

A Short Treatise On The Life Of Imam Ali ('A)

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A brief biography of the life of Imam Ali ('a) that focuses mostly on his manners, behaviour and attitude towards politics, power, governance, spirituality and Gnosticism.

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Preface

The invaluable legacy of the Household [Ahl al-Bayt] of the Prophet (may peace be upon them all), as preserved by their followers, is a comprehensive school of thought that embraces all branches of Islamic knowledge. This school has produced many brilliant scholars who have drawn inspiration from this rich and pure resource. It has provided the Muslim ummah with many scholars whom, following in the footsteps of Imams of the Prophet's Household ('a), have done their best to clear up the doubts raised by various creeds and currents within and without Muslim society and to answer their questions.

Throughout the past centuries, they have given well-reasoned answers and clarifications concerning these questions and doubts.

To meet the responsibilities assigned to it, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly (ABWA) has embarked on a defense of the sanctity of the Islamic message and its verities, often obscured by the partisans of various sects and creeds as well as by currents hostile to Islam. The Assembly follows in the footsteps of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and the disciples of their school of thought in its readiness to confront these challenges and tries to be on the frontline in consonance with the demands of every age.

The arguments contained in the works of the scholars belonging to the School of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are

of unique significance. That is because they are based on genuine scholarship and appeal to reason, and avoid prejudice and bias. These arguments address scholars and thinkers in a manner that appeals to healthy minds and wholesome human nature.

To assist the seekers of truth, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly has endeavoured to present a new phase of these arguments contained in the studies and translations of the works of contemporary Shi'ah writers and those who have embraced this sublime school of thought through divine blessing.

The Assembly is also engaged in editing and publishing valuable works by leading Shi'ah scholars of earlier ages to assist the seekers of the truth in discovering the truths which the School of the Prophet's (S) Household ('a) has offered to the entire world.

The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly looks forward to benefit from the opinions of the readers and their suggestions and constructive criticism in this area.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating the genuine Islamic teachings as preached by the Prophet Muhammad (S).

We beseech God, the Most High, to accept our humble efforts and to enable us to enhance them under the auspices of Imam al-Mahdi, His vicegerent on the earth (may Allah expedite his advent).

We express our gratitude to Allamah Mohammad Taqi Ja'fari the author of the present book, and Mr. Kazim Bhojani, its translator. We also thank our colleagues who have participated in producing this work, especially the staff of the Translation Office.

Cultural Affairs Department

Ahl al-Bayt ('a) World Assembly

Chapter 1: Ali And Politics

Classification Of Historical Events

Analysis of historical events can be classified into two major types:

1. Analysis of events such that veracity (objectivity and correctness) of the analysis only affects our understanding of a particular minor issue. In this case correctness or incorrectness of the analysis does not benefit or harm our understanding of social issues overall and does not affect anything beyond that particular event itself.

Let us assume for example that we commit a mistake in identifying Napoleon's neighbour from a historic perspective in the following sense: The colour of the cap of the Napoleon's neighbour was brown and we identify it mistakenly to be blue. In this situation we know that this in no way will affect our understanding of the true personality of Napoleon, about whom study can be socially beneficial for us. Whether Napoleon had a neighbour or not and whether his neighbour wore a blue cap or a brown one, has no relation whatsoever to Napoleon's personality. It is even possible that some other events in his life were also of this nature and had no role in the formation of his personality.

So, even if we commit a genuine mistake or commit a mistake intentionally, in identifying or analysing these events, or in other words, if we manipulate these events according to our personal inclinations, we have not compromised the final purpose itself because even after reaching such wrong conclusions we cannot use them in our understanding of the personality of Napoleon as a whole.

2. Analysis of notable events which are tied to the future of present-day societies. These events cannot be analysed blindly without careful investigation and it is even worse if we distort them for the sake of personal gains and vain desires or change them for the gratification of our lusts.

For example, it can be said that the most important and major events—which the future of most societies are tied to—are events related to the leaders of Monotheism (the Prophets). The effects of a mistake in explaining the lives of this group are not limited only to the bygone events of the personal lives of those leaders, and correctness or incorrectness of this analysis is not limited only to distorting a historical event; clearly, such mistakes and distortions can change the course (of the lives) of millions.

In other words, the issue of religion from the perspective of its importance for human societies occupies the foremost position whether we are aware of it or not. Therefore, a mistake or manipulation in these historical events or regarding the personalities of the leaders of different religions can bring about the highest level of harm and tragic consequences which are not bound by any specific limit.

For example, let us assume that a certain person for the sake of satisfaction of his base desires or pursuing his own personal interests says something like: From historical research I have to come to the conclusion that Prophet Musa ('a) (or Prophet Isa ('a)) preformed a certain immoral act. In this situation not only has this person fabricated a false event but has played with the emotions of the millions of followers of Judaism and Christianity from the beginning of time up to today and has committed the worst of crimes against the whole of humanity.

One such important question is the issue of the statesmanship (or politics) of Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a). Some Muslims in the past for the sake of affirming their own mentality and beliefs said that Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) was not politically wise and with this conclusion they wrote a false history from their own hands. With the passage of time these conclusions were handed over to the West. Westerners under circumstances particular to themselves, sometimes out of a lack of information and sometimes knowingly, then added baseless conclusions to this false history and these conclusions were returned back to the Muslims. The

naive Muslims also viewed these with reverence and admiration and without even a passing thought they accepted them as being correct.

