

Ethical Dimensions in *Nahj ul-Balaghah*: An Analytical View

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Ethical and spiritual teachings constitute the greater part of *Nahj ul-Balaghah* making up almost half of the book. The fame of the book, more than anything else, is due to the sermons, exhortations and aphorisms on ethical subjects. The sermons, letters and utterances of the book have played an influential role in serving as a matchless source, after Qur'an and *Sunnah*, in influencing the minds of the people. The teachings have retained their original power to quicken the hearts and to sublimate emotions. The importance of *Nahj ul-Balaghah* infact, lies in its ethical teachings and more so on in the emphasis that Caliph 'Ali attributed to these teachings. His didactic philosophy regarding the development of the human character and his perception of the human aspiration for *taqwa* (piety), *'adl* (justice), *sabr* patience, Kindness and condemnation of worldliness is to be uncovered. These ethical values are further elaborated in *Nahj ul - Balaghah* as follows:

1. *Taqwa* (piety)

Taqwa is one of the most frequent motifs of *Nahj ul- Balaghah*. No other term or concept receives so much attention and stress in this book as *taqwa*. It speaks of *taqwa* as a spiritual faculty acquired through assiduity and exercise, which on its emergence produces certain characteristic effects, one of which is to abstain from sin with ease. "The responsibility for what I say is guaranteed and I am answerable for it. He to whom experiences have clearly shown the past exemplary punishments (given by Allah to peoples) is prevented by *taqwa* (piety) from falling into doubts."¹

In the same sermon, *taqwa* has been explained in these words:

Beware that sins are like unruly horses on whom their riders have been placed and their reins have been let loose so that they would jump with them in to Hell.
Beware that *taqwa* (piety) is like trained horse, on whom

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the riders have been placed with the reins in their hands,
so that they would take the riders at Heaven.²

In this sermon *taqwa* (piety) is described as a spiritual condition which results in control and command over one's self. It explains that the result of subjugation to desires and lusts and being devoid of *taqwa* degrades one's personality, making it vulnerable to the carvings of the carnal self. In such a state man is like a helpless rider without any power and control, whom his mount takes wherever it desires.

The essence of the *taqwa* lies in possessing a spiritual personality endowed with will-power, and possessing mastery over the domain of oneself. A man with *taqwa* is like an expert horseman riding a well-trained horse and who with complete mastery and control drives his tractable steed in the direction of his choice. "...Certainly fear of Allah has saved the lovers of Allah (*awaliya*) from unlawful items and gave His dread to their hearts till their nights are passed in the wakefulness and their noons in thirst (on account of fasting).³

Here Caliph 'Ali makes it clear that *taqwa* is something which automatically leads to abstention from unlawful actions and to the fear of Allah, which are its necessary effects. Therefore, according to this view *taqwa* is neither itself abstinence nor fear of Allah; rather it is a sacred spiritual faculty of which these two are only consequences. "Certainly, for today fear of Allah is a protection and a shield, and for tomorrow (the Day of Judgment) it is the road of Paradise."⁴ Thus *taqwa* is shield and shelter for man and not a chain or a prison. Caliph 'Ali (RAA) clarifies the difference between *taqwa* and impiety in this way: "Know O creatures of Allah! That *taqwa* (Piety) is a strong house of protection while impiety is a weak house which does not protect its people and does not give security to him who takes refuge therein. Know that the sting of sins is cut by piety and the final aim is achieved by conviction of belief."⁵

In some of his discourses Caliph 'Ali regards *taqwa* as the real form of freedom from so many kinds of slavery and the deliverance from every form of destruction, besides being key to guidance. "Certainly, *taqwa* is the key to guidance, provision for the next world, freedom from every kind of slavery and deliverance from all ruin."⁶ The message is clear, *taqwa* gives man spiritual freedom and liberates

