sup>

Life is too short for you to learn all the knowledge that you find attractive, so learn what inspires you, only what inspires you.<sup>1</sup>

Do not share the knowledge with which you have been blessed with everyone in general, as you do with some people in particular; and know that there are some men in whom Allah, may He be glorified, has placed hidden secrets, which they are forbidden to reveal. Remember the reply of the righteous slave to Moses when he said to him: 'May I follow you so that you can teach me what you know about what is right?' He replied: 'Surely you will not be able to be patient with me. How can you be patient about something which you do not understand?'<sup>1</sup>

Acquire some knowledge, even if you do not acquire very much, for to have complaints about the times being made to you is better than having complaints being made about you.<sup>1</sup>

Knowledge is power. Whoever finds it overcomes by it, and whoever does not find it is overcome.<sup>1</sup>

There are two kinds of knowledge: What is naturally absorbed, and what you hear about—and what you hear about will be of no use to you if it is not naturally absorbed.<sup>2</sup>

Close attachment to knowledge comes from the nobility of aspiration.<sup>2</sup>

Every container becomes tightly packed with what is put in it, except for the container of knowledge, for surely it expands.<sup>2</sup>

The intellect will never harm its owner, but knowledge without any intellect will harm its owner.<sup>1</sup>

If there are too many answers, then the correct one is obscured.<sup>2</sup>

The peak of knowledge is friendship, and causing offence destroys it.<sup>4</sup>

If you desire knowledge and good, then throw away the implements of ignorance and evil that you possess, for surely a goldsmith is not ready to work with gold until he has thrown away the farming implements that are in his possession.<sup>1</sup>

## Knowledge and Acting on It

Knowledge is accompanied by action, for whoever knows acts. Knowledge calls out for action: if it responds to the call then it remains . . . otherwise it moves away from it.<sup>2</sup>

Acquire some knowledge and you will understand through it; and act on it and you will be one of its people.<sup>2</sup>

O you who carry knowledge around with you, are you only carrying it around with you? For surely knowledge belongs to whoever knows and then acts accordingly, so that his action corresponds to his knowledge. There will be a people who carry knowledge around with them, but it will not pass beyond their shoulders. Their innermost thoughts will contradict what they display in public, and their actions will contradict what they know.<sup>1</sup>

The one who acts without knowledge is like a traveller who has gone off the path. The more he wanders away from the open road, the further away he is from where he wants to go. And the one who acts with knowledge is like the one who travels on the open road.

So let the one who is watching, watch out: is he coming or going?<sup>4</sup>

Take care and hold fast to what you know, for surely every onlooker is responsible for his actions, and his words, and his intentions.<sup>4</sup>

One who knows but does not act is like an archer without a string to his bow.<sup>4</sup>

## The Purity and Nobility of Knowledge

There is nothing as honourable as knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge is a noble inheritance.<sup>4</sup>

The lowest knowledge is what remains on the tongue, and the highest is what appears on the limbs in reliable actions.<sup>2</sup>

Be careful not to talk about knowledge in the presence of those who have no desire for it, or to talk about noble precedents in the presence of those who do not follow precedents, for surely that is what will make them harbour hatred against you.<sup>1</sup>

When Allah degrades a slave, He excludes him from knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

When a dead person is placed in his grave four kinds of fire will cover him, but then the prayer will come and put one of them out, and the fast will come and put another one of them out, and charity will come and put another one of them out, and knowledge will come and put the fourth one out, and it will say: 'If I had come sooner, I would have put all of them out, and given you delight, for I am with you now, and you will not see anything else distressing.'<sup>1</sup>

Do not talk about knowledge with the foolish so that they deny you, nor with the ignorant so that they find you oppressive, but talk about it with those of its people whom you meet who will accept it and understand it.<sup>1</sup>

It is enough to indicate the honour of knowledge that he who is not well-established in it claims to possess it, and delights in being associated with it!<sup>4</sup>

## The Station of the Men of Knowledge

The man of knowledge is the lamp of Allah on the earth, so if Allah wishes anyone well, he derives light from him.<sup>1</sup>

The man of knowledge is like a date palm which you watch, waiting for something good to fall down from it for you.<sup>1</sup>

The man of knowledge is better than the one who fasts and stands in prayer and fights in the way of Allah. When the man of knowledge dies, Islam suffers such a loss that it can only be put right by whoever is his successor.<sup>1</sup>

The one who goes in search of knowledge is accompanied by angels until he returns.<sup>1</sup>

The man of knowledge is the one who knows his worth, and it is ignorance indeed for a man not to know his worth.<sup>1</sup>

Know that the slaves of Allah are those who seek to preserve knowledge of Him, safeguarding what safeguards it, and letting its springs flow freely. They are united by friendship, and they meet with love, and they drink from the cup that quenches their thirst, and they go on with their thirst satisfied. They are not troubled by doubt, and they are not quick to backbite. It is on this basis that their natural disposition and character rest, and on this is based their love, and by this they are united. They are like seeds that have been assessed and selected, some to be kept and some to be thrown away, identified through purification, and refined through clarification.<sup>2</sup>

Among the duties which are owed to the man of knowledge by the one who wants to learn from him are these: not to ask him too many questions, and not to find fault with his answers, and not to disturb him when he is relaxing and not to reveal his secrets, and not to backbite anyone in his presence.<sup>1</sup>

The man of knowledge is the one who recognizes that what is known is very little compared to what is not known, and as a result he considers himself ignorant, and accordingly he increases his efforts to know more by going out in search of knowledge!<sup>4</sup>

When a man of knowledge makes a mistake, it is like a shipwreck—when the ship sinks everyone sinks with it.<sup>1</sup>

When a man of knowledge laughs, even his laughter is flecked with specks of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

## Knowledge and Ignorance

The one who is ignorant considers himself knowledgeable, even though he is unable to recognize what knowledge is, and is tied up in his own opinions.<sup>4</sup>

The man of knowledge recognizes the one who is ignorant—for he once had that ignorance, but the one who is ignorant does not recognize the man of knowledge—for he does not have that knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

The one who is ignorant is a child even if he is an old man, and the man of knowledge is a grown up even if he is young.<sup>1</sup>

Allah does not hold the people of ignorance responsible for not learning until He has held the people of knowledge responsible for not teaching.<sup>1</sup>

There are two kinds of people for whom everything is easy: the man of knowledge, who recognizes the consequences; and the one who is ignorant, who does not know where he is.<sup>1</sup>

There are two kinds of men who have been a great burden to me: the ignorant who are religious, and the knowledgeable who are immoral.<sup>1</sup>

In reply to someone who asked him a difficult question, Imam 'Ali said: 'Ask in order to understand, and do not ask in order to find fault, for surely the ignorant man who wants to learn resembles a man of knowledge, and surely a man of knowledge who wants to be difficult resembles an ignorant man who wants to find fault.'<sup>2</sup>

You will not be safe from the evil of the one who is ignorant as long as you are next to him or nearby, for surely the one who has the most to fear in being burnt by the fire is the one who is closest to it.<sup>1</sup>

How ugly it is for the one with a handsome face to be ignorant: it is like a beautifully built house in which evil dwells, or like a

garden inhabited by an owl, or like a herd of camels being watched by a wolf.<sup>1</sup>

Do not argue with anyone who is ignorant, and do not follow anyone who is oppressive, and do not disobey anyone who is in authority.<sup>1</sup>

You will always see the one who is ignorant being either careless or wasteful.<sup>1</sup>

The most ignorant of those who are ignorant is the one who trips over the same stone twice.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to prove something to someone who is ignorant, but it is difficult to make him confirm it.<sup>1</sup>

There is no good in remaining silent when wise words are needed, just as there is surely no good in speaking in ignorance.<sup>2</sup>

There is no disease more incurable than ignorance.<sup>3</sup>

There is no poverty quite like ignorance.<sup>5</sup>

## Advice about Good Health

There is no illness more debilitating than lack of intellect.<sup>5</sup>

There is no health where there is greed.<sup>5</sup>

Medicine may sometimes make you ill.<sup>4</sup>

Taking medicine is to the body what soap is to clothing. It cleans it but wears it out.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of the cold when it first comes, and welcome it as it comes to an end, for surely it affects your bodies just as it affects the plants: when it starts it burns, and as it ends it brings new growth.<sup>3</sup>

Good health is hidden wealth.<sup>1</sup>

## Counsel

Look at whoever wants to give you advice, for if it is at all likely that people will suffer as a result, then do not accept his counsel and be on your guard; but if it is directed from the view of justice

and righteousness, then accept it because of that.<sup>1</sup>

Do not stop giving advice to your family, for surely you are responsible for them.<sup>4</sup>

Give sincere advice to your brother, whether it sounds attractive or ugly.<sup>4</sup>

Whoever loves to listen to his own words rather than to yours will not understand what you have to say, and whoever lets his own desire override your view will not comprehend your advice, and whoever thinks that he has a more perfect understanding of any matter that you raise will not yield to you.<sup>1</sup>

## Encouragement to Be Correct in One's Actions

Do not try to be quick in what you do, but try to do it well, for surely people will not ask you: 'How long did it take you to finish what you were doing?' Surely they will ask you how well you did it.<sup>1</sup>

Be quick to seize the opportunity, before you are frustrated.<sup>4</sup>

The one who calls to a good cause but does not act accordingly is like an archer without a string to his bow.<sup>2</sup>

Face-to-face combat is a tremendous struggle.<sup>1</sup>

To delay is to lose.<sup>4</sup>

Beware of relying on wishful thinking for surely it belongs to those who are stupid—the foolish and the ignorant—and it keeps you away from both the next world and this world.<sup>4</sup>

Bear with your illness in what it gives you to bear.<sup>4</sup>

Beware of being lazy, for surely whoever is lazy is not fulfilling the duty he owes to Allah.<sup>1</sup>

Never reckon upon something which you cannot depend on yourself to be able to fulfil, and do not let an easy ascent deceive you when the descent is steep and difficult; and know that actions have results, so take care of the consequences, and affairs have characteristics of suddenness, so beware!<sup>1</sup>



## Good Character and Courteous Behaviour

### Good Character

Nobility of character consists of ten qualities: generosity, modesty, sincerity, fulfilment of trust, humility, self-esteem, courage, forbearance, patience, and gratitude.<sup>1</sup>

There are three kinds of people who are recognized only in three kinds of situations: the courageous man is recognized only in times of war; the forbearing man only in times of anger, and the sincere friend only in times of need.<sup>2</sup>

Do not let your evil outweigh your good, and do not let your avarice outweigh your generosity, and do not let your withholding outweigh your giving freely.<sup>3</sup>

Dislike in your self what you dislike in others.<sup>4</sup>

The most noble inheritance is good courteous behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