Sometimes some of these people became so bold that they resorted to distortion and philosophizing of history. Some have said that although Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) was a courageous, pious and wise man, unfortunately he lacked political wisdom and therefore they did not approve of the status that others have maintained for him and with this understanding they concluded their historical analysis.

This judgment originates from the fact that the history of Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) and the events of the early period of Islam have not been studied carefully enough and, as a result, the reality of politics and political wisdom has not become totally clear.

It is absolutely necessary to refute these doubts—whether deliberate or not. Therefore, we must write, albeit in a few short pages, about the policies of Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) with the hope that the respected readers will inform us without any hesitation of other historical misinformation in order to help us make clear the historical realities to which the destiny of the nations is tied.

Reality Of Politics

The meaning of the word politics, like many other important terminologies, is not free from difference of opinion. We do not, however, see it necessary to state all the different opinions in this short discourse. That which can be considered useful in this regard is that there are three major and important definitions of politics which we present here in our discourse:

1. Politics means understanding the relationship of the individual with the state and of the society with the government. We have quoted this short definition from historians and scholars of philosophy of history.

However, as can be seen, this sentence alone cannot correctly explain the general meaning of the word politics because in this definition the existential relationship between the societies, the governments and the people is not taken into account. Nevertheless, without any doubt the study of the relationships mentioned in the definition forms an important part of politics. In any case, in this definition the most important factor that should be taken into account to explain the meaning of politics has been omitted and that existential factor is taking into account the force that is required for changing or forming the said relationship, the relationship that is implied by the meaning of the word politics according to this definition.

2. This is an interpretation of the word politics that was given by Aristotle¹.

“It is necessary that the most important of all goodness should be the most important subject of discussion for societies and this discipline is the same which in practice is called government or politics.”²

The same definition has been repeated by him again at another place where he says, “The purpose of all the sciences and arts is (attainment of) goodness. The most important of this good should be the subject matter of the most important of the sciences and this science is politics.”³

This expression is a translation of the original Greek text. Even though there is the possibility of mistake in its translation from Greek to French or from French to Arabic the meaning intended by Aristotle by the word politics is clear to the extent that we require it. It can be said that the intent of Aristotle by this definition was to say that ‘Politics is the endorsing, forming or changing of the interrelationships in societies with the goal of attainment of felicity and goodness.’ The same meaning can also be obtained from Plato’s Republic. Here we deem it necessary to give a short explanation of this definition of politics.

The reality of goodness, justice and truth (not the just the words) is something that is welcomed by all people, societies and governments so much so that we cannot find in history any people or society or government which did not consider itself a supporter of goodness, justice and truth. Even if one asks the most vicious of individuals about the actions they have done and for what reason, without doubt they would say for goodness, justice and truth and, similarly, if you ask the most oppressive governments—like that of Genghis Khan⁴—as to what their aim in all the bloodshed and plundering was, we would hear the same answer.

From this perspective, people, societies and governments are always moving under the banner of search for good and establishment of justice. This reality cannot be denied keeping in mind prominent conclusive studies in psychology of people, societies and governments.

Now we can understand the true (lofty) meaning of the word politics as it was intended by Aristotle. Based on the explanation given, the meaning of the word politics as given by Aristotle can be summed up in few lines as follows:

From the perspective that (attainment of) good is the aim of all individuals, societies and governments, all the means necessary for reaching this aim must be secured. The science which is responsible for explaining the quantity and quality of these means is called politics.

If this definition of politics is what Aristotle himself understood, then this science (politics) is the best and the most important of all the sciences and a true politician is the most important and the most essential of all human personalities.

3. Another interpretation of politics has also been given. However, this definition of politics has become a source of widespread fear among the people who are not involved in politics and it has led the common people and the faithful of all the religions to hate politics completely. This interpretation says: Politics is defining or specifying a certain goal—which of course is done by the politician—and attaining that goal through all possible means.

As is clear, not only does this definition not talk about goodness or felicity but there is not even mention

of humanness or humanity. According to this definition, even wild animals that, by the use of effort specific to themselves, make conditions favourable for victory can be called politicians! This is the same definition that Oswald Spengler⁵ has given about politics:

“The born statesman stands beyond true and false. He does not confuse the logic of events with the logic of systems. "Truths" or "errors"—which here amount to the same—only concern him as intellectual currents, and in respect of workings. He surveys their potency, durability, and direction, and duly books them in his calculations for the destiny of the power that he directs. He has convictions, certainly, that are dear to him, but he has them as a private person; no real politician ever felt himself tied to them when in action. "The doer is always conscienceless; no one has a conscience except the spectator”, said Goethe⁶, and it is equally true of Sulla⁷ and Robespierre⁸ as it is of Bismarck⁹ and Pitt¹⁰. The great Popes and the English party-leaders, so long as they had still to strive for the mastery of things, acted on the same principles as the conquerors and upstarts of all ages. Take the dealings of Innocent III, who very nearly succeeded in creating a world-dominion of the Church, and deduce therefrom the catechism of success; it will be found to be in the extremist contradiction with all religious moral.”¹¹

The word politics has been used in this unacceptable meaning for centuries. This meaning best applies to those authorities of religion and rulers who think that human societies, rather the whole system of nature, are toys in their hands. So, even when at times we hear claims of justice, support for the oppressed people, development of society and establishment of unity from such people, these claims do not have any value other than for deluding people and preparing the grounds for achieving personal interests.

Keeping all this in mind it is implausible to expect that those who adopt this meaning of politics will ever abide by any of the principals of humanity.