him from the chains of slavery and servitude to lusts and passions. It releases him from the bonds of envy, lust and anger. This expurgates society from all kinds of social bondages and servitudes. Men who are not slaves of comfort, money, power and glory, never surrender to the various forms of bondages which effect the human society. Of the many effects of *taqwa* that have been pointed out, two are more important than the rest; firstly, the development of insight and clarity of vision; secondly, the capacity to solve problems and to whither difficulties and crisis. It will be in place to mention certain profound remarks, depicted in the *Nahj ul- Balaghah* about reciprocal relationship between the human beings and *taqwa*. In spite of great emphasis laid in *Nahj ul- Balaghah on taqwa* as a kind of guarantee and immunity against sin and temptation, it should be noticed that one must never neglect to safeguard and protect *taqwa* itself. *Taqwa* guards man, and man must safeguard his *taqwa*. This reciprocal guarding of the one by the other is comparable to the one between a person and his clothes. A man takes care of his clothes and protects them from being spoiled or stolen, while the clothes in turn guard him against heat or cold. In fact, the Holy Qur'an speaks of *taqwa* as a garment. "...And the garment of *taqwa* that is better..."⁷

Caliph 'Ali while speaking about this relationship of mutual protection between a person and his *taqwa* says, "Turn your sleep into wakefulness by it's help (of *taqwa*), and pass your days with it, make it the equipment of your hearts, wash yours sins with it, treat your ailments with it and hasten towards your death with it."⁸ In the same sermon Caliph 'Ali says, "I advise you, O' creatures of Allah! that you should have fear of Allah because it is right of Allah over you and it creates your right over Allah, and that you should seek Allah's help in it, and it's help in (meeting) Allah."⁹ While describing the qualities of the pious in one of his sermons Caliph 'Ali says, "... He puts himself in hardships for the sake of his next life, and makes people feel safe from himself..."¹⁰

2. 'Adl (justice)

'Adl (justice), according to Caliph 'Ali is a limit to be observed, represented and believed in by every person. All should be content to remain within limits. But if its limits are violated and the belief in it

and the respect for it is lost, human greed and lust being insatiable by nature, would not stop at any limit. When the man further advances on this interminable journey of greed and lust, the greater becomes his dissatisfaction. Caliph 'Ali, in one of his sermons speaks, "There is a wide scope in dispensation of justice, and he who finds it hard to act justly should find it harder to deal with injustice."¹¹

Caliph 'Ali regards justice as a Divine sanctity. He does not expect a Muslim, who is aware and informed about the teachings of Islam, to be a spectator at the scenes of injustice and discrimination. He asserts, "Do you command that I should seek support by oppressing those over whom I won't do so, as long as the world goes on, and as long as one star leads another in the sky. Even if it were my property, I would have distributed it equally among them, then why not when that property is that of Allah."¹² Hadrat 'Ali holds that justice should be done without making any discrimination between rich and poor.

In one of his such instructions given to Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr, when the latter was appointed as the governor of Egypt, he advises: "Behave humbly with the people.... the big (rich) should not expect injustice from you in their favour and the low (poor) should not be deponent of your justice to them."¹³ While advising Malik al-Ashtar when he was deputed while the position of Abi Bakr had become precarious, the Caliph advises Ashtar in these words; "Do justice for Allah and do justice towards the people as against yourself."¹⁴

In the same letter Caliph 'Ali advises al-Ashtar to select such a person for handling of disputes who would appear to him as the most distinguished of his subjects and whose verdicts would not be affected by lust and greed, and shall possess the broad understanding of matters, "For the settlements of disputes among people select him who is the most distinguished of your subjects....he should not content himself with a cursory understanding (of the matter) without going thoroughly into it"¹⁵.

The Caliph shows great concern over the fulfillment of rights. He holds that denial of rights invites corruption and ruin to the society. In one of his letters to his army officers, when he became the Caliph,

he addresses, “Now what ruined those before you was that they denied people their rights and then they had to purchase them (by bribes) and they led the people to wrong and they followed it.”¹⁶

In *Nahj ul-Balaghah*, one of the best ways shown to fulfill social justice is to take proper care of mutual rights. Caliph ‘Ali comments on it in these words: “...Allah, the Glorified has, by placing me over your affairs, created a right over you, and you too have a right over me like mine over you. A right is very vast in description but very narrow in equability of action.”¹⁷ In the same context Caliph adds, “It (right) does not accrue to any person unless it accrues against him also, and right does not accrue against a person unless it also accrues in his favour”¹⁸.