There is no companion better than good character, and no legacy better than courteous behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

Accept from people for yourself what you would like them to accept for themselves from you.<sup>7</sup>

Courteous behaviour is the best legacy.<sup>8</sup>

If you desire what is honourable, then avoid what is forbidden.<sup>9</sup>

Lack of courteous behaviour is the cause of all evil.<sup>10</sup>

Travelling is the measure of good character.<sup>11</sup>

Be merciful towards the poor for their lack of patience; and towards the rich for their lack of gratitude; and be merciful towards

all of them, for all their carelessness.<sup>1</sup>

The most noble quality to take into account is good character.<sup>4</sup>

Being in awe of Allah (*taqwa*) is the crown of good character.<sup>2</sup>

Good character is the best of companions.<sup>4</sup>

When things become clear, you realize that lying goes with cowardice, and truthfulness with courage, and ease with despair, and weariness with covetousness, and deprivation with greed, and humiliation with debt.<sup>1</sup>

May you have courteous behaviour, for if you are in power it will make you stand out, and if you are in the middle it will make you excel, and if your way of life makes you poor you will live by your courteous behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Choose all the best characteristics for your self, for surely goodness is a matter of habit.<sup>4</sup>

The most noble of kings is the one who does not become mixed up in recklessness, or deviate from the truth; and the richest of those who are wealthy is the one who is not the captive of his own desires; and the best of sincere friends is the one who does not make things difficult for his brothers; and the best of good character is what helps one towards being in awe of Allah (*taqwa*) and being scrupulous.<sup>1</sup>

A man will not become a true leader until it does not matter to him in what clothes he appears.<sup>1</sup>

Courteous behaviour constantly needs to be renewed.<sup>4</sup>

## Abstinence

The whole of abstinence (*zuhud*) is dealt with in two sentences in the Qur'an: Allah, may He be glorified, says: 'So that you do not despair because of what has passed you by, nor become overjoyed with what comes to you.' And whoever is not in despair about what is past, nor overjoyed with what he has, has certainly grasped completely what abstinence is all about.<sup>2</sup>

Abstinence in this world is limiting hopes, and being grateful for blessings, and scrupulously avoiding what is forbidden.<sup>1</sup>

Abstinence means drawing near to Allah.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever follows moderation will not be destroyed, and whoever is abstinent will not be impoverished.<sup>1</sup>

The most excellent abstinence is the abstinence which is concealed.<sup>2</sup>

Abstinence is wealth.<sup>2</sup>

The one who is abstinent with the *dinar* and the *dirham* is more respectable than the *dinar* and the *dirham*.<sup>1</sup>

Be abstinent in this world and Allah will show you its ignominies; so do not be neglectful, in order that you are not neglected.<sup>2</sup>

Blessed are the abstinent in this world, who long for the next world. They are a people who have taken the earth as a carpet, and its dust as a mat, and its water as sweet health, and the Qur'an as a way of life, and supplication as a protection; and then they have severed relations with this world completely, just as the Messiah did.<sup>2</sup>

The noblest wealth is turning away from desire.<sup>2</sup>

Surely the hearts of the abstinent in this world weep even when they are laughing, and their sorrow is heavy even when they are joyful, and their disgust for their selves is great even when they are happy with what they have been given for sustenance.<sup>2</sup>

There is no abstinence quite like abstinence from what is forbidden.<sup>2</sup>

When describing the qualities of those who are abstinent, Imam 'Ali said: 'There are a people amongst the people of this world but they do not belong to it, for they are in it but not of it.'<sup>2</sup>

'If you can do without something, then leave it, and only take what you need instead.'<sup>2</sup>

## Modesty and Nobility

Nobility is a matter of good intellect and good conduct, not of lineage and descent.<sup>5</sup>

There can be no nobility where there is bad behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

Nobility is honouring the obligations you owe to other men.<sup>1</sup>

Awe is accompanied by frustration, and shyness by deprivation, and opportunity passes you by like passing clouds, so seize a good opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

There is no faith like modesty and patience.<sup>2</sup>

## Contentment

When Imam 'Ali was asked about His words, may He be exalted: 'So We will surely give him a life which is a pleasing life', he replied: 'It is contentment.'<sup>2</sup>

The fruit of contentment is ease.<sup>1</sup>

Holding on to what you have is better for you than going after what others have.<sup>4</sup>

The free man is a slave when he covets, and the slave is a free man when he is contented.<sup>1</sup>

Do not be ashamed of giving only a little, for surely the one who is deprived of that has even less.<sup>2</sup>

Poverty and wealth went out, circling around, and then they met contentment . . . and came to rest!<sup>1</sup>

As abilities increase, desires decrease.<sup>2</sup>

There is no treasure more self-sufficient than contentment.<sup>2</sup>

The most self-sufficient wealth is abandoning desire.<sup>4</sup>

## Patience

Patience is the key to relief.<sup>1</sup>

Patience is a protection against *hunger* in need.<sup>4</sup>

Patience is courage.<sup>4</sup>

Patience in awaiting the outcome is either a cure or what brings ease.<sup>1</sup>

Patience is one of the ways to achieve victory.<sup>4</sup>

Patience is a riding-beast that does not falter.<sup>1</sup>

It is more difficult to bear the pride of the nobility than it is to bear the recklessness of the rich. The abasement of poverty

hinders you from being patient, just as the exaltation of wealth hinders you from being generous and just.<sup>1</sup>

Tolerance is the graveyard of defects.<sup>4</sup>

There are two kinds of patience: being patient in what you loathe, and being patient in what you love.<sup>2</sup>

Repel the waves of anxiety with the resolution of patience and the goodness of certainty.<sup>4</sup>

Surely among the treasures of righteousness are being patient during disasters, and concealing misfortunes.

The one who is patient will not be deprived of success, even though it is a long time coming.<sup>3</sup>

Misfortunes have a final outcome in which they come to an end, and the way to deal with it is to be patient.

The resolution of patience extinguishes the fire of desire.<sup>1</sup>

If patience were a man, it would be a righteous man.<sup>4</sup>

## Generosity and Miserliness

Generosity is nearness to the Creator and Creation, and avarice is farness from the Creator and Creation.<sup>4</sup>

Generosity is more sympathetic than compassion.<sup>3</sup>

The one who is generous does not soften under coercion, and does not harden in times of ease.<sup>1</sup>

The one who is generous is soft when sympathy is required, and the one who is mean is hard when treated with kindness.<sup>1</sup>

The one who is generous has a courageous heart.<sup>1</sup>

The one who has the most blessed life is the one who supports others during his life.<sup>1</sup>

If a request is made to the one who is generous, it will make him give freely; and if it is made to the one who is mean, it will induce him to refuse.<sup>1</sup>

The miser is no good to anyone, and he is not straightforward unless it is out of fear or need; so when his need is fulfilled or he is no longer afraid, he reverts back to his true nature.<sup>1</sup>

You should not praise a young boy when he is generous, for surely he is not aware of the excellence of generosity, and

whenever he gives what he has it is out of weakness.<sup>1</sup>

You should not revile anyone, and you should not reject anyone who asks you for something, for either he will be a noble person whose need you can satisfy, or he will be a mean person whose respect for you can be acquired.<sup>1</sup>

The lowest of people is the one who makes excuses to a mean person.<sup>1</sup>

A generous person never inquires too deeply into anything. In describing the attributes of His Prophet, He, may He be exalted, said: 'He was aware of some of it and he turned away from some of it.'<sup>1</sup>

If you ask a generous person for something, then leave him to think about it, for surely he will only think good about it, and if you ask a mean person for something, then take him by surprise about it, for surely if he thinks about it he will revert to his natural disposition.<sup>1</sup>

If a generous person is angry, then speak to him gently; and if a mean person is angry, then hit him with a stick!<sup>1</sup>

The one who is generous is content with speech, and the one who is mean is trapped by wealth, and the one who is low is reformed by being disgraced.<sup>1</sup>

Generosity and giving freely are displayed in feeding people, not in giving them wealth. Whoever gives away a thousand while being mean with a plate of food is not a generous person.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of being attacked by a generous person when he is hungry, and by a mean person when he is satiated.<sup>2</sup>

Avarice is a combination of all the vicious defects, and it is the halter that leads people towards every evil.<sup>3</sup>

Greed is more harmful to man than poverty, for if a poor man finds something, it is enough for him, whereas a greedy person never has enough even if he finds something.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of making friends with an avaricious person, for surely he will sit back when you are in great need of something.<sup>4</sup>

The avaricious person is as generous in parting with his honour as he is miserly with his wealth, and the generous person is as grudging giving up his honour as he is generous in giving away his

wealth.<sup>1</sup>

The rage of the avaricious person at the one who gives freely is even more amazing than his avarice.<sup>1</sup>

I am amazed by the avaricious person who hastens upon himself the very poverty from which he is fleeing, and who misses the very opulence that he seeks, so that the life that he leads in this world is the life of the poor; and yet he will be brought to account in the next world in the same way as the rich are brought to account.<sup>2</sup>

The avaricious person only looks brave.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of greed, for surely it destroyed those who were before you. It was this that caused men's blood to be shed, and it was this that caused family relations to be severed . . . so avoid it.<sup>1</sup>

## Curbing One's Passions

Fight your passions as you fight your enemies.<sup>1</sup>

Rewards and punishments will be in accordance with struggling against the self, and turning it away from passions, and preventing it from unrestrained enjoyment of the pleasures towards which the eyes cast longing glances.<sup>1</sup>

The one who is prudent is the one who has control over his passions.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of your passions, and may this be what helps you to restrain them: your knowing that surely they distract your intellect, and cloud your judgement, and affect your honour, and divert you from your important affairs, and worsen the consequences for you in the next world. Surely passions involve amusement, and where amusement is present gravity is absent—and the life transaction (religion) of Islam cannot be established and you cannot do good in this world unless you are in earnest.<sup>1</sup>

Surely whenever you abandon the truth you do not abandon it for anything other than falsehood, and whenever you turn away from what is right you do not turn away from it without turning to what is wrong.<sup>1</sup>

We turn towards Allah, may He be glorified, for Him to reform

what has become corrupted in our hearts, and we seek help from Him to guide our selves in the right direction, for surely the hearts are in His hands, and He changes what is in them as He wishes.<sup>1</sup>

The best of people is the one who has the ability to change his self as he wishes and to defend it against every evil, and the bad person is the one who is not like this.<sup>1</sup>

Resist your passions and women . . . and do what comes to you.<sup>1</sup>

Diminish the desires that oppose your intellect by opposing them.<sup>1</sup>

## Forbearance and Forgiveness

Forbearance is a protecting veil, and the intellect is a cutting sword, so veil the defects in your character with your forbearance, and fight against your passions with your intellect.<sup>2</sup>