Politics Of Imam Ali (‘A)

Now that the introduction has clarified some important points, those who are seeking truth should know that if we take politics to mean that which was said in the third definition and the details and consequences which were explained in clear terms by Oswald Spengler then Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) knew very well about this kind of politics but never put it into practice.

In other words, it is impossible that Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) who had grasped the reality of humanity and human nobility would sacrifice this nobility for the sake of a superficial victory that would last for a short period.

This is Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a). The same Ali who became so displeased when an anklet was taken away oppressively from a woman (living within the Islamic boundaries) that he said if someone dies of regret after hearing this he is not to be blamed. It is the same Ali who gave precedence to the life of a tiny little ant over total domination over the whole world. The same Ali who did his best to ensure his sword would

not spill the blood of a single innocent person in an oppressive manner.

It is a huge mistake to search for such a person in the ranks of bloodthirsty and licentious people. Ali belonged to the caravan of the leaders of monotheism. Certainly, Ibrahim, friend of God, Musa, son of Imran and Isa, son of Maryam (peace be upon them all) are completely different from Nero¹², Genghis Khan and Napoleon even in the case that the former, the leaders of truth, do not have authority over even a single person and those Genghis Khans have the whole world under their control.

But if we take into account the true meaning of the word politics and say that politics means success in social affairs then Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) will be seen in the foremost ranks but only if we understand that success in this temporary life while having power over subordinates and the weak is different from an everlasting victory over intellects and the hearts of the children of Adam.

A superficial victory of a few temporal days that elicits the feeling of resentment from subordinates, is like a transient nightmare that disappears quickly after generating terror for a short time.

Today the glorious image of the leaders of monotheism is imprinted so deep on the hearts of the pure people that even the most deviated of the people cannot dare to say that Ibrahim or Musa or Isa were—for example—evil people. While, on the other hand, a sense of hatred and disgust is produced in the hearts of all upon hearing the names of the so-called politicians who are in pursuit of a superficial outward personal victory. This is the same thing that has been mentioned very clearly by Oswald Spengler:

“The first problem is to make oneself somebody; the second—less obvious, but harder and greater in its ultimate effects—to create a tradition, to bring on others so that one's work may be continued with one's own pulse and spirit, to release a current of like activity that does not need the original leader to maintain it in form. And here the statesman rises to something that in the Classical world would doubtless have been called divinity. He becomes the creator of a new life, the spirit-ancestor of a young race. He himself, as a unit, vanishes from the stream after a few years. But a minority called into being by him takes up his course and maintains it indefinitely. This cosmic something, this soul of a ruling stratum, an individual can generate and leave as a heritage, and throughout history it is this that has produced the durable effects. The great statesman is rare. ¹³”

If these sentences, which are clear without any kind of elucidation, are studied correctly and seen with a mind free from any sort of blind imitation and prejudice and if a comparison is made between the important individuals of the two groups of politicians mentioned previously, it will become clear whether these truths introduce ordinary politicians or Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a).

We will describe some of the things mentioned above and in addition to this we seek the help of the respected reader in order to clear up casuistic reasoning from the minds of the uninformed. Spengler says that the first thing that is necessary for a politician is to make himself somebody— meaning to be identified or recognized by others. We can raise this question and ask: How can the act of ‘Amr bin ‘As

be considered making himself somebody given that for the sake of saving himself in battle, he removed his clothes and humiliated himself in front of others? Or, how can the alliance of Mu'awiyah with a stranger for the purpose of killing the leader of the Muslims to make himself somebody be reconciled with attainment of goodness? Can the act of preventing an enemy from drinking water to the point that they are dying of thirst identify a person as someone that can lead others in the attainment of goodness?

Leaving this aside he also says: He becomes the creator of a new life, the spirit-ancestor of a young race. He himself, as a unit, vanishes from the stream after a few years. But a minority called into being by him takes up his course and maintains it indefinitely.

It is known that Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) during the early years of his life and after the demise of the great leader of Islam (Prophet Muhammad (S)) was always in the minority because of lack of congruity between him and others. In spite of this, with the passage of time he managed to conquer the hearts of people with his spirituality, wisdom and justice.

History has completely failed to reveal the true governance and political wisdom of Ali ('a). If we carefully examine the pages of history and put aside beliefs that we have inherited from our forefathers we will see that we cannot find any other leader whose followers were subjected to so much persecution—they did not even dare speak the name of their leader. The enemies of Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) endeavoured so much to suppress and destroy his reputation that worse than what was said about him cannot be imagined. In spite of all this, without even the least of false efforts or without any support from so-called successful personalities, he possessed the most sublime human personality and his name is written in the foremost ranks in the book of humanity.

Today when we are in the best and most progressive days in terms of our understanding of human values (though not from the practical point of view) we hear the highest praise and respect for Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) from all the nations even from those societies that do not adhere to any religion. If at times we see some nations bear a grudge against him or because of ignorance try to belittle his personality, a wave of detestation and disgust from all other nations is set out against them. From this it is clear that a true politician is the same cherished of Ibrahim whose personality manifests itself better and better with the passage of time as opposed to the current of ordinary politicians and in effect makes the whole of humanity from the young to the old his followers.