Caliph ‘Ali in one of his letters addressed to his collectors of (land) tax holds the rulers as the treasures of the people and advises them to fulfil the demands of justice in relation to their *r’ayyah*(subjects), “Behave yourselves with endurance with regard to their needs, because you are the treasures of people, representatives of the community and the ambassadors of their Imams.”¹⁹

In the famous epistle to Malik al Ashtar, which contains elaborate instructions about various aspects of government, Caliph ‘Ali writes, “Do not stand over them (people) like greedy beasts who feel it is enough to devour them, since they (people) are of two kinds, either your brother in your religion or one like you in creation..... Do not say, ‘I have been given authority...because it engenders confusion in the hearts, weakens, the religion (faith) and takes one near ruin.”²⁰

Caliph ‘Ali condemns the shedding of blood without a just cause. “You should avoid shedding blood without justification.”²¹ In one of his sermons while discussing about the people who sit for dispensation of justice but are not fit for it, the Caliph gives heart-shaking comments in these words, “Lost lives are crying against his unjust verdicts, and properties (that have been wrongly disposed off) are grumbling against him.”²²

Thus, Caliph ‘Ali shows an amazing sensitivity to justice and compassion towards the people and a great respect for them and their

rights, which as reflected in his letters, sermons and short sayings, is an exemplary and unique attitude towards this issue.

3. World and Worldliness

One of the recurring themes of *Nahj-ul Balaghah*, is strong warning against the dangers of worldliness. Caliph 'Ali, in his utterances has used the phrase *sakrat al-ni'mah*, meaning intoxication induced by comfort and affluence which is inevitably followed by vengeful disasters. In one of his sermons he warns, "You, O people of Arabia, will be victims of Calamities which have come near. You should avoid the intoxication of wealth, fear the disasters of chastisements, keep steady in the darkness and crookedness of mischief..."²³ Then he describes misfortunes caused by such immoderations. In a sermon he fore-tells the calamities that were to befall the Muslim society in future. He says, "this will be when you are intoxicated, not by drinking, but with wealth and plenty."²⁴ Caliph 'Ali struggled to save the Islamic world from this grave danger, and was severely critical of those who were responsible for the infection to set in. He set an ideal in his personal living quite in harmony with his teachings. On attaining the Caliphate, he gave the top priority to the campaign against these dangers in his revolutionary programme.

He so often points out that the world is a good place, but only for him who knows that it is not a permanent abode, but only a road or a *caravan seria*. "It (World) is good abode for him who does not like it as an abode, and a good place of stay for him who does not regard it a permanent home for stay."²⁵ At another place he comments about it in these words: "O people! certainly this world is a passage while the next world is a place of permanent abode. So, take from the passage (all that you can) for the permanent abode."²⁶

Temporariness of the world is well explained in his sermons. Hereafter, in contrary to it, is regarded as the permanent place. In this world one shall try only to fulfil his basic needs of life and shall not treat this life as any goal in itself. Caliph 'Ali warns about the fate of worldly interests in his letters of instructions to al-Hasan al Mujtaba (his eldest son). He advises him to not to get deceived by the leanings of the people towards worldly attractions. "Beware, lest you become

deceived by the leaning of the people towards worldly attractions and their using rushing upon it.”²⁷

In the same letter he advises his son to remain cautious so that the greedy people may not lead him to destruction. “Beware lest bearers of greed should carry you and make you descend down to the springs of destruction.”²⁸ In one of his letters addressed to Salman al-Farsai, Caliph ‘Ali compares the world with a snake in these words; “Now the example of the world is like that of a snake, which is soft in touch but whose poison is fatal.”²⁹

In one of his sermons, Hadrat Ali regards virtuous deeds as the plantation of the next world and regards wealth and children as the plantation of this world. “Certainly wealth and children are the plantations of this world while as virtuous deeds are the plantations of the next world.”³⁰

In one of his letters addressed to Abdullah ibn al- Abass, about which ibn al-Abass used to say that apart from the Holy Prophet’s (SAW) sayings he did not derive greater benefit from any saying than this one. Hadrat ‘Ali advises him in these words; “Your pleasure should be about what you secure in respect of your next life and your grief should be for what you miss there of.”³¹

