



peak of eloquence

NAHJUL BALAGHA

xkp

VOL 2 - LETTERS & SAYINGS

Nahjul Balagha - Vol 2 Letters and Sayings

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Chapter 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

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

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

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

Chapter 3

To the Qadhi of Kufa, Shurayh b. Haarith when he purchased a costly house.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His delivery now lies in the hands of One Who throws the bodies of kings into dust and overthrows their empires, Who ends the lives of despots and Who has brought to an end the dominions of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome and Himyars, kings of Yemen, Who had destroyed the wealth, power and glory of all those individuals who had amassed wealth, gathered property, built very strong and durable houses, furnished them with the choicest and most costly furniture and surrounded them with beautiful

gardens. Those people were imagining that they and their descendants will enjoy the fruits of the labours, though in reality everyone of the house so built or the article so collected will have to be accounted for on the Day of Judgement, the day when people will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds, the day on which evil doers will suffer for their vicious and wicked ways. Your mind will corroborate and confirm this if it is kept free from intemperate ambitions, from lust for alluring things, from sensuality and from vicious affections and attachments.

Chapter 4

A letter to one of the commanders of his army.

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

Chapter 5

To the hypocrite Ash'ath bin Qays when he usurped public funds.

[Ash'ath bin Qays was a hypocrite and time-sever. For sometime he attached himself to Imam Ali (a) pretending to be his sincere follower. The ulterior motive behind this was to amass wealth and to grasp power. Imam Ali (a) had appointed him as the Governor of Azarbaijan. He started collecting and procuring wealth by every means possible. When this was reported to Imam Ali (a), he wrote the following letter to Ash'ath: On receipt of this letter he wanted to abscond with the wealth so amassed but good counsels prevailed upon him and he was persuaded by Hujr b. Adi Kindi to go to Imam Ali (a). When his accounts were audited he had to surrender 400,000 dirhams.]

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

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

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

Chapter 6

To Mu'awiya on his (Ali's) right to the caliphate.

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

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

O Mu'awiya! I am sure that if you give up self-aggrandizement and self-interest, if you forsake the idea of being alive only to personal profits and pleasures, if you cease to be actuated solely by selfishness and if you ponder over the incident leading to the murder of Uthman, you will realize that you cannot at all be held responsible for the affair and I am the least concerned with the episode. But it is a different thing that you create all these false rumours and carry on this heinous propaganda to gain your ulterior motives. Well you may do whatever you like.

Chapter 7

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

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

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

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

Chapter 8

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

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

Chapter 9

A letter to Mu'awiya.

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

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

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

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

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

A letter to Mu'awiya.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us, you and I, have a single combat. Let it be a combat unto death. Let the soldiers of both armies stand aside and let two of us alone combat with each other. Let the world see and realize who is the sinner and who has forgotten Allah and the Day of Judgement. Will you accept this invitation of mine? Have you the courage for it? Are you a man to face death boldly and bravely or are you merely a vampire sucking the blood of others surreptitiously?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Always keep the fear of Allah in your mind. Remember that you have to meet Him one day (let the fear of Allah guide you in all your activities against man) and your end will be towards Him and not towards none else.

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

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

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

Instructions to two of his commanders.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter

A reply to a letter of Mu'awiya.

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

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

We (Bani Hashim) still own the glory of prophethood (having the Holy Prophet (s) from among us). Prophethood which brought equality to mankind by lowering the position of mighty and despotic lords and raising the status of oppressed and humiliated persons. When Allah willed the Arabs to embrace Islam, in large numbers they entered its fold willingly or reluctantly. During the days when those who had precedence in embracing Islam were receiving the Blessings of the Lord for their precedence or when those who, on account of unbearable sufferings from the hands of your clan, were forced to migrate from Makkah, you and your family were after wealth and power. Some of you embraced Islam to better your position because Muslims were gaining ascendancy and supremacy and some others became Muslims because after having harmed and wronged the Muslims in the early days of Islam, you felt that the only way to protect yourself from their vengeance was to profess the religion, though outwardly and hypocritically.

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

When Abdullah bin Abbas was the Governor of Basra, Imam Ali (a) wrote the following letter to him. The cause of this letter was the behaviour of Ibn Abbas towards the clan of Bani Tamim. Ibn Abbas hated them because some of them had sided with Talha and Zubayr in the Battle of Jamal and therefore, he had on occasions treated them scornfully. They r

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

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

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

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

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

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

To Ziyad ibn Abih, who had been appointed as the Commissioner of Basra by Abdullah bin Abbas.

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

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

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

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