Some people with shallow thinking say that a politician is someone who can establish his absolute control over his society, but Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) after the demise of Prophet (S) was not able to establish his control over Muslims. It is as if these people intend to say that establishing control means controlling the society like helpless goats with the help of a sword and if needed taking them to war fields for the sake of personal aims and dominating them such that their eyes and hearts remained terrified and overwhelmed, like Hajjaj ibn Yusuf and likes of him used to do. These people do not comprehend the value of a human being and the worth of his relationship with God. Not only this, such people have not only not understood or do not want to understand the value of a human being but they even think

religion is nothing more than a series of outward rituals and ceremonies and say that in order to gain power and control over the whole world we should not spare any efforts even if inhuman, like Pope Innocent the Third.

The mistakes of these people do not end here but the most damaging mistake that some of these historians have committed is that they have studied the history of the great leaders of Islam from a few superficial historic events and have satisfied themselves with those few and then they say only that Islam had many conquests and conquered many nations over a short period.

However, they have not carefully reflected as to how many of these Muslims were like Abu Dharr al-Ghifari. The Prophet of Islam was not able—in the limited time he had—to instill the sublime teachings and laws of Islam the way he wanted to into the hearts of more than a few from among all Muslims.

At that time, some would say they believed in the Prophet while God himself denied these outward claims and warned His messenger, lest he should accept their outward claims, that faith was not firmly rooted in their hearts and they were only outwardly attributed to Islam.

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ

The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You do not believe but say, We submit; and faith has not yet entered into your heart (Surah Al-Hujurat, 49: 14).

Can this lack of firm faith in the hearts of Muslims be considered evidence that the Prophet of Islam lacked wisdom?! In other words, can we say that the Prophet was not politically wise because he could not establish total influence over the Muslims of that time? And if for instance we accept this then can we similarly say that the Prophet Ibrahim, the chief of all the religions, lacked political wisdom because during his time not even his family members obeyed him. Certainly, such ideas are nothing but illusion.

Even though—at the time of the Prophet of Islam—Islam was young and zeal was at its peak amongst Muslims, we are well aware of what misfortunes befell Islam in the few years after the demise of the Holy Prophet and what storms of calamity were heaped up over the fresh garden of Islam. A terrible misfortune befell Islam because of the interference of a certain group in the matters of Islam which turned the harvest of this pure religion into the ashes of power struggle and worship of desires. After these gloomy events, was it anything other than political wisdom that Ali ('a) presented through his character and his stand, the effects of which—over a period of a few centuries—increased the number of his lovers from a handful of people to millions. That which is worthy of attention here are the following words of Spengler:

“The gardener can obtain a plant from the seed, or he can improve its stock. He can bring to bloom, or let languish, the dispositions hidden in it, its growths and colour, its flower and fruit. On his eye for possibilities—and, therefore, necessities—depends its fulfilment, its strength, its whole Destiny. But the

*basic form and direction of its being, the stages and tempo and direction thereof, are not in his power. It must accomplish them or it decays, and the same is true of the immense plant that we call a "Culture" and the being-streams of human families that are bound up in its form-world. The great statesman is the gardener of a people."*¹⁴

When fame-seeking power-hungry people do not want to learn the true principles of humanity and move forward with the help of these principles, why should a true politician be considered to be lacking in wisdom and foresight?! And, just because materialistic people consider only money, status and position to be human values, why should a true politician be blamed when he maintains a precise and strict account of the public treasury and does not show preferences to one person over another but to the extent of the effectiveness of that person in the society.

Do people need a more evident historic proof than the directives that Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) gave to Malik Ashtar about the governance of Egypt, as proof that he was a politician in its true sense?

It is very clear what those who have said that Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) lacked political wisdom mean and it does not really require a long drawn out explanation. These people say that Ali ibn Abi Talib was a good man, he was the advisor to the Holy Prophet, and he did not accede to the likes of ‘Amr ibn Ab’dawat and Marhab from whose swords death would rain. However, they also say: Ali ibn Abi Talib was very imprudent from a political point of view because for the sake of protecting the Prophet and saving the life of the saviour of humanity he slept in his bed when they knew the enemies had planned a surprise attack and if the sword had cut his body into pieces, he would have lost his life in this incident.

Some also say that it was far from being politically wise when he did not rise against the usurpers to take back his right even though he had the power with strong and brave followers to support him. They believed that it was lack of political foresight that he kept silent and did not rise up for the sake of saving Islam due to the apprehension that newly converted Muslims would turn their backs on Islam—people in general were not important and it did not matter if they would have forsaken Islam.

They say it is not very wise that someone soon after coming in power clashes with a strong (political) enemy and weakens oneself. It is was necessary for Ali to keep Mu’awiyah in his position (as a governor) because accepting tyranny, oppression and undue diplomatic relations and changing the moral system of Islam into a tool for satisfying greed for a few years does not harm anything.

They say Ali was imprudent when he allowed his sworn enemies access to water in battle and did not do anything to obstruct them. If Ali were a true politician, he would have even been able to kill thousands of people—even the believers—of thirst so that the conditions would become favourable for reaching (political) power.

They say because Ali detested false praise and flattery he lacked political wisdom. Ali used to say, *“Do not mention for me handsome praise for the obligations I have discharged towards Allah and towards you, because of (my) fear about those obligations which I have not discharged and for issuing*

injunctions which could not be avoided, and do not address me in the manner despots are addressed. Do not evade me as the people of passion are (to be) evaded, do not meet me with flattery.”¹⁵

Indeed! In the judgment of some taking away the rights of the poor and giving them to flatterers is political wisdom.