At another place he again comments about the destructive nature of the world, “it’s (world’s) appearance is attractive and it’s inside is destructive.”³² He holds that the period of life that one avails in this world is basically the period of test and one has to render account for it. “You are on test in this world and have to render account about it.”³³

4. Kindness and Sympathy

Man by nature can not tolerate to remain a silent spectator while others who have no merit over him, eat, drink, enjoy and relish freely at the cost of his deprivation. When the society is divided into haves and have-not’s, the believer (Muslim) considers himself responsible. In his document of instructions Caliph ‘Ali in this regard advised Malik al-Ashtar in these words, “Take care for the sake of Allah for his obligations towards them (lowest class) for which He had made you responsible.”³⁴ In the same document the Caliph advises Ashtar to cover the short-comings of his subjects. Thus, this too he regards a

way to render ones sympathy with others. “Therefore, cover shortcomings (of your subjects) so far as you can: Allah would cover those of your shortcomings which you would like to remain under cover from your subjects.”³⁵

Sympathy with others and sharing their sufferings is of essential importance. One of the ways to symbolise one sympathy to others is to adopt the way of forgiveness. In this concern the Caliph is reported to have advised Malik al –Ashtar in these words, “So extend them (your subjects) your forgiveness and pardon in the same way as you would like Allah to extend His forgiveness and pardon to you...”³⁶

Caliph ‘Ali holds that one of the ways to show mutual sympathy is to share the adversities of the times. In his letter, he advises ‘Uthman Ibn Hunafi, “Should I be content with being called amir al-Muminin, while refusing to share the adversities of the times with the people? Or should I be an example to them in the distress of life?”³⁷ In the same letter, he says, “It is absolutely out of question that my desires should over power me and my greed should lead me to relish choicest foods while in Hijaz and Yamamah there may be some people who despair of even a single loaf of bread...Shall I lie with a satiated belly while around me are those whose stomachs are hungry and whose livers are burning?”³⁸

When the situation has deteriorated beyond reparation and it is practically impossible to alleviate the misery of the poor through sympathy, the believers shall share their deprivation and try to soothe their (of poor people) wounded hearts by adopting a life style similar to that of the poor. When the Caliph was questioned about his old and worn out clothes, he replied, “With it the heart fears, the mind feels humble and the believers emulate it.”³⁹

In one of his letters addressed to his governor in Egypt, the Caliph advises him to accustom his heart to compassion, affection and kindness for his subjects. “Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them.”⁴⁰

Thus, Caliph ‘Ali has not only shown his concern regarding mutual sympathy and kindness but he has also identified various ways that can be practiced in this regard.

5. Help the Oppressed

Caliph ‘Ali always stood against the oppressors and showed practically, his utmost sympathy with the oppressed. In his “will” for al- Hasan and al-Hussain when Ibn Muljam (the curse of Allah be upon him) struck him (fatally with a sword), Caliph said, “I advise you (both) to fear Allah....Be an enemy of the oppressor and helper of the oppressed.”⁴¹

In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, on deputing him as the governor of Egypt, he comments about the oppressor and oppressed in these words, “Nothing is more inductive of reversal of Allah’s bounty or for the hastening of his retribution than continuance in oppression, because Allah hears the prayers of the oppressed and is on look out for the oppressor.”⁴²

In his letter of instructions to his eldest son, al-Hassan, the Caliph holds that oppressing the weak is the worst oppression. He speaks, “Worst food is that which is unlawful. Oppressing the weak is the worst oppression.”⁴³

6. Keeping Promise

Caliph ‘Ali has given profound remarks about keeping promise and warns the people who fail to fulfil the trust. In one of his sermons, he advises his companions about it in these words, “As regards the fulfilment of trust, whoever does not pay attention to it will be dis-appointed.”⁴⁴ He speaks that even if an agreement is concluded with an enemy one shall not fail to fulfil, by all means, “If you conclude an agreement between yourself and your enemy or enter into a pledge with him, then fulfil your agreement and discharge your pledge faithfully.”⁴⁵