Forbearance is an excellent characteristic.<sup>4</sup>

Forbearance is an intimate companion.<sup>2</sup>

Many a word swallowed out of forbearance and fear of something even worse makes forbearance an effective support.<sup>1</sup>

If you are not naturally forbearing, then try to be forbearing, for surely seldom does anyone try to be like a people without very quickly becoming one of them.<sup>2</sup>

The people who ought to be most forgiving are those who are most able to inflict punishment.<sup>3</sup>

Forgive whoever wrongs you.<sup>4</sup>

Surely Allah loves to forgive mistakes that are concealed.<sup>3</sup>

Accept people's forgiveness, and do not let anything that you dislike happen to anyone.<sup>4</sup>

Forgiveness is for the one who admits, not for the one who persists.<sup>1</sup>

Do not defeat the purpose of forgiveness by rebuking others.<sup>1</sup>

Forgiveness will corrupt whoever is mean just as much as it will benefit whoever is generous.<sup>1</sup>

Accustom your self to being tolerant.<sup>4</sup>

Accept the excuse of the one who asks you to be excused.<sup>3</sup>

If you want to be friends with a man, then make him angry and see if he treats you fairly while he is angry . . . and if he does not, then leave him.<sup>1</sup>

If you hear words that hurt you, then bow your head before them and they will miss you.<sup>1</sup>

The key to leadership is an all-embracing heart.<sup>3</sup>

## Safeguarding Secrets and Fulfilling Trusts

Included in the fulfilment of trusts is rewarding the good turn, for surely that is similar to something that has been left with you for safekeeping.<sup>1</sup>

Fulfilment of trusts is the key to one's means of livelihood.<sup>1</sup>

It is not appropriate that everything which is kept secret should be made known to you, and it is not right that everything which you know should be made known to others.<sup>1</sup>

Do not betray anyone who places his trust in you . . . even if he betrays you.<sup>4</sup>

Your secret runs in your blood, so do not let it flow anywhere other than in your veins.<sup>1</sup>

Entrust your secret with one person, and give your advice to a thousand.<sup>1</sup>

A good brother keeps secrets.<sup>1</sup>

Every secret has the right to be protected, and the secrets which are most entitled to be protected are your secret with your Lord, and His secret with you. And know that whoever disgraces anyone will be disgraced, and that whoever spills a secret will have his blood spilled.<sup>1</sup>

The remedy for every illness is to keep it concealed.<sup>4</sup>

Whenever confidants of secrets become many, losses increase.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as conjectures and opinions begin to swarm and swirl around any matter, they expose it.<sup>1</sup>

Make friends with many people, but only entrust your secret to

one of them.<sup>1</sup>

Do not share your secret with someone who has not shared his secret with you.<sup>1</sup>

Do not reveal the secret of the one who reveals your secret.<sup>4</sup>

Whoever conceals his secret still has the choice.<sup>4</sup>

## Being Considerate

Friendship is the means by which a need is satisfied, and it is by the goodness of being kind and considerate that the objectives which are sought after are made easily attainable.<sup>1</sup>

Choose a good watering-place for yourself.<sup>4</sup>

Steadfastness is prudence.<sup>4</sup>

Being hasty in affairs results in humiliation, and is the main cause of regret, and deprivation of virility, and distortion of position, and is evidence of weakness in faith.<sup>1</sup>

The one who reflects will be right . . . or nearly always, and the one who is in a hurry will be wrong . . . or nearly always.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever becomes involved in matters without considering their outcome, is certainly exposed to dire misfortunes.<sup>4</sup>

To make the one who is at a standstill move is easier than bringing the one who is on the move to a standstill.<sup>1</sup>

Avoid saying 'In my opinion . . .', and 'I reckon . . .', and 'I think . . .'.<sup>4</sup>

Hold back from the way ahead if you are afraid of going astray, for surely it is better to stop wandering about in confusion than to ride on into horrible things.<sup>4</sup>

One of the things that bring success is stopping when bewildered.<sup>4</sup>

## Trustworthiness, Benevolence, and Gratitude

One of the elements of nobility is fulfilling your responsibilities.<sup>4</sup>

It is more fitting not to fulfil an agreement with the one who

deceives you.<sup>4</sup>

O people, surely trustworthiness is the twin of truthfulness, and I do not know of any safeguard that gives more protection; and whoever knows how you are going to react will not act treacherously.<sup>2</sup>

Hold fast to what you have agreed in every detail.<sup>3</sup>

An act of kindness is a shackle which cannot be undone except by gratitude or recompense.<sup>1</sup>

Honour whoever is generous to you.<sup>4</sup>

Hold on to excellence, and be good at giving freely, and speak well to people.<sup>4</sup>

Pray for the one who gives to you.<sup>4</sup>

If your hand is unable to give in return, then fill your tongue with gratitude.<sup>1</sup>

Be as good to others as you would love them to be good to you.<sup>1</sup>

Behave well while you have blessings, for surely they will come to an end, and they will testify about the one who had them and how he acted in respect to them.<sup>1</sup>

Be good to whoever behaves badly towards you, and reward whoever is good to you.<sup>4</sup>

Benevolence silences the tongue.<sup>5</sup>

Thank whoever is good to you, and be good to whoever thanks you.<sup>1</sup>

Rebuke the one who is evil by rewarding the one who is good.<sup>2</sup>

The malevolence of the one who is benevolent is that he refuses to help you, and the benevolence of the one who is malevolent is that he refrains from harming you.<sup>2</sup>

When the King becomes more intimate with you, then exalt Him more.<sup>1</sup>

Keep the company of the one who remembers the good that you have done him, and who forgets the help that he has given you.<sup>1</sup>

Be gracious to him whose leader you wish to be, and seek help from him whose equal you wish to be, and be in need of him whose prisoner you wish to be.<sup>1</sup>

Acknowledge the right of him who acknowledges your right, whether his status be high or low.<sup>4</sup>

The most beloved of people to you is the one who helps you the most.<sup>1</sup>

When you are good to a free man it makes him give something in return, and when you are good to a worthless man it encourages him to come back and ask for more.<sup>1</sup>

Reprimand your brother by being good to him, and repel his evil by being kind to him.<sup>3</sup>

Do not repay whoever has made you happy by behaving badly towards him.<sup>4</sup>

## Humility

Humility is a blessing of which the envious are unaware.<sup>1</sup>

Arrogance towards the arrogant is humility itself.<sup>1</sup>

Humility is one of the traps of nobility.<sup>1</sup>

Humility guides to safety.<sup>4</sup>

There is no nobility of descent like that of humility.<sup>4</sup>

The fruit of humility is love.<sup>4</sup>

The humility of a man in a position of high rank protects him from the malice of others when he falls.<sup>1</sup>

Meet the people who come to you in need with good news and humility, and then if misfortune strikes you, and your situation changes, and you meet them again, you will be safe from the humiliation of having to break with them and humble yourself to them.<sup>1</sup>

When the exalted ones acquire knowledge, they practise humility, and if they become needy they sally forth.<sup>3</sup>

When rebuking a man who had praised him excessively, but who privately blamed him unfairly, Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, said: 'I am less than what you state, and better than what you think privately.'<sup>3</sup>

The one who is humble is like the low ground where the rain that falls on it and the rain that falls elsewhere collects, and the one who is proud is like a hill where the rain that falls on it and the rain that falls elsewhere never settles.<sup>1</sup>

When you have done everything, then be like the one who has done nothing.<sup>1</sup>

## Justice and Equity

When Imam 'Ali was asked about His words, may He be exalted: 'Surely Allah commands to justice and goodness', he said: 'Justice is being fair, and goodness is being excellent.'<sup>2</sup>

Justice has only one form, and injustice has many forms, and because of this it is easy to perpetrate injustice, and it is difficult to pursue justice. They resemble hitting and missing the target in archery, for surely it needs practice and experience to hit it, whereas it does not need any of this to miss it.<sup>1</sup>

Fear the one who is weak when he is under the banner of justice more than you fear the one who is strong when he is under the banner of injustice, for surely help will come to the former from where he does not expect, and the wound inflicted by him will never heal.<sup>1</sup>

Consider what you have and do not utilise it except in what is right for it, and consider what others have and do not take it unless you have a right to it.<sup>1</sup>

The error of giving something to someone who does not want it, and of withholding something from someone who does want it, is one and the same thing.<sup>1</sup>

When Imam 'Ali, peace be on him, was asked which is superior, justice or generosity, he replied: 'Justice puts matters in their appropriate place, whereas generosity misplaces them; and justice governs everyone, whereas generosity concerns only a few; so justice is the more noble and the superior of the two.'<sup>3</sup>

Justice is superior to courage, for if people were to act justly in general, they would have no need of courage.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever is just in his governance, and feeds others with the food he has, and makes provision in this world for the next world, has nothing to fear.<sup>1</sup>

There are three kinds of people who do not receive fair

treatment from three other kinds of people: those who are moral from those who are immoral; those who are wise from those who are foolish; and those who are generous from those who are mean.<sup>1</sup>

Prefer to be one who is overcome while being just, rather than one who triumphs while being unjust.<sup>1</sup>

Make your self a balance of justice in what is between you and others.<sup>4</sup>

The time during which kings and rulers are tyrannical is shorter than the time during which they are just. This is because the tyrant corrupts and destroys, and the one who is just reforms and rectifies, and it takes much less time to destroy something than it does to put it right.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever acts justly towards those who are below him will be treated justly by those who are above him.<sup>1</sup>

Give precedence to justice over force, and you will conquer through love, and do not try to be clever where simple language would be more useful.<sup>1</sup>

## Doing Good and Avoiding Evil

To do good is not to increase your wealth and your children, but to increase your knowledge, and make your forbearance greater, and vie with people in the worship of your Lord. If you do good, then praise Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, and if you do wrong, then seek forgiveness from Allah.<sup>4</sup>

There is no goodness in this world except that which relates to two kinds of men: those who do wrong and realize they have done wrong, so that they turn to Allah in repentance; and those who are quick to do good. Actions made in awe (*taqwa*) of Allah are not insignificant, for how can anything be insignificant if it is accepted?<sup>4</sup>

Opportunity passes you by like passing clouds, so seize hold of an opportunity to do good.<sup>4</sup>

Generosity is something to which everyone can have access, and it is to intend to do good to everyone else.<sup>1</sup>

Among the most excellent acts of beneficence are generosity in

times of hardship, truthfulness in times of anger, and forgiveness while possessing power.<sup>1</sup>

Goodness in which there is no evil is comprised of gratitude for a blessing, and patience in whatever adversity comes to pass.<sup>2</sup>

Do good and do not belittle any part of it, for surely even the least of it is great, and even a little of it is a lot; and let none of you say: 'Surely so-and-so is better at doing good than I am', for by Allah, surely there are people like this, amongst those who do good and those who do evil, and whenever you turn away from one of them to the other, you will be taken care of by one of its people.<sup>3</sup>