We do not wish to spend time on the statements of these gentlemen. We just want to mention a detail that they have made a mistake about—they have taken *Genghis Khan* in the place of *Prophet Ibrahim* and *Bakhtun Nasr*¹⁶ in the place of *Isa* son of *Marium (Jesus)*.

Yes, Mu’awiyah was a politician. If you want to know more about his politics carefully read his political directions to Sufyan ibn Awf Gamadi. Ibn Abi Al-Hadid quotes them in his commentary on Nahj Al-Balagha.

“Sufyan ibn Awf Gamadi says: Mu’awiyah summoned me and said: I am sending you with an army. Take a route from the banks of the Euphrates until you reach Hait; occupy that place and if you see any resistance from the people there attack them and destroy them. After crossing Hait and when you reach Anbar occupy it. If you do not see any army then leave there and camp at Madain and do not go close to Kufa and know that if you terrify the people of Anbar and Madain it is as if you have inflicted these destructions on Kufa. O Sufyan! This destruction and plunder will cast fear into the hearts of Iraqis and will make our zealous hearts happy and will incline those who fear towards us. So destroy anyone whose opinion differs from our opinion and whichever place you enter destroy it and plunder people’s belongings because the plundering of belongings is similar to killing and its unpleasant effect on the hearts is more.”¹⁷

These were the directions of a major political figure of the Islamic society. This man did not consider human life to be of any worth not even equal to the worth of a tiny ant. In other words, we can say, ‘Well done Genghis Khan! But unfortunately, you were not present in the time of Mu’awiyah so that you could benefit from his school of politics and learn the principles of politics from him.’

Never! Politics is far from this meaning. At the time when the enemy was arraying its troops and was making arrangements for war and had tried to defeat Ali’s army by cutting off the water supply, Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) raised his hands towards his Lord and said:

“O my Allah! Hearts are getting drawn to You, necks are stretching (towards You), eyes are fixed (on You), steps are in motion and bodies have turned lean. O my Allah! Hidden animosity has become manifest and the pots of malice are boiling. O my Allah! We complain to You of the absence of our Prophet, the numerousness of our enemy and the diffusion of our passions. Our Lord! Decide between us and between our people with truth, and you are the Best of Deciders.”¹⁸

And before the start of battle he issued the following command to his army:

*“Do not fight them unless they initiate the fighting, because, by the grace of Allah, you are in the right and to leave them till they begin fighting will be another point from your side against them. If, by the will of Allah, the enemy is defeated then do not kill the retreaters, do not strike a helpless person, do not finish off the wounded, and do not inflict harm on women even though they may attack your honor with filthy words and abuse your officers.”*¹⁹

It is said that ordinary politicians—according to the third definition—at the time of action make a distinction between themselves and the society; in other words, they make it appear as if they are doing service to the society but suddenly at the time of action the whole society becomes their servant and a tool in their hands. Only a group close to them and the flatterers benefit from them.

We must see what Ali says in this regard? He says: *“I seek you for Allah’s sake but you seek me for your own benefits.”*²⁰ From this small sentence we can to a very great extent understand Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) and estimate the value of his words.

It can be seen in history that these savage politicians shirked any responsibility and they acted as if all the social resources were their own personal property. From this perspective their destructive policies have always made progress and with a peculiar tranquillity particular to them they carried on busy in their politics.

However, Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) says, *“Know that I shall fight two persons—a person that claims that which is not his and one who ignores what is obligatory upon him.”*²¹

Ali (‘a) would fight these two whether such a person were someone like Talhah and Zubayr, who were from the chiefs of the nation, or a Bedouin Arab who had no social position whatsoever. Although in this situation people like Talhah and Zubayr created the revolt of Jamal because in their thinking Imam Ali’s rational social principle was against politics.

We would also like to mention some other words of Ali. He has said, *“O people! Certainly, I am a Muslim from amongst you. Whatever is beneficial for you is beneficial for me and whatever harms you, harms me.”*²²

But this concept (of rule of people over people) is very far-fetched in the logic of these people because history has shown to us that even the ordinary ones from amongst these politicians considered everything in this world obliged to follow them, be it beneficial to them or cause them harm.

We end this discourse by quoting the words one of the true politicians and champions of monotheism:

“We are in a period when most of the people regard betrayal as wisdom. In these days the ignorant call it excellence of cunning. What is the matter with them? Allah may destroy them. One who has been through the thick and thin of life finds excuses to be preventing him from the orders and prohibitions of Allah but he disregards them despite capability (to succumb to them and follow the commands of Allah),

while one who has no restraints of religion seizes the opportunity (and accepts the excuses for not following the commands of Allah)”²³

He also says at another place, *“Had I not been hateful of deceit I would have been the most cunning of all men”²⁴²⁵* This same meaning is indicated at many places in the life of Imam Ali brief study of which does not leave any room for doubt. However, we mention some instances just for illustration.

1. Most historians have written that the most accurate of the predictions during the confusion of the selection of the Caliph were made by Ali (‘a):

For example when the second of them (the Caliphs) insisted that Ali pay oath of allegiance to the first one [at the time the first was installed], he said, *“Milk a little for him, an amount of it will return to you as well.”²⁶* Not even one historian doubts the fact that the Caliphate of the second was through endorsement of the first and not through any consultation or election.

2. Similarly in the event of raising of the Qur’an on spears in the battle of Siffin which has been for centuries termed as ‘the rebellion of Siffin’, immediately upon seeing it and listening to their slogans Imam Ali (‘a) said, *“The sentence is right but what (they think) it means, is wrong.”²⁷* And we cannot find a single historian who says that Ali consulted commanders of his army in this political prediction. On the contrary they have written: As soon as he saw this hypocrisy and deceit he expressed himself in the above mentioned words.