Caliph ‘Ali gives so much importance to the maintenance of pledge that he speaks of fighting against the persons who fail to fulfil it. “Beware, surely Allah has commanded me to fight those who revolt or who break the pledge, or create trouble on the earth.”⁴⁶

7. Tarahum (Kinship)

Caliph ‘Ali holds that one should always keep to kinship (*tarahum*) even if his relatives turn away and do not regard its importance. In his letter of instructions to his elder son, Hadrat Hasan

al-Mujtaba, he speaks; “Behave yourself towards your brother in such a way that if he disregards kinship, you keep to it; when he turns away be kind to him and draw near to him.”⁴⁷

In one of his sermons Caliph ‘Ali speaks about the wisdom of keeping kinship in these words, “whoever holds up his hand for (helping) his kinsmen, he holds one hand but at the time of his need many hands remain held up from him.”⁴⁸

8. Enjoining the Right and Trying to be Well Wishers

In his letter of instructions to Hadrat Hassan al-Mujtaba, Caliph ‘Ali advises him to follow “*amr bil-mar uf* and *nah-i-an-il munkar*” (enjoin right and forbid wrong) in this way, “Ask others to do good; you will thus, be among good doers. Desist others from evil with action as well as your speech and keep off, to the best of ability, from he who commits it.”⁴⁹ In the same letter he advises his son that Allah commands for virtues and refrains from sin, “He (Allah) does not command you save for virtue and does not refrain you save from evil.”⁵⁰

He also advises his son to desire the same for others what he does desire for himself, “You should desire for others what you desire for yourself and hate for others what you hate for yourself.”⁵¹

9. Association with Good and Good Doers

In one of his letters addressed to al-Ashtar, the Caliph regards the collection of good deeds as the best collection. “The best collection with you should be the collection of good deeds.”⁵² In the same letter he advises al-Ashtar to associate with God-fearing people and guides him that virtuous and vicious should not be given equal position, “Associate yourself with God-fearing and truthful people. The virtuous and vicious should not be in equal position before you because this means dissuasion of virtuous from virtue and persuasion of vicious to vice.”⁵³

In the same document of instructions Caliph ‘Ali advises al-Ashtar to increase his conversation with scholars, “Keep on increasing your conversation with the scholars and discussions with the wise...”⁵⁴ In this letter Caliph ‘Ali also, expressed this view that the command of army shall be given in the hands of such a person

who stands to be well-wisher of Allah, “Put in command of your forces the man who in your view is the best well-wisher of Allah, His Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and your Imam.”⁵⁵

10. Harmony between Claims and Deeds

Caliph ‘Ali desires the establishment of harmony between claims and deeds. In one of his sermons he speaks, “Allah may curse those who advise good but they themselves avoid it, and those who desist others from evil but they themselves act upon it.”⁵⁶

11. Undue Distribution of Wealth

Caliph ‘Ali regards the undue distribution of wealth as wastefulness and lavishness; Beware; certainly that giving of wealth without any right for it is wastefulness and lavishness.”⁵⁷

12. Muslim Rulers/Leaders

In one of his sermons Caliph describes some of the main qualities of a ruler or a leader of the Muslims. He speaks, “...He who is incharge of .. leadership of the Muslims should not be a miser.... nor be ignorant....nor be of rude behavior.....nor should he deal unjustly.....nor should he accept a bribe...”⁵⁸

13. Effects of *Satan*

Caliph ‘Ali warns against the ill effects of Satan (devil) as he (Satan) leads to astray, “You should fear lest Satan infects you with his disease, or leads you astray through his call, or marches on you with horsemen and footmen...”⁵⁹

14. Major and Minor Sins

Caliph ‘Ali in one of his sermons holds that exposition of sins of others is the commotion of a big sin even if the expositor may not have himself committed any big sin. “By Allah, even if he did not commit big sins but committed only small sins, his exposing the sins of people is itself a big sin.”⁶⁰ Commenting about the sins, the Caliph, further advises that one shall not feel safe even for a small (minor) sin, as he may be punished for it. He explains it in these words, “Do not be quick in exposition of any one’s sins for he may be forgiven for it, and do not feel yourself safe even for a small (minor) sin because you may be punished for it.”⁶¹