When a person dies all his actions cease except for three: charity, which lasts by continuing to benefit others; knowledge, which he taught to people who continue to benefit from it; and a righteous child, who continues to pray for him.<sup>1</sup>

Overlook the mistakes of those who are honourable, for one of them never makes a mistake without the hand of Allah helping him up.<sup>3</sup>

Do not abandon doing good, for surely time brings many changes. How many a one who once sought someone is sought by him the following morning, and how many a one who was once followed by others has the following evening himself become a follower!<sup>1</sup>

Doing good is easy to start with, and to finish with it is difficult. It is as if it begins as a desire without any idea, and ends up as an idea without any desire. It is because of this that it has been said: 'Keeping a good deed going is more difficult than getting it started.' . . . The action is what is kept going, the one who keeps it going is the one who makes it progress.<sup>3</sup>

Doing good is what enslaves a free man.<sup>3</sup>

It is inevitable that you have a companion in your grave, so make him one with a good appearance and a sweet fragrance—and that is righteous action.<sup>3</sup>

Initiating a good deed is a matter of choice, but seeing it through is obligatory.<sup>3</sup>

There is no trade quite like righteous action, and no profit quite

like its reward.<sup>3</sup>

If you tire yourself out doing good, surely your tiredness will come to an end . . . and your good action will last for-ever.<sup>3</sup>

Spend in a right cause, and do not store up for another person.<sup>3</sup>

It is amazing that people can say someone is good when he is not. How can this make him pleased? And it is amazing that people can say someone is evil when he is not. How can this make him angry?<sup>3</sup>

No one knows about the excellence of the people of excellence except the people of excellence.<sup>3</sup>

Surely Allah has slaves on whom Allah has bestowed favours in particular so that they can benefit other slaves with them. He continues to grant them favours as long as they continue to give them away freely. But if they withhold them, then He takes them away from them, and transfers them to others.<sup>3</sup>

Good is what fills your self with tranquillity and puts your heart at rest; and bad is what makes your self restless and your heart agitated.<sup>3</sup>

When an evil thought occurs to you but does not become manifest, then it gives birth to fear, and if it becomes manifest, then it gives birth to pain. And when a good thought occurs to you but does not become manifest, then it gives birth to joy, and if it becomes manifest, then it gives birth to pleasure.<sup>3</sup>

Throw back the stone from where it came, for surely evil is only repelled by evil.<sup>3</sup>

Put off evil, for surely if you wanted you might hasten it now.<sup>3</sup>

The one who does good is better than it, and the one who does evil is worse than it.<sup>3</sup>

Keep company with the people of good and you will be one of them, and keep away from the people of evil and you will be separated from them.<sup>3</sup>

Do not keep the company of an evil person, for surely your character will take on something of his character without your even realizing it.<sup>3</sup>

Evil people connect to what is bad in people, and neglect what is good in them, just as flies seek out places that are filthy.<sup>3</sup>

The thing that benefits everyone is the death of those who are evil.<sup>3</sup>

Do not keep the company of those who are evil, for surely they will place you under their obligation by offering you safety from them.<sup>3</sup>

## Intention

Surely Allah, may He be glorified, will lead whomever of His slaves that He wishes into the Garden, in accordance with the sincerity of their intentions and the righteousness of their secret desires.<sup>3</sup>

Whoever does not praise you for your good intentions will not thank you for your beautiful gifts.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever makes his secret intentions righteous, Allah will make his outer conduct righteous.<sup>2</sup>

When words come from the heart of anyone they find a place in the heart of another, but when they come merely from the tongue they do not go any further than the ears.<sup>1</sup>

Do not look down on anyone who looks ugly, or who is shabbily dressed, for surely Allah the Exalted looks at people's hearts and rewards their actions.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever does not have the good intention has no true life transaction (religion).<sup>1</sup>

## Knowledge of the Limits of the Self

Whoever knows his self surely knows his Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Allah has mercy on the man who is aware of his own capacity, and who does not exceed his limits.<sup>9</sup>

The man who is aware of his own capacity will not be destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

If you expect someone to do more than he is able to do, then expect him to fail you by as much as you have exceeded his capacity.<sup>1</sup>

## Veiling Faults

How fortunate is the one who is concerned with his own faults rather than the faults of other people! How fortunate is the one who does not know other people and whom other people do not know! How fortunate is the one for whom life is the same as death, and existence the same as non-existence. His neighbour is spared his good and his evil. He does not ask for anything from other people, and other people do not ask for anything from him.<sup>1</sup>

May whoever of you who knows about others' faults be restrained by what he knows about his own faults, and may he only be concerned with his own gratitude for being spared from what causes others trouble.<sup>1</sup>

How is it that someone can find fault with his brother's error and reproach him for his misfortune! Does he not remember how the veil of Allah hides his own wrong actions which are much greater than the one with which he is finding fault?<sup>1</sup>

Do not be quick to find fault with the wrong action of anyone—for perhaps it may have been forgiven, and do not feel at ease with your self even if it is only a minor disobedience—for perhaps you may be punished for this.<sup>1</sup>

## Learning from Events and Reflecting on Them

Reflection gives you fair warning and good advice.<sup>4</sup>

It is not sincere reliance on Allah if someone who has made a mistake admits his mistake, and then goes and makes it again.<sup>1</sup>

Reflection will show you the right direction.<sup>4</sup>

How often events can teach people, and how little they reflect on them.<sup>2</sup>

In reflection there is freedom from having to choose.<sup>1</sup>

## Prudence and Correct Judgement

The fruit of negligence is regret, and the fruit of prudence is safety.<sup>2</sup>

Being prudent is using your intellect, and behaving courteously is being a leader.<sup>1</sup>

To be prudent is to be wide awake.<sup>1</sup>

The most prudent of people is the one whose seriousness dominates his humour, and whose judgement overcomes his passions. His action expresses his innermost thought, and his contentment does not deceive him in regard to his lot, nor his anger in regard to his strategy.<sup>1</sup>

Many a word is more effective than an all-out attack.<sup>2</sup>

Planning before action protects you from regret.<sup>1</sup>

There is no better use of the intellect than contemplation.<sup>4</sup>

Whoever has no contemplation has no wealth.<sup>4</sup>

## Excusing Oneself

Beware of making too many excuses, for surely many lies become mixed up with many excuses.<sup>1</sup>

The one who makes excuses when he has done nothing wrong will force that wrong action on himself.<sup>1</sup>

The one who asks to be excused will be helped, and the one who blames others will become angry.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of what people make excuses about, and do not be reckless when life is easy, and do not despair when things are going badly.<sup>2</sup>

Not having to make an excuse is more honourable than having to be truthful in making one.<sup>3</sup>

Beware of having to make an excuse for repeating a wrong action which could have been avoided, for surely the best outcome for you in making excuses is that you attain a position where you are safe from wrong actions.<sup>4</sup>

Repeating excuses only reminds you of the wrong action.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of making a stand by offering excuses, for many an excuse establishes the evidence against the one who makes it, even though he is innocent.<sup>1</sup>

## Consulting with Others

Consultation with another is easy for you, and tiring for the others.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing helps quite like consultation.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing is correct if you avoid consultation.<sup>3</sup>

Give good advice to everyone who seeks your counsel, and do not seek the counsel of anyone except the advice of one who is sincere and intelligent.<sup>1</sup>

Do not let a mean person join your consultation, because he will limit your action; nor a coward, because he will make you fear what you do not fear; nor a greedy person, because he will promise you what you do not want. Surely cowardice and meanness and greed are all identical, for they are all united in their having a bad opinion of Allah, may He be Exalted.<sup>1</sup>

After asking 'Abdullah ibn Abbas for his advice about something, Imam 'Ali did not agree with his opinion, and so he said to him: 'You have to advise me and I have to consider . . . and if I disagree with you, then you have to obey me.'<sup>3</sup>

If your enemy seeks your counsel, then devote yourself to giving him good advice, for surely by seeking your advice he has left off being your enemy and has started becoming your friend.<sup>1</sup>

If you wish to know a man's character, then seek his advice, for surely you will find out how just or unjust he is, and how good or bad he is, from his advice.<sup>1</sup>

If you need counsel about some matter that has suddenly happened to you, then begin by exposing it to the spontaneity of the young, for surely their minds are sharper, and their intuition is quicker; then after that refer it to the judgement of those who are mature and old, so that they can analyse it, and decide what is best for it, for surely they are the most experienced.<sup>1</sup>

## Unpleasant and Objectionable Qualities

### Lying

Truthfulness is honour, and lying is humiliation; and whoever is known for his truthfulness will have his lying overlooked, and whoever is known for his lying will not have his truthfulness accepted.<sup>1</sup>

Lying is degrading.<sup>4</sup>

Turn away from lying in order to be honourable, if you have not turned away from it in order to avoid evil.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of befriending a liar, for surely he will make what is far away seem near, and he will make what is near seem far away.<sup>4</sup>

There are two matters which are inseparable from lying: making many promises and making even more excuses.<sup>1</sup>

A liar has no manhood.<sup>5</sup>

The greatest trouble is caused by the promise of a liar to someone who is greedy.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest fault in the sight of Allah is the word of the liar.

The one who utters false words and the one who continues to perpetuate them are equally at fault.<sup>1</sup>

I have not lied and I have not gone astray . . . and no one has been led astray by me.<sup>3</sup>

Keep away from lying, for surely it keeps belief away. The one who is truthful is within sight of safety and honour, and the one who tells lies is on the brink of a precipice and degradation.<sup>2</sup>

Envy for the dead person decreases, but lies about him increase.<sup>1</sup>

Do not pay attention to the one who is speaking, but pay attention to what he is saying.<sup>10</sup>

Whoever is lacking the excellence of truthfulness in what he says has surely inflicted serious damage on the most noble aspect of his character.<sup>1</sup>

## Oppression

The oppression of the weak is the most disgusting oppression.<sup>4</sup>

Acting unjustly is the last stage of kings.<sup>1</sup>

The most blameworthy behaviour is acting unjustly when in a position of power.<sup>4</sup>

A miserable provision for the Promised Day of Return is enmity towards the slaves of Allah.<sup>3</sup>

The men who act oppressively have three characteristics: they act unjustly towards those above them by disobeying them, and towards those below them by overpowering them, and they support the people who are oppressors.<sup>3</sup>

The most blameworthy person is the one who speaks badly about a weak person to a tyrannical ruler.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever instigates oppression will in the future bite his hand in regret.<sup>3</sup>

There is no successful outcome in treating people unjustly.<sup>5</sup>

Do not oppress others any more than you would like to be oppressed yourself.<sup>4</sup>

Do not make a big thing of the oppression of the one who oppresses you, for surely whenever he tries to harm you he does you good.<sup>4</sup>

## Greed and Covetousness

Covetousness is endless slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Deprivation comes with greed.<sup>3</sup>

Being greedy is a sign of being poor.<sup>4</sup>

The overthrow of the intellect is often due to preoccupation

with ambition.<sup>3</sup>

Greed urges people to plunge into wrong actions.<sup>4</sup>

Greed decreases a man's ability, and does not increase his good fortune.<sup>4</sup>

The evil of greed encompasses all the bad aspects of shameful actions put together.<sup>4</sup>

'Greed leads to deprivation, and cowardice leads to death.'