3. If we look carefully into the matter of Talhah and Zubayr when they came (to Ali (‘a)) and said we desire to go to Mecca to take part in the rites of Umrah²⁸ (optional pilgrimage). He said to them, *“Your intention is not Umrah but your aim is deceit.”²⁹*

Other than these few instances, there are a thousand other places where he made predictions and they turned out to be exactly as he had predicted.

The summary of our explanation in this discourse is: Ali ibn Talib (‘a) was fully aware of politics in its true meaning—in the hope of realization of which every single person has lived from the time of the sons of Adam—and he made this political system practical in his lifetime.

He was also aware of politics in its undesired meaning which consists of identification a goal and acquisition of the necessary means for reaching that goal in any possible way. However, knew it to be detrimental for all humans and never brought it into practice.

¹. Aristotle (384–322 BC) was a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato. His writings cover many subjects, including physics, metaphysics, poetry, theatre, music, logic, rhetoric, politics, government, ethics, biology, and zoology.

². Politics, Aristotle, Arabic translation, vol. 1, page 92.

³. Politics, Aristotle, Arabic translation, vol. 1, page 212. See also Politics, Aristotle, Translated by Benjamin Jowett, Batoche Books, Kitchener, 1999, page 68. “In all sciences and arts the end is a good, and the greatest good and in the highest degree a good in the most authoritative of all—this is the political science of which the good is justice, in other words, the common interest.”

4. Genghis Khan (1162–1227 AD) was the founder, Khan (ruler) and emperor of the Mongol Empire, the largest contiguous empire in history.
5. Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (1880–1936 AD) was a German historian and philosopher.
6. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832 AD) was a German writer and polymath. Goethe's works span the fields of poetry, drama, literature, theology, philosophy, humanism, and science.
7. Lucius Cornelius Sulla (138–78 BC) was a Roman military and political leader.
8. Maximilien Robespierre (1758–1794 AD) is one of the best-known and most figures of the French Revolution.
9. Otto Bismarck (1815–1898 AD) was a Prussian German politician and aristocrat of the 19th century.
10. William Pitt (1708–1778 AD) was a British Whig statesman.
11. The Decline of the West, Oswald Spengler, Arabic translation, vol. 2, page 669–679; See also, The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History, Oswald Spengler, Authorized (English) translation with notes by Charles Francis Atkinson, vol. 2, London, page 442.
12. Nero (37 AD – 68 AD) was the fifth and last Roman emperor of the Julio–Claudian dynasty.
13. The Decline of the West, Oswald Spengler, Arabic translation, vol. 2, page 672,673; See also, The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History, Oswald Spengler, Authorized (English) translation with notes by Charles Francis Atkinson, vol. 2, London, page 444.
14. The Decline of the West, Oswald Spengler, Arabic translation, vol. 2, page 674; See also, The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History, Oswald Spengler, Authorized (English) translation with notes by Charles Francis Atkinson, vol. 2, London, page 445.
15. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 205, page 335 (Ansariyan Publication)
16. Bakhtun Nasr was a Babylonian Emperor.
17. Sharh Nahj Al-Balagha, Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, vol. 1, page: 169
18. Nahj Al-Balagha, Letter 15: vol. 2, page 288.
19. Nahj Al-Balagha, Letter 14: vol. 2, page 282.
20. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 216: vol. 2, page 182.
21. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 173: vol. 1, page 642.
22. Aara ul-Muathireen Hawla Aathar il-Imamia, page 107
23. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 41: vol. 1, page 206.
24. 'All the Arabs' instead of 'all the people', according to some transcripts. See Ghayatul Maram, vol. 7, page 72 and in the narration of Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, "Was is not for piety and religion...", Sharh Nahj Al-Balagha, vol. 1, page 28.
25. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 200, vol. 2, page 128.
26. Tabarasi, Al-Ihtijaj, vol. 1, page 96.
27. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 40: vol. 1, page 204.
28. Sheikh Mufid, Kitab al Jamal, page 89.
29. Kitab al Jamal, Page 89.

Chapter 2: Ali And Jihad

The issue of Jihad—which without doubt brings the picture of bloodshed to the mind—is one of the most important issues related to Islam. As a result, we must explain correctly to the best of our ability the answer to this utterance in which it is said: For propagation of its ideals Islam holds the sword in hand. For a correct explanation of this it is incumbent upon us to look in brief at the environment in which the Prophet of Islam began his (Divine) invitation to the masses. We shall try our best to mention only those

events which are acceptable by all historians irrespective of whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. In other words, unless we obtain a reputable testimony that is agreed upon by all we will not attribute any credibility to it.

From the day the Prophet of Islam received his first revelation and obtained certainty that he had been chosen by Allah for guidance of the people, he took the first basic steps for declaring his Prophethood. Firstly, he started from a very small gathering and revealed his Prophethood and the first amongst men to accept faith was Ali ibn Abi Talib and first amongst women was Khadijah the respected lady of Hijaz who with all her wealth and status became the first believing women. For a while he declared his Prophethood secretly and in private to only those close to him. Slowly after a period of time he was instructed to gather his uncles who were from the chiefs of Quraysh and inform them of this as well. Here he was met with opposition rather than acceptance but without even the slightest despair he started declaring his Prophethood to other people.