15. Adopt Virtue, avoid Vice and Company of Wicked

Caliph ‘Ali has emphasized the adoption of virtues and avoiding of vices at various occasions. In one of his sermons he is reported to have said, “When you see virtue follow it, and when you see vice avoid it.”⁶² At another place he states, it’s wisdom in these words, “You should adopt the course of virtue whereby you will have guidance, and keep aloof from the direction of vice so that you remain on the right way.”⁶³

The Caliph does not only desire that Muslims should avoid vice but he expresses his utmost desire that believers shall remain aloof from the company of wicked as well. In this context he speaks in one of his sermons, “Avoid the company of the wicked because vice adjoins vice.”⁶⁴ In one of his sermons the Caliph gives the picture of a true Muslim in these words, “...A (true) Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand every (other) Muslim is safe, save in the matter of truth.”⁶⁵

16. Forbearance and Not the Anger

In a letter of the Caliph addressed to ibn Abdullah, al-A’war al-Hamdani the anger has been regarded as the advancing force of satan in these words, “...‘Keep off anger because it is one large army of Satan’s armies.’”⁶⁶ In the same letter the Caliph ‘Ali advises to maintain patience even if one is tempted to develop violent, anger. He speaks, “Show forbearance in the amount of rage, and pardon inspite of authority; the eventual end will be then in your favour.”⁶⁷ “Caliph ‘Ali speaks of the wisdom of this sweet temperedness in these words,” One who is sweet-tempered can retain the love of his people for good.”⁶⁸

17. Moral Traits are Blessings

In one of his utterances Caliph ‘Ali holds that moral traits are the blessings. He speaks, “Blessed be he who humbles himself, whose livelihood is pure, whose heart is chaste, whose habits are virtuous, who spends his savings (in the name of Allah), who prevents his tongue from speaking non- sense, who keeps people safe from evil, who is pleased with the Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) *sunnah* and who is disconnected with innovations in religion.”⁶⁹

18. Goodness of Moral Character is the Best Companion

“No honour is like fear from Allah, no Companion is like the goodness of moral character.....no trade is like virtuous acts..... no self control is like inaction in the time of doubt.”⁷⁰ This utterance is full of moral teachings, in it fear from Allah, in other words, has been stated as the best honour. Then, virtuous acts and goodness of moral character have been described as best trade and best companion, respectively. In the same saying forbearance, consultation, discharge of obligations, wisdom and thinking have been stressed upon.

19. Prefer Truth to Falsehood

“Belief means that you should prefer truth (even) when it harms you rather than falsehood (even) when it benefits you; that your words should not be more than your action and that you should fear Allah when speaking about others.”⁷¹ In this saying it has been advised to prefer truth over falsehood irrespective of (material and monetary) loss or benefit. It is also instructed that one should not exaggerate one’s (virtuous), deeds by speaking about them more and more. Also, one should fear Allah while commenting about other people.

20. Best Achievements

While advising his son (al-Hasan), Caliph ‘Ali is reported to have said, “O’ my son, learn four things and (a further) four things from me. Nothing will harm you if you practice them. That the richest of riches is intelligences, the biggest destitution is foolishness, the wildest wildness is vanity and the best achievement is goodness of the moral character.”⁷²

21. Family, Deeds and Position

“He whose deeds accord (him) a back position cannot be given a front position because of his lineage.”⁷³ It is clear from this utterance that man can not and should not rely on his ancestors who might have been respected for their piousness or knowledge. He can not expect success in this world and salvation in the Hereafter by virtue of his lineage when his own conduct is dishonorable.

22. Charity an Effective Cure

“Charity is an effective cure, and the actions of people in their present life will be before their eyes in the next life.”⁷⁴ This saying comprises of two phrases. In the first part charity has been described as an effective cure, because when a man helps the poor and destitute by alms, they pray for his health and recovery, from the depths of their hearts and, therefore, their prayer is granted and brings him cure. The second part relates to the disclosures of actions on the Day of Judgment when material curtains will be lifted and the deeds will appear so apparently before the eyes that there will be no possibility of denial by anyone.