And if this is not so . . . then consider those whom you have seen and heard. Were those who were killed in battle mostly advancing forward, or were they killed while they were fleeing? And consider this: is it those who seek you out with courtesy and nobility generally who are more entitled to generosity from yourself, or those who seek you out with evil and greed?<sup>1</sup>

Take revenge on greed by being content, just as you take revenge on your enemy through retaliation.<sup>1</sup>

How many a hope meets with disappointment, and how many a covetous desire ends in self-deception.<sup>4</sup>

Beware of being excited by the riding beasts of covetous desires.<sup>4</sup>

## Backbiting and Slander

Backbiting is a springtime pasture for the ignoble.<sup>1</sup>

The one who listens to backbiting is one of the backbiters.<sup>6</sup>

Backbiting is the endeavour of the incapable.<sup>3</sup>

Backbiting is finding fault in secret.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever is aware of his own faults will have no time for the faults of others.<sup>4</sup>

'How fortunate is the one whose concern for his own faults keeps him from noting the faults of other people.'<sup>2</sup>

O slave of Allah, do not be quick to find fault with the wrong action of anyone—for perhaps he may have been forgiven; and do not feel at ease with your self even if it is only slightly disobedient—for perhaps you may be punished for it. So may whoever of you who knows about others' faults be restrained by what he knows about his own faults, and may he be concerned only with

his own gratitude for being spared from what troubles others.<sup>2</sup>

Slander is a deadly arrow.<sup>1</sup>

Slander is the bridge to evil.<sup>1</sup>

## Anger and Foolishness

Anger begins with madness and ends in regret.<sup>1</sup>

Do not let your anger drive you to do something wrong, so that you satisfy your rage but make your life transaction (religion) suffer.<sup>1</sup>

Be on your guard against becoming angry with someone who drives you to it, for surely it will destroy your presence of mind, and stop you from seeing things clearly.<sup>1</sup>

However little the anger may be, the harm done to the self and to the intellect will be great.<sup>1</sup>

Anger arouses concealed hatred.<sup>1</sup>

Justifying one's anger is not achieved by the humiliation of having to make excuses afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

Do not pass judgement when you are angry.<sup>1</sup>

Escape to your contentment from your anger, and if it happens suddenly then suppress it quickly.<sup>1</sup>

The anger of the one who has an intellect is expressed in his actions, and the anger of the one who is ignorant is expressed in his words.<sup>1</sup>

The tongue of the one who has an intellect follows his heart, and the heart of the one who is foolish follows his tongue.<sup>3</sup>

The greatest poverty of all is foolishness.<sup>1</sup>

Do not keep the company of one who is obsessively passionate, for surely he will make his actions seem attractive to you and will desire that you be like him.<sup>3</sup>

Whoever observes the faults of people, and denounces them, and then regards them as acceptable for his own self, is the epitome of stupidity itself.<sup>3</sup>

Behaving courteously towards the one who is foolish is like pouring sweet water on the roots of the desert gourd: the more it is watered the more bitter it becomes.<sup>1</sup>

When the one who is foolish is spoken to he forgets what is said to him; and when he speaks, it is in haste, and when he is driven to do something loathsome, he does it.<sup>1</sup>

When the one who is foolish says what he has to say, he follows it up by swearing an oath.<sup>1</sup>

Do not fraternize with the one who is stupid, for surely he will struggle with himself for your sake but he will not benefit you, and he will often want to benefit you but will only do you harm; so his silence is better than his friendliness, and his being far away is better than his being nearby, and his being dead is better than his being alive.<sup>1</sup>

Surely a man who knows the truth of the matter, and abandons it, is very stupid; and surely a man who is ignorant of the truth of the matter, even though it is obvious, is very ignorant.<sup>1</sup>

## Vanity and Arrogance

Being conceited is contrary to what is correct.<sup>3</sup>

There is no praise for being arrogant.<sup>5</sup>

The most difficult faults to put right are vanity and obstinacy.<sup>1</sup>

A man's self-conceit is one of the enviers of his intellect.<sup>3</sup>

How many a person is seduced by the good that is spoken about him.<sup>5</sup>

The greatest action to be proud of is not being proud at all.<sup>1</sup>

When the vilest of people learn something, it makes them arrogant, and when they become wealthy, it makes them go too far.<sup>1</sup>

When a man exceeds his capacity in the world, his behaviour becomes unattractive to other people.<sup>1</sup>

If Allah was to allow any of His slaves to be arrogant, then He would have allowed it among His prophets and His friends (*awliya*) in particular; but He, may He be glorified, has made them detest being arrogant, and has made them content with being humble, so that their cheeks are pressed against the earth, and their faces are covered in dust. They make themselves easily accessible to the believers (*mu'minun*), and others consider them to be a people who are weak.<sup>2</sup>

Do not do an injustice to your good qualities by being boastful and arrogant.<sup>1</sup>

Be kind and clement and you will be noble, and do not be conceited so that you are hated and despised.

There is no loneliness more desolate than vanity.<sup>1</sup>

What is there for the son of Adam to be proud of? For surely he starts out as a drop of semen and ends up as a corpse; he cannot provide sustenance for himself, and he cannot avoid his death.<sup>9</sup>

The one thing that is better not expressed, even if it is true, is a man's praise for himself.<sup>1</sup>

## Envy

Envy is the ruin of the life transaction (religion) of Islam.<sup>4</sup>

Envy means inevitable sorrow, and a confused intellect, and constant selfishness. The blessing of the one who is envied is still a blessing, but for the one who envies, it is an affliction.<sup>1</sup>

Envy is a degrading characteristic, and one of the signs of its being degrading is that it is surely directed at the nearest of the nearest.<sup>1</sup>

The health of one's body depends on lack of envy.<sup>3</sup>

The one who is envious is malicious towards the one who has no wrong doing.<sup>9</sup>

The envy of a sincere friend is one of the illnesses harmful to friendship.<sup>3</sup>

Grudges can be inherited just as wealth can be inherited.<sup>1</sup>

The one who envies you considers the end of one of your blessings as a blessing for himself.<sup>1</sup>

When Allah wishes to subject a slave to a merciless enemy, He subjects him to an envious man.<sup>1</sup>

Do not envy one another, for surely envy devours belief 'just as fire devours fuel'.<sup>2</sup>

The one who envies will never be content with you until one of you dies.<sup>1</sup>

If you serve a leader, then do not wear the same clothes as he, and do not ride the same mount as he, and do not employ servants

like his servants, (maintain a different level from that of the ruler), and then perhaps you will be safe from him.<sup>1</sup>

Taking the credit for everything causes envy, and envy causes hatred, and hatred causes dissension, and dissension causes disunity, and disunity causes weakness, and weakness causes humiliation, and humiliation causes the decline of authority, and the end of prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

## Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy (*nifaq*) degrades a man.<sup>5</sup>

Whoever praises you for having fine qualities which you do not have, and appears to be pleased with you, is really criticizing you for having the ugly qualities which you do not have, and is in fact angry with you.<sup>1</sup>

The signs of the hypocrites (*munafiqun*) can be recognized as these: their greeting is a curse, and their food fills you with suspicion, and they are miserly with their booty. The only thing they know about the mosque is how to leave it, and the only time they come to the prayer is when it is ending. They are arrogant people who neither put anything right nor allow anything to be put right. At night they sleep like a log, and in the day they are full of hot air.<sup>1</sup>

Take hold of wisdom from wherever it comes to you, for surely there are words of wisdom in a hypocrite's heart which he repeats again and again until they come to rest in the one to whom they belong.<sup>4</sup>

Know that the one who praises you for being what you are not must surely be speaking about someone else, and the obligations of his reward and his recompense have certainly fallen away from you.<sup>1</sup>

Beware of being fickle in your life transaction (religion).<sup>4</sup>

I advise you, O slaves of Allah, to be in awe of Allah, and to beware of the people of hypocrisy, for surely they are misguided and they misguide others, and they make mistakes and they make others make mistakes. They are unpredictably fickle, and enticingly

devious, for they are the followers of Satan (Shaytan), and the blaze of Hell's fires: 'They are the party of Satan, and most surely the party of Satan are the losers.'<sup>2</sup>

## Despair and Hopelessness

Hopelessness leads to negligence.<sup>4</sup>

Do not give up hope if the answer to your request is slow in coming, for surely what you receive depends on the strength of your request.<sup>4</sup>

Anxiety is more blameworthy than patience.<sup>6</sup>

Sorrow and anger are two tendencies which are subject to what happens in the event of your being confronted with what you dislike. So if something unpleasant comes to you from someone who is above you, it fills you with sorrow, and if it comes to you from someone who is below you, it fills you with anger.<sup>1</sup>

Making your need apparent comes from weakness of aspiration.<sup>1</sup>

If you feel regret for what has already escaped your grasp, then feel regret for what will never come to you.<sup>4</sup>

Anxiety in times of trial is the height of affliction.<sup>9</sup>

The most unfortunate of people is in this condition: his knowledge is wide, and his aspirations are far-reaching, and his ability is very limited.<sup>1</sup>

## Deviation from the Right Path

Greed and pride and envy are what cause people to rush into wrong actions.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever has a weak self loses his valour.<sup>4</sup>

There are three situations whose rottenness no amount of stratagems can put right: the enmity between close relations, the envy amongst equals, and the shallow-mindedness of kings.<sup>1</sup>

When Imam 'Ali was asked, 'Which matters are punished most swiftly and cause the downfall of their participants most quickly?'

he replied: 'Oppressing whoever has no helper except Allah, and falling short in recompensing favours, and the arrogant behaviour of the rich towards the poor.'<sup>1</sup>

There are six kinds of people who will not be able to avoid sorrow: poor people who have newly acquired wealth; rich people who fear for the safety of their wealth; people who seek positions which are beyond their capacity; people who are envious; and people who are full of malice; and people who mix with the people of courteous behaviour when they do not behave courteously themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Being ignorant of excellence is tantamount to being dead.<sup>1</sup>