Gradually the number of Muslims started increasing and the Prophet's opposition to idol-worship and the ignorant and baseless practices and customs of the Arabs became more open. As a result of a large number of events that took place in this small circle and the fact that no one was able to stop the Prophet from the path he had taken, the chiefs of Quraysh, being fed up with the situation, formed groups—large and small—for repulsing the unrest caused by Muhammad (S).

During this period mediators were sent by the chiefs of Quraysh to attempt to silence the Prophet (S) either by alluring him to material benefits or through intimidation. We narrate one such incident here as an example.

The Demands Of The Quraysh

'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah, one of the influential persons amongst the Arabs, was once sitting in a gathering of the Quraysh at a time when the Prophet was sitting alone in the mosque. 'Utbah said to the chiefs of Quraysh, *'I am going to Muhammad. I will have a conversation with him and make suggestions to him regarding certain matters. Maybe he will accept some of them and we will also give him whatever he demands so that he stops his activities.'* (This event took place when Hamzah had become Muslim and followers of the Prophet were increasing). The chiefs of Quraysh affirmed him and said, *'Go and talk with him.'*

Utbah went and sat next to the Prophet in the mosque and said, *'O my cousin! Your station in eminence— as you are aware yourself—in regard to our family and lineage is very high. However, you have laid hands upon a momentous task for your people. You have divided the society and presented our ideals to be foolishness and you have criticized our Gods and religion and you have called our forefathers unbelievers. I am advising you regarding certain things. Listen attentively maybe you will accept a part or all of my advice.'* The Holy Prophet said: *'O Abu Walid! Speak so that I may listen.'*

He said: 'O my cousin! If you desire wealth and property as a result of these activities, we will give you so much wealth that you would become wealthier than all of us. If you want power and eminence, we will make you the chief and the headman over us. If you are after kingdom we will make you the Sultan over us. If you cannot rid yourself of this state that you are in, we will arrange a doctor for you so that you recover from this because sometimes a person enters such a state and is in need of treatment for it.'

'Utbah completed his words; the Holy Prophet was listening to all of it carefully. After 'Utbah finished his parley the Holy Prophet asked: 'Have you said whatever you wanted to say?' He said: 'Yes'

The Holy Prophet (S) then said, 'So now listen to me.' 'Utbah said, 'Yes I am listening.' The Holy Prophet continued:

'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, and the Merciful.

حم

Ha Mim. (Surah Fussilat, 41: 1).

تَنْزِيلٌ مِّنَ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful Allah. (Surah Fussilat, 41:2).

كِتَابٌ فَصَّلْتُ آيَاتُهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ

A Book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Qur'an for a people who know. (Surah Fussilat, 41:3).

بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا فَأَعْرَضَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ

A herald of good news and a Warner, but most of them turn aside so they hear not. (Surah Fussilat, 41:4).

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا فِي أَكِنَّةٍ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَا إِلَيْهِ

And they say: Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us.' (Surah Fussilat, 41:5).

The Holy Prophet recited the subsequent verses for 'Utbah. He was listening to the verses carefully with

his hands folded on his back. Then the Prophet (S) reached a verse of mandatory prostration. The Prophet (S) performed prostration and said: *'O Abul Walid! Did you hear it? Now you know yourself better.'* 'Utbah returned and as soon as the chiefs of Quraysh saw him, they said to each other that 'Utbah had returned in a different state.

He sat close to them. They asked, *'What did you see?'* He said, *'I swear by God I have heard a speech similar to which nothing has ever reached my ears. By God, neither are these words from any type of poetry nor from magic and sorcery.'*

'O Chiefs of Quraysh! Obey me in regard to this man and leave this matter to me. I am of the belief that: Leave the work of this man to himself and stay out of his way. I swear by God the words that I heard from this man entail important events in the future. If the Arabs try to harm his movement he will be eliminated without you being required to take any steps; however, if he triumphs over the Arabs then his kingdom and honor is your kingdom and honor and through him you will become the most honorable of all the people.' They said, *'By God, he has enchanted you as well.'* 'Utbah said: *'I have given you my opinion. You are free to decide for yourselves.'*¹

The Response

After becoming disappointed by a number of such exchanges and attempts at allurement and intimidation, these people did not see any other way except to openly express their enmity with Muslims. Consequently, all the tribes of Arabs tried to capture a person or a few of those who had become Muslims from their tribes and jail and torture them. They beat them and used hunger and thirst to make them miserable and at the time of day when the burning sun of Mecca would make the rocks and the sand burning hot, they would torment them on these rocks and sand.

With the increase in the number of Muslims, such enmity and individual and collective torture was increasing. The Prophet was compelled to send a group of Muslims to Habasha (located near today's Ethiopia) so that they could perhaps remain safe from the torture of Quraysh. At the time of dispatching this group he said: Habasha has a just King; you will not be oppressed there.²

Quraysh did not remain silent regarding this and they sent two of their representatives to Habasha in order to force the Muslims to return so that they could attempt to turn these people away from Islam. When these two representatives reached the King of Habasha they asked for the Muslims to be handed over to them.

Najashi (the King of Habasha) said, 'We must know why these people have come to our land?' He summoned a few persons from the Muslims. They narrated for him the account of the Prophet and his religion that had guaranteed them salvation. Najashi said, 'I will not send these people back to their homeland and I leave the decision (to stay or go) to them.'³

The Prophet began preaching the religion of Islam to different tribes in Mecca. Especially during the season of Hajj, he would impart his teachings to the Arab tribes, preach monotheism to them and warn them about polytheism. Amongst the tribes that the Prophet Muhammad (S) himself introduced the religion to and invited to Islam were Bani Kalb, Bani Hanifah, Bani ‘Aamir, Bani Khizraj.