23. Endurance is Bravery

“Incapability is a catastrophe; endurance is bravery; abstinence is riches; self-restraint is a shield (against sin); and the best companion is submission (to Allah’s will).”⁷⁵ In this utterance Caliph ‘Ali has spoken about the positive and negative aspects of life which bring man face to face with both his defects and weaknesses and which, in turn, help him realize the value of a higher spiritual and moral power.

24. Prevention from Sin is Better

“Abstention from sin is easier than seeking help afterwards.”⁷⁶

In this saying one is advised to abstain from sin. Also, it is described as an easier task in comparison to seeking help after committing sin. As the latter is a more difficult and complicated job.

25. Knowledge and Wealth

Kumayl ibn Ziyad an-Nakha’i relates that once Caliph caught hold of him (Kumayl) and took him to the graveyard. He (Caliph) then breathed a deep sigh and said;”...Knowledge is better than wealth...”⁷⁷ In support of his statement the Caliph ‘Ali (Rad. A) gave three reasons; Firstly, knowledge guards the man (from afflictions of the next world), while wealth is to be safeguard by the man. Secondly, wealth decreases on spending it, while knowledge multiplies (increases) by spending (imparting to others). Thirdly, the achievements of wealth (like property etc). are destroyed. However, what the man of knowledge achieves by virtue of his knowledge will never by

destroyed, because the knowledge which has brought him privilege will be retained for ever.

26. Missing of Opportunity Brings about Grief

“To miss an opportunity brings about grief.”⁷⁸ There is no denying this fact that man’s life is short and the opportunities of life are shorter still. With the passage of time man loses many opportunities. An opportunity does not knock twice because time and tide wait for none. Thus, one should make the best use of those opportunities that do arise.

27. Relation between Speech and Reason

“As the intelligence increases, speech decreases.”⁷⁹ It becomes understandable from this utterance of the Caliph ‘Ali (Rad A.) that with the advancement towards the perfection of intellect one gets more absorbed in thinking, reflection and reasoning. As a result of it, he talks as less as possible. Thus, one who talk excessively, usually possess little intellect and reasoning.

28. Small Donation Better than Refusal

“Do not feel ashamed for giving little (donations), because refusal is smaller than that (little donation).”⁸⁰ One can easily understand from this utterance of Hadrat ‘Ali (Rad. A.) that it is not obligatory to make large donations. Important thing is that one should not desist from donation within his capacity. Little donations are in no way shameful acts, because something is always better than nothing.

29. Warnings Actually Good Tidings

“Whoever warns you is like one who gives you good tidings.”⁸¹ In this utterance warnings and good tidings have been regarded as the two sides of the same coin. It is advised that one should not be annoyed with constructive warnings and healthy criticism, but rather be happy and thankful. Timely criticism makes one attentive to his mistakes, prompting him to try harder and improve himself.

30. Comparison of Two Tongues

“The tongue of the wise-man is behind his heart, and the heart of fool is behind his tongue.”⁸² A wise man does not make use of his

tongue unless he is sure about the correctness of his speech. He uses his heart and mind prior to using his tongue. He also thinks of the possible consequences. The fool in contrary to this thoughtlessly expresses words that come to his tongue. This may subsequently lead him to a stage of sorrow and regret.

Reference and Notes

- 1 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Sermon No. 16;P.135
- 2 Ibid;P.136
- 3 Ibid; Sermon No. 113;P.261
- 4 Ibid; P. Sermon No. 190;P.382
- 5 Ibid; Sermon No. 156;P.320
- 6 Ibid; Sermon No. 228;P.451.
- 7 *Holy Qur'an*; (7:26).
- 8 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Sermon No. 190;P.382.
- 9 Idem.
- 10 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Sermon No. 190;P.40.
- 11 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Sermon No. 15;P.135.
- 12 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Sermon No. 125;P.279.
- 13 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Letter No.27;P.486.
- 14 Ibid; Letter No.53;P.535
- 15 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Sermon No. 53;P.539
- 16 *Nahj ul-Balaghah*; Letter No.79; P.568.
- 17 Ibid; Sermon No. 215,PP.432-33
- 18 Idem.,
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