There are three things which cause ruin: pride, for surely it caused the downfall of Satan (Iblis) from his high station; and greed, for surely it caused Adam to be expelled from the Garden; and envy, for surely it induced the son of Adam to kill his brother.<sup>1</sup>

There are four things of which even a little is too much: fire, enmity, illness, and poverty.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing more ugly than breaking off relations after establishing them, and treating people harshly after being like a brother to them, and being an enemy after being a friend, and being dishonest towards anyone who has put his trust in you, and betraying anyone who has submitted himself to you.<sup>4</sup>

## **Inquisitiveness**

I sought ease for myself . . . and I have not found anything that brings greater ease than avoiding what does not concern me.<sup>1</sup>

You can recognize how low a man is by how much he talks about what does not concern him, and by how much he tells people what they did not ask him about.<sup>1</sup>

Avoid speaking about what you have no knowledge of, and talking about what is not your business.<sup>4</sup>

Whoever avoids what is irrelevant justly perceives the views of other intellects.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever makes what does not concern him his business will

fail to deal with what does concern him.<sup>1</sup>

## Bad Opinion of Others

The worst of people is the one who does not trust anyone because of his bad opinion of them, and whom no one trusts because of his bad influence.<sup>1</sup>

Do not let the bad opinion of others dominate you, for surely it will not leave you in peace with your friend.<sup>4</sup>

Do not have a bad opinion of what anyone says if you think that there is some likelihood of there being good in it.<sup>3</sup>

Having a bad opinion makes hearts wither, and it makes one suspect the one who is trustworthy, and it makes the one who seeks to be intimate withdraw into isolation, and it adversely affects the friendship between brothers.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing better than having a good opinion of others, although there is sometimes weakness in it; and there is nothing more ugly than having a bad opinion of others, although there is sometimes prudence in it.<sup>1</sup>

## Courtesy in Society and Having Good Relations

### People

People are the children of this world, and a man cannot be criticized for loving his mother.<sup>3</sup>

People resemble the people of their time more than they do their fathers.<sup>5</sup>

There are two kinds of men amongst people: those who are believers (*mu'minun*) because they have been deprived of their loved ones, and those who speed ahead because they have been deprived of their selves.<sup>1</sup>

People are hostile towards what they do not understand.<sup>3</sup>

There are three kinds of people: those who are resolute in renouncing the world; those who are steadfast in opposing their passions; and those who are full of desires and obedient to their passions. The person who has renounced the world is not overjoyed with what Allah gives him, and he is not greatly saddened by what has passed him by; and the self of the person who is steadfast longs for the world, so that he leads it along, and gazes at its pleasures, and then he enjoys them; and the self of the person who is full of desires calls him to this world and he answers its call, and it

commands him to chose it and he obeys it, and so he sullies honour by it, and submits his nobility to it, and destroys his chances in the next world by it.<sup>4</sup>

People have two kinds of activities. There is the activity of the one whose action is for this world, and so this world distracts him from the next world; he is afraid that whoever succeeds him will be poor, and he puts their security above his own, so he passes his life in trying to benefit someone else. And there is the activity of the one whose action in this world is for what comes after it, so things come to him from this world without his having to do anything. He gains good fortune in both worlds at the same time, and acquires provision in both worlds together. He becomes honoured by Allah, and he does not ask Allah for anything that he needs but that He grants it.<sup>3</sup>

There are two kinds of men amongst people: those who never have enough, and those who seek but do not find.<sup>1</sup>

The mirror in whom a man may recognize his own characteristics is all people; for surely he can see his good qualities in those of them who are his friends, and his bad qualities in those among them who are his enemies.<sup>1</sup>

People are asleep, and when they die they wake up.<sup>5</sup>

## Having Good Relations

The best of your family are those who meet your needs.<sup>4</sup>

Do not let your family become the unhappiest of people because of you.<sup>4</sup>

Be generous to your relations, for surely they are your wings, with which you fly, and they are your roots, to which you return, and they are your hands, with which you can overcome.<sup>2</sup>

May whoever has been given wealth by Allah use it to do good to his relatives.<sup>2</sup>

It is best that those who are related should visit each other but not live next to each other.<sup>1</sup>

Close relatives need love, but love does not need relatives.<sup>1</sup>

## Being Close to One's Brothers

Do not neglect the rights of your brother, by relying on what there is between you and him, for surely whoever has his rights ignored by you is not your brother.<sup>1</sup>

The best of your brothers are the ones who look after you, and the best of them are the ones who meet your needs.<sup>7</sup>

Help your brother in every situation, and stay with him when he leaves.<sup>6</sup>

Do not let the strength of your brother in repudiating you be any firmer . . . than you are in establishing good relations with him.<sup>4</sup>

Do not separate yourself from your brother unless you have exhausted every approach in trying to put things right with him, and do not follow after him, pestering him, after a separation from him has taken place, or else you will stand in the way of his being able to turn back to you.<sup>1</sup>

Do not be harsh with your brother out of suspicion, and do not separate yourself from him without first having tried to reason with him.<sup>1</sup>

Seek reconciliation with your brother, even if he throws dust at you.<sup>1</sup>

Do not be happy at having many brothers when they are not the best, for surely brothers are in the same position as fire, a little of which gives enjoyment, and a lot of which is destructive.<sup>1</sup>

The weakest of people are those who are incapable of winning friends, and the weakest of them are the ones who lose those whom they have already won.<sup>3</sup>

Obey your brother even if he disobeys you, and be on good terms with him even if he is harsh with you.<sup>4</sup>

Beware of having too many friends, for surely only someone who knows you can harm you.<sup>1</sup>

Praise the one who treats you harshly and admonishes you, not the one who supports you and flatters you.<sup>1</sup>

If you want to make friends with a man, then see who his enemies are.<sup>1</sup>

If your friend deceives you then treat him as one of your enemies.<sup>1</sup>

Treat your friend as if he were an enemy when taking provision from him, and treat your enemy as if he were a friend when taking provision to him.<sup>1</sup>

Be generous with your wealth to your friend, and with your support and your presence as proofs of your friendship, and with your enthusiasm and affection towards everyone in general, and with your justice and fairness to your enemy, but keep your life transaction (religion) to yourself and do not mention it to anyone.<sup>1</sup>

Your friend is the one who restrains you, and your enemy is the one who urges you on.<sup>1</sup>

The worst of friends is the one to whom you are a burden.<sup>3</sup>

The best of friends is the one whose love for you increases when you are not in need of him, and does not decrease when you are in need of him.<sup>1</sup>

Do not long to be with whoever is indifferent to you.<sup>4</sup>

Evil brothers are like trees on fire which set each other alight one after the other.<sup>1</sup>

Some parts of a journey are a torment, and an evil companion is part of the Fire.<sup>3</sup>

Beware of an evil companion, for surely he is like a drawn sword: it looks delightful but has ugly consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Beware of drawing near to anyone who makes you fear for the safety of your life transaction (religion) and your honour.<sup>4</sup>

There are four situations that cause misery: having an evil neighbour, having an evil child, having an evil wife, and living in cramped conditions.<sup>1</sup>

## Educating Children

Do not force your children to behave like you, for surely they have been created for a time which is different to your time.<sup>1</sup>

Mould clay as long as it is pliable, and plant seedlings while they are still supple.<sup>1</sup>

A child that has to be restrained is like an extra finger: if you let it be, then you dislike it; and if you cut it off, then it is painful.<sup>1</sup>

It should be your aim to display more kindness towards your child than the kindness that he displays towards you.<sup>1</sup>

If you scold a child, then leave him room to turn away from his wrong action, so that you do not leave him with obstinacy as his only way out.<sup>1</sup>

Since you sat down wherever you wished when you were small, sit down where you do not want to now that you are grown up.<sup>1</sup>

The first things that children should learn about are the things that they will need to know when they become men.<sup>1</sup>

The more forceful the pretence is in the beginning, the harder it will be to keep up the pretence in the end.<sup>1</sup>

Surely the heart of a child is like fallow ground: whatever is planted in it is accepted by it.<sup>4</sup>

When a father beats his child it is like putting manure on a young crop.<sup>1</sup>

## Rights of Neighbours

By Allah, Allah, look after your neighbours, for surely your Prophet gave you advice concerning them. He never stopped giving advice about them until we thought he might even give them the right to inherit from us.<sup>2</sup>

Avoid burying your dead next to someone evil, for surely a good neighbour benefits you in the next world just as much as he benefits you in this world.<sup>1</sup>

Keep company with people in whatever way you wish . . . and they will keep company with you likewise.<sup>1</sup>

Treat free men generously and with complete sincerity, and average people with interest and caution, and those who are low with simplicity.<sup>1</sup>

Shutting yourself away from people earns you enmity, and opening yourself up to them attracts evil companions, so be between shutting yourself away and letting yourself go, for surely the best of affairs is the one which is most in the middle.<sup>1</sup>

Continuing to comfort someone after three times only renews the misfortune, and continuing to greet someone after three times only belittles the friendship.<sup>1</sup>

Discuss things with children with insight and argument, and with the middle-aged through reflection, and with old men by keeping silent.<sup>1</sup>

Surely the poorest of people . . . is the Messenger of Allah, so whoever denies him denies Allah, and whoever gives to him has truly given to Allah.<sup>3</sup>

By Allah, Allah, look after the orphans, and do not attack their reputation, and do not neglect them when they are in your presence.<sup>2</sup>

## Courtesy in Society

A sincere friend is not a true friend until he has taken care of his brother in three situations: in times of misfortune, in his absence, and at the time of his death.<sup>3</sup>

A sincere friend is a kindred spirit, and a brother is a kindred body.<sup>1</sup>

Do not scold too much, for surely it causes resentment and arouses hatred.<sup>4</sup>

Quarrelling erodes the life transaction (religion) of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

Do not let bad opinion spoil a friendship after certainty has brought you together.<sup>1</sup>

If a close friend of yours is appointed as a ruler, and even a tenth of his friendship remains, then he is not a bad companion.<sup>1</sup>

A man's enemies can be of more benefit to him than his brothers, for they draw his attention to his faults, from which he can then turn away.<sup>1</sup>

If you are given power over your enemy, then show him forgiveness as a sign of your gratitude to God for having been given power over him.<sup>3</sup>

The most deadly thing for your enemy is not to let him know that you have taken him as an enemy.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest of enemies at tactics are those who are most

secretive in making their plans.<sup>35</sup>

The worst of trials is the enemy's joy at your misfortune.<sup>1</sup>

Many a battle has been given life with harsh words, and many a love has been planted with a single glance.<sup>1</sup>

The weakest of enemies at tactics are those who openly display their enmity.<sup>1</sup>

Do not underestimate your enemy's power when you wage war on him, for surely even if you win it you will not be praised, and if you are defeated you will never be forgiven.<sup>1</sup>

Making fun of someone is the beginning of enmity.<sup>6</sup>

Treat whoever opposes you as an enemy.<sup>1</sup>

## Courtesy at Gatherings

If you are at a gathering and you are not speaking to anyone nor being spoken to, then get up.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever keeps company with those who have knowledge is respected, and whoever keeps company with those who are debased is despised.

You should sit with the people who are experienced, for surely it enables them to recognize the worth of what is most valuable, and to acquire it at the lowest possible cost.<sup>1</sup>

Do not have someone who is not like you at your gatherings.<sup>4</sup>

Be moderate with people and go along with them.<sup>10</sup>

Life is good in three situations: having a sincere friend who, in the days when he is your friend, does not hold what he had to put up with in the days when he was your enemy against you; having a wife who brings you joy when you join her, and who keeps your secrets when you leave her; and having a servant who does what you had in mind, as if he already knew what you wanted.<sup>1</sup>

Eat food that you find pleasing, and wear clothes that other people find pleasing.<sup>1</sup>



## Economics, Politics, and Military Action

### Economic Activity

Do not cheat in your buying and selling, for the respect that you lose is worth more than the goods that you acquire.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the advice that Imam 'Ali gave to one of his governors was: 'Prohibit stockpiling, for surely the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them peace, prohibited it. And let selling be generous selling, using well-balanced scales, and with prices that are not unfair to either party, whether they are buying or selling. And if anyone is tempted to stockpile after you have forbidden it, then make an example of him and punish him without overdoing it.'<sup>2</sup>

There are three things that do not last: wealth in the hands of someone who is wasteful, a summer cloud, and the anger of someone who is passionately in love.<sup>1</sup>

The accumulation of wealth by those who are generous is one of the two kinds of abundance, and the accumulation of wealth by those who are mean is one of the two kinds of barrenness.<sup>1</sup>

Wealth has three blameworthy characteristics: either it is acquired in an unlawful way, or it is not expended in a rightful way, or it distracts those who are concerned with its good from the worship of Allah the Exalted.<sup>1</sup>

The one who loves *dirhams* may be excused even if they bring him closer to this world, especially if they protect him from the sons of this world.<sup>1</sup>

Wealth is the stuff that desires are made of.<sup>3</sup>

Any wealth of yours that teaches you a lesson has not been

wasted.<sup>3</sup>

Every man has two partners to share his wealth: the one who inherits from him, and contingencies.<sup>3</sup>

Surely wisdom and wealth never come together in the creation of perfection.<sup>1</sup>

Manhood without wealth is like a lion which is feared even though it does not attack, or like a sword which is frightening even when it is sheathed; and wealth without manhood is like a dog which you avoid in case it bites you even though it does not bite you.<sup>1</sup>

Be generous but do not be wasteful, and be thrifty but do not be stingy.<sup>3</sup>

Being well organized with just enough is much more satisfying than having too much and being extravagant.<sup>1</sup>

Abundance does not come with being extravagant, and scarcity does not come with a job well done, and wrongdoing does not come with admitting it.<sup>1</sup>

Being rich while abroad is like being at home.<sup>3</sup>

Stay away from other people's wealth and be sure to give up all hope of it.<sup>4</sup>

Do not accompany someone who is rich on a journey, for surely if you equal him in his expenditure you will end up in loss, and if he spends on you, then you will be embarrassed.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty silences the one who is intelligent from making his point.<sup>4</sup>

Being poor while at home is like being a stranger.<sup>3</sup>

I have considered everything that humiliates the one who is respectable and breaks him . . . and I have not seen anything more likely to humiliate and break him than poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty is the greater death.<sup>3</sup>

Do not let your poverty make you reject Allah, nor your wealth make you immoral.<sup>1</sup>

Dealing badly with wealth causes disgust, and dealing badly with poverty leads to loss of honour.<sup>1</sup>

Modesty is the adornment of poverty, and gratitude is the adornment of wealth.<sup>3</sup>

Debts are the chains of Allah on earth; if He wishes to humiliate a slave He hangs them round his neck.<sup>1</sup>

Indebtedness is slavery . . . so do not give yourself up as a slave to someone who is not aware of your rights.<sup>1</sup>

Excessive debt forces the one who is truthful to tell lies, and the one who keeps his promises to break them.<sup>1</sup>

## Political Activity

Writing to Talha and Az-Zubair, Imam 'Ali said: 'You have become resentful too easily, and you have expected too much. Can you tell me of anything to which you are entitled that I have opposed, or of any share of yours that I have taken for myself, or of any claim that has been submitted to me by any one of the Muslims with which I have acted feebly, or ignorantly, or on which I have shut the door?'<sup>2</sup>

Do not oppose the changes that are coming, nor fill your hearts with hatred for them, so that you can retreat as they advance.<sup>1</sup>

The best of affairs is the one which is most in the middle.<sup>4</sup>

Allah has mercy on the man who sees what is right and supports it, or who sees what is wrong and resists it, and who assists in the claim of whoever is entitled to it.<sup>2</sup>

Then know, O Malik, that surely I am sending you to a country that has been under the rule of others before you, both just and unjust, and surely the people will judge your actions just as they used to judge the actions of the rulers before you, and they will talk about you just as you used to talk about them.<sup>2</sup>

Know that there are different classes of people under your protection, and each one cannot do well without the others, and each one cannot do without the others.<sup>2</sup>

Seek help from Allah in what causes you anxiety, and temper your severity with a degree of leniency, and act kindly to those who are most entitled to kind treatment, and deal severely with an incident if you cannot do so without being severe.<sup>2</sup>

Surely every guardian (*wali*) has a particular group of followers, amongst whom are those who are preoccupied with competing

for power, and who are only slightly concerned with being just in their dealings; so make it your chief concern to limit their ambitions by putting a stop to what causes such a state of affairs; and do not parcel off any plot of land for any one of your followers or guards.<sup>2</sup>

To continue, do not go to great lengths to hide yourself away from those who are under your protection, for surely when a guardian hides himself away from those who are under his protection it is a kind of imprisonment, and it demonstrates a lack of knowledge of current affairs; and hiding away from them stops them from knowing what it is that is being kept hidden from them, so that they belittle what is important, and exaggerate what is insignificant, and criticize what is good, and admire what is ugly, and confuse truth with falsehood.<sup>2</sup>

Beware of reminding those who are under your protection of the favours you do them, or of exaggerating what you do for them, or of making them a promise and then subsequently breaking that promise.<sup>2</sup>

Those who are under a guardian's protection will come to no good unless there is good in the guardian, and the guardian will come to no good unless those who are under his protection go straight; so if those who are under the guardian's protection fulfil their duty to him, and the guardian fulfils his duty to them, then what is right will be strengthened between them, and the open road of the life transaction (religion) of Islam will be established, and signs of justice will be evident.<sup>2</sup>

It is forbidden for anyone who is a leader with people under his protection to let his intellect become intoxicated, for it is disgraceful that a guardian should need to have anyone to look after him.<sup>1</sup>

The one who possesses power is like one who rides a lion: he is envied for his position, and he is the one most aware of his situation!<sup>3</sup>

The best life for a king is one in which there is little conflict and few difficulties; and the most difficult things for a man to do are to know his self and to keep his secret.<sup>1</sup>

The metaphor of those who have power is that they are like

people who climb a mountain and then fall off it; the one who is nearest to destruction and ruin is the one who has climbed the furthest.<sup>1</sup>

It is amazing how a ruler can be good . . . for when he does wrong he finds someone to back him up and praise him!<sup>1</sup>

The thing which is most harmful to you is that you let your leader know that you know more about being a leader than he does.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the advice that Imam 'Ali gave to Malik Al-Ashtar, who was his governor in Egypt, was: 'Have a time set aside for those who need to see you, so that you can deal with them personally; and sit with them in a gathering which is open to everyone, and act with humility in it for Allah Who created you; and keep your army and your bodyguards away from them, so that they are not wary of you or pressurized by you, and so that they can say what they have to say to you without fear, for surely I heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them peace, say, speaking in general: "A nation in which the weak are unable to claim their rights from the strong without fear will not be blessed." + 2

Surely the most excellent things that bring guardians delight are establishing justice in the country and seeing the love of those who are under their protection openly displayed; and surely their love will not be openly displayed unless their hearts are at peace; and their giving advice will not be correct unless they have access to the guardians of affairs and hardly feel oppressed by their rule at all.<sup>2</sup>

Consider the greatness of Allah's dominion over you, and the power that He has over you in comparison to the power that you have over Him, for surely this will put your ambitions at rest, and curb your impetuosity, and fulfil for you what has escaped your intellect!<sup>2</sup>

Treat them, those who are under your protection, with your pardon and your forgiveness, just as you would like and want Allah to treat you with His pardon and His forgiveness, for surely you are above them, and the guardian who has authority over you

is above you, and Allah is above whoever has appointed you as guardian! And it is He Who has given you authority over them, and tests you through them; so do not let your self declare war on Allah, for surely no one can protect you from His retribution, and you cannot do without His forgiveness and His mercy. And do not despair of His forgiveness, and do not treat His punishment lightly, and do not be in a hurry to act when you find that there is an alternative, and do not say: 'It is I who am in authority, so I must be obeyed!', for surely this will fill the heart with defects, and weaken the life transaction (religion) of Islam, and arouse jealousy.<sup>2</sup>

Fill your heart with mercy for those who are under your protection, and with love for them, and with kindness for them, and do not behave like a hungry wild beast with them, preying on their food.<sup>2</sup>

Make sure that you prefer those affairs which are most in the middle when dealing with rights, and make this your general rule when administering justice, and the most comprehensive, in order to satisfy those who are under your protection; for surely there is discontent among the common people if there is a bias in favour of the upper classes, and surely discontent among the upper classes can be excused if the common people are satisfied. There is no one from among those who are under the guardian's protection who is more of a burden in seeking provision from him in times of ease, or who is of less help to him in times of trial, or who hates fairness more, or who makes more excessive demands, or who shows less gratitude when something is given to him, or who is slower to forgive when he is denied something, or who is weaker in enduring the changing fortunes of time, than the people from the upper classes. Surely the ones who are the supports of the life transaction (religion) of Islam, and who unite the Muslims together, and who are the means of opposing the enemy, are the common people of the nation, so give them your attention, and show them your sympathy.<sup>2</sup>

Be fair to Allah and be fair to people with regard to your self, and your own family, and whoever of those who are under your

protection who love you. For surely unless you do this you will act unjustly! And whoever acts unjustly towards the slaves of Allah becomes an opponent of Allah instead of being His slave.<sup>2</sup>

Behave with humility towards those who are under your protection, and give them your attention, and give them your protection, and aid them selflessly in glances and looks, and in expressions and greetings, so that the mighty do not want to harm you, and the weak do not despair of your justice, and of peace.<sup>2</sup>

If those who are under your protection think that you are being unjust, then explain yourself to them, and let the justness of your explanation dispel their suspicions about you, for surely by doing this you will satisfy yourself, and it will put you on good terms with those who are under your protection, and your explanation will have fulfilled your need to demonstrate the truth to them.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever presents himself as a leader to people should begin by instructing himself before instructing others, and he should correct by the example of his actions before he corrects by his words. The one who instructs his self and corrects it is more entitled to be respected than the one who instructs people and corrects them.<sup>2</sup>

If a guardian is strong in his actions, then his governance will move him in accordance with his innate disposition, whether it be good or evil.<sup>1</sup>

The best of guardians is the one whose reputation for being just is lasting, and his successor relies on his example.<sup>1</sup>

A just leader is better than a heavy downpour of rain.<sup>4</sup>

Establish the limits prescribed by Allah (*hudood*) close to you, and then they will also be established far away.<sup>4</sup>

## Military Activity

Let the most favoured commander in your armed forces be, as far as you are concerned, the one who is most concerned with helping them, and who favours them in his efforts to do whatever he can for them and to do whatever he can for those of their followers who support them, so that their only concern is to be concerned with

fighting the enemy, for surely your affection for them will instil affection in their hearts for you.<sup>2</sup>

The armed forces are, by the permission of Allah, the protectors of the people, and the adornment of the rulers, and the glory of the life transaction (religion) of Islam, and the means to establishing security. The people will not survive without them, and the armed forces in turn will not endure unless Allah provides them with the provisions that they need to assist them in fighting their enemy, and on which they rely to keep fit, and to see to their needs.<sup>2</sup>

Choose as the leader of your army the one who appears to you to be the most sincere of them towards Allah and towards His Messenger and towards your Imam, and who has the purest heart of them, and who is the most excellent of them in being tolerant and slow to anger, and in accepting excuses easily, and in being sympathetic towards the weak, and in overcoming the strong, and who is not moved by severity, nor restrained by weakness.<sup>2</sup>

O the lame one, it is as if I am with him, and he is at the tail-end of the army, where there are no clouds of dust and no noise, and no jingle of harnesses, and no whinnying of galloping horses kicking up the earth with their hooves like a herd of wild animals!<sup>2</sup>

Do not fight them until they attack you, for surely, by the grace of Allah, you are in the right, and your leaving them alone until they attack you is further proof in your favour against them. And if, by the permission of Allah, they are put to flight, then do not kill the fugitives and stragglers, and do not strike the helpless, and do not finish off the wounded, and do not cause the women harm, even if they abuse your honour and reputation and curse your commanders. for surely they are weak in physique and character and intellect. Surely we have been commanded to restrain ourselves with them, even if they are idol-worshippers, and even though a man used to take a woman by force in the days of ignorance before Islam (*jahiliyyah*), and beat her with a stick to discipline her, and his children as well.<sup>2</sup>

O community of Muslims, try to be filled with fear of Allah, and clothe yourselves with tranquillity, and grit your teeth, for surely this protects your heads against the swords and strengthens your

armour; and rattle your swords in their scabbards before you unsheathe them and look fiercely, and strike left and right and wield your weapons well, and strike at their weak spots with your swords. And remember that you are in the sight of Allah, and with the son of the uncle of the Messenger of Allah, so attack them with all your might, and do not dare run away, for surely that would result in disgrace, and the Fire on the Day of Reckoning.<sup>2</sup>

Do not advance on people like those who advance with the intention of starting a war, and do not keep away from them like those who keep away because they lack courage—until my orders reach you—and do not let their hatred drive you to fight them before you have called them to Islam and reasoned with them.<sup>2</sup>

I advise you, O slaves of Allah, to be in awe of Allah, for surely that is the best advice slaves can give one another, for the best outcome of all affairs is with Allah. The gates of war have been opened between you and the people who pray in the same direction, and no one will bear this banner except those who have insight and patience and an understanding of how the truth manifests itself. So carry out what you have been commanded to do, and desist from what has been forbidden to you, and do not be in a hurry in any matter until you are clear about it, for surely with us every matter is not what it seems.<sup>2</sup>

Make all the necessary preparations for war, and consider everything that has to be taken into account regarding it, for its fires have broken out, and its flames are rising higher; and try to be full of patience, for surely this is more likely to lead to victory.<sup>2</sup>

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## Glossary of Arabic Terms

- amir* one who commands, the source of authority in any given situation.
- ansar* the 'Helpers', the people of Madina who accepted Islam and welcomed and aided the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when he made *hijrah* to Madina from Makka, and the *Muhajirun* who followed him.
- awliya* plural of *wali*.
- buraq* the winged riding-beast which carried the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, on his Night Journey from Makka to Jerusalem and then through the realms of the seven heavens beyond the limit of forms to within a bow-span's length or nearer to the Presence of the Real.
- deen* the life transaction, submission and obedience to a particular system of rules and practices, in this usage the all-embracing behavioural programme of Islam. Usually translated to mean 'religion', the word *deen* strongly implies the transaction between the One to Whom the debt is due (Allah) and the indebted (man), because the verbal root is *dana*, to owe, to be indebted to, to take a loan. Hence, living the *deen* (the life transaction of Islam) means repaying one's debt to the



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- Creator* or indeed, behaving as befits the high station of man in creation.
- dinar* gold coinage; one *dinar* is 4.4 grams of gold.
- dirham* silver coinage; one *dirham* is 3.08 grams of silver.
- hadd* the limits, Allah's boundary limits between what is forbidden. The *hudood* (punishments) are the specific fixed penalties laid down by the *shari'ah* for certain specific crimes.  
(pl. *hudood*)
- hamim* boiling water, one of the regions of the Fire.
- hajj* the yearly pilgrimage to Makka which every Muslim who has the means and ability must make once in his or her life-time, and the performance of the rites of the *hajj* in the protected area which surrounds the Ka'aba. One of the pillars of Islam.
- hijrah* emigration in the way of Allah. Islam takes its dating from the *hijrah* of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, from Makka to Madina, in AD 622.
- Iblis* one of the names of Satan, meaning 'extremely desperate and despairing'.
- Ibrahim* the Prophet Abraham, peace be on him.
- imam* the one who leads the prayer in particular and the Muslim community in general. In the Islamic Shi'ite tradition, the term 'Imam' takes on an added meaning; it is the title and function of spiritual authority of Imam 'Ali and his descendants, all of whom belong to the Family of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all those who follow him and

	them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.
'Isa	the Prophet Jesus, peace be on him.
<i>jahiliyyah</i>	the time of ignorance, before the coming of Islam.
<i>jahim</i>	burning fire, one of the regions of the Fire.
<i>jihad</i>	struggle, particularly warfare, against the enemies of Allah to defend and establish the life transaction ( <i>deen</i> ) of Islam. One of the pillars of Islam.
<i>jinn</i>	unseen beings created of smokeless fire who cohabit the earth together with mankind. Some are <i>mu'minun</i> , some are <i>kafirun</i> , and some are followers of <i>shaytan</i> .
Ka'abah	the cube-shaped building in the heart of Makka; it was originally built by the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be on him, and rebuilt with the help of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The Ka'abah is the focal point which all Muslims face when doing the prayer.
<i>kafir</i> ( <i>pl. kafirun</i> )	the unbeliever, the one who covers up Allah's reality and who rejects His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him; the opposite of a <i>mu'min</i> .
<i>khalif</i> ( <i>pl. khulafah</i> )	someone who stands in for someone else; in this usage, the leader and ruler of the Muslim community who stands in as the representative of Allah.
<i>khums</i>	the fifth of any booty of war which is not shared among those fighting in it but is set aside to be spent in the way of Allah on those who are in need.

- Messiah** the Prophet Jesus, peace be on him.
- Muhajirun** 'the Emigrants'; the companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who accepted Islam in Makka and made *hijrah* to join him in Madina. Imam 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, was one of the Muhajirun.
- mu'min*  
(pl. *mu'minun*) the believer, the one who recognizes Allah's reality and accepts His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him. The opposite of a *kafir*.
- munafiq* the hypocrite, the one who looks like a Muslim, and pretends to be a *mu'min*, but who is a *kafir*.
- Musa** the Prophet Moses, peace be on him.
- Quraysh** the dominant tribe of Makka and the custodians of the Ka'aba.
- salat* the prayer, particularly the five daily obligatory ritual prayers of the Muslims which consist of fixed sets of standings, bowings, prostrations, and sittings in worship to Allah. One of the pillars of Islam.
- shahadah* to witness, to bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. One of the pillars of Islam.
- Sham** the territory north of Arabia which is now divided into Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan.
- shari'ah* a road, the legal and social modality of a people based on the revelation of their Prophet. The last *shari'ah* in history is that of Islam. It abrogates all previous *shari'ahs*. Being the last, it is the

easiest to follow, for it is applicable to the whole human race wherever they are.

*shaytan*  
(pl. *Shayatin*)

a devil, particularly Iblis, who is one of the *jinn*.

*sirat*

the narrow bridge over the Fire which must be crossed to enter the Garden.

*siyam*

fasting; abstaining from food, drink, and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset. The obligatory fast during the lunar month of Ramadan is one of the pillars of Islam.

*sunnah*  
(pl. *sunan*)

a form, the customary practice of a person or group of people. It has come to refer almost exclusively to the life-pattern or behavioural practice established by the example of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

*taqwa*

fearful awareness, being careful, knowing your place in the cosmos. Its proof is the experience of awe of Allah, which inspires a person to be on guard against wrong action and eager for actions which please Him.

*ummah*

the nation of Muslims, the body of the Muslims as one distinct and integrated community.

*wali*  
(pl. *awliya*)

a friend, of Allah; one whom Allah has especially favoured with His protection and blessing. Also, a guardian or ruler, who has the responsibility of protecting another person or many other people.

*wilayah*

friendship, in particular with Allah. *Wilayah*, the condition of the *wali*, refers uniquely to the gnostic station of a person. The station of the *wali* is the station of knowledge of the Real by direct seeing. The greatest *wali* is like a drop compared

### Glossary of Arabic Terms

to the ocean of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

*zakat*

literally, 'a purification'; the wealth tax obligatory on Muslims each year, usually payable in the form of one fortieth of surplus wealth which is more than a certain fixed minimum amount. After being collected, it is distributed immediately to those who are in need. One of the pillars of Islam.

AGS No. 3486 Date 22/9/96

Section.

**Due date**

D.D. Ch

یہ کتاب آپ کے پاس امانت ہے۔ اسے پڑھیں، اس کی حفاظت کریں اور بروقت (اوپر درج آخری تاریخ تک) واپس کریں۔ تاخیر کی صورت میں جرمانہ ادا کرنا ہوگا۔

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