Invitation To Jihad

Without any doubt according to the historical accounts of the Prophet’s life it is clear that until the pact of allegiance of ‘Aqabah the Muslims did not show any resistance. (This was around two or three years before the migration to Madina.)

With the passage of time the increasing power of Islam made Quraysh concerned and they increased their persecution and desired a full-fledged war. This situation has been presented in history in these words: Before the pact of allegiance of ‘Aqabah the Prophet did not give permission to fight. Only endurance, patience and prayer were allowed to the people by him whereas the Quraysh showed no softness in destroying and vanquishing the Muslims and they succeeded in turning back a few Muslims from their religion. They expelled some groups from their homes and tortured others. The first verse about war and measures for it was revealed at the following occasion.

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظُلِمُوا ۗ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ

‘Those who are fought against are permitted [to fight] because they have been wronged, and Allah is indeed able to help them. (Surah Al Hajj, 22:39).

الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ

Those who were expelled from their homes unjustly... (Surah Al Hajj, 22:40).

After the above verse the following verse was revealed:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ

And fight with them until there is no persecution... (Surah al-Baqara, 2: 193 and Surah al-Anfaal, 8:39)⁴

Keeping these things in mind it becomes clear that the leader of Islam did not take recourse to sword for propagation of its ideals. On the contrary, the polytheists and the power-seeking people laid the foundations of enmity and war and in this situation the Prophet of Islam was forced to defend himself and his followers. The first time the Prophet of Islam showed resistance was not in offence but rather the

resistance was defensive in nature.

If we carefully examine the accounts of the wars that took place in that period we will see that all of them were defensive in nature. Even at the time when the Jews and the Christians broke their oath, the Prophet attacked them pre-emptively only because there was a fear that they would rise against Islam. For a broad study of other wars we take recourse to significant verses related to jihad. We mention here in brief some verses relevant to jihad at the time of the Prophet as an illustration.

1.

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا ۖ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ

‘Those who are fought against are permitted [to fight] because they have been wronged, and Allah is indeed able to help them. (Surah Al Hajj, 22:39).

الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ

Those who were expelled from their homes unjustly... (Surah Al Hajj, 22:40).

2.

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّىٰ لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ

And fight with them until there is no persecution... (Surah al-Baqara, 2: 193 and Surah al-Anfaal, 8:39)

3.

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَن تَوَلَّوهُمْ ۖ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

Allah forbids you only in regard to those who made war against you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them—it is they who are the wrongdoers. (Surah al-Mumtahina, 60:9).

4.

كَيْفَ وَإِنْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ لَا يَرْقُبُوا فِيكُمْ إِلَّا وَلَا ذِمَّةً ۚ يُرْضُونَكُمْ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتَأْبَىٰ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ

How (can it be)! While if they prevail against you, they would not pay regard in your case to ties of relationship, nor those of covenant; they please you with their mouths while their hearts do not consent; and most of them are transgressors. (Surah at-Tawba 9:8).

اشْتَرَوْا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ سَاءَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

They have taken a small price for the way; surely evil is it that they do. (Surah at-Tawba 9:9).

لَا يَرْقُبُونَ فِي مُؤْمِنٍ إِلَّا وَلَا ذِمَّةً ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُعْتَدُونَ

They do not pay regard to ties of relationship nor those of covenant in the case of a believer; and these are they who go beyond the limits. (Surah at-Tawba 9:10).

فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ وَتُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ

But if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, they are your brethren in faith; and We make the communications clear for a people who know. (Surah at-Tawba 9:11).

وَإِنْ نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَهْدِهِمْ وَطَعَنُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ فَقَاتِلُوا أَلَمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَا أَيْمَانَ لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْتَهُونَ

And if they break their oaths after their agreement and (openly) revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief—surely their oaths are nothing—so that they may desist. (Surah at-Tawba 9:12).

أَلَا تُقَاتِلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَمُّوا بِإِخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَّوْكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۚ أَتَخْشَوْنَهُمْ ۚ فَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

What! Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first; do you fear them? But Allah is most deserving that you should fear Him, if you are believers (Surah al-Tawbah 9:13).

5.

وَأَذَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى النَّاسِ يَوْمَ الْحَجِّ الْأَكْبَرِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ۚ وَرَسُولُهُ ۚ فَإِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ

لَكُمْ ۚ وَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ ۚ وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

And an announcement from Allah and His Messenger to the people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that Allah and His Messenger are free from liability to the idolaters; therefore if you repent, it will be better for you, and if you turn back, then know that you will not weaken Allah; and announce a painful punishment to those who disbelieve. (Surah al-Tawbah 9:3)

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَنْقُصُوكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَحَدًا فَأَتِمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ

Except those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement, and then they have not failed you in anything and have not backed up any one against you, so fulfil their agreement to the end of their term; surely Allah loves those who are careful (of their duty). (Surah al-Tawbah 9:4)

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَحْصُرُوهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصَدٍ ۚ فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

So when the sacred months have passed away, then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captives and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush, then if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, leave their way free to them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:5)

6.

ۚ وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً

And fight the polytheists all together as they fight you all together. ((Surah al-Tawbah, 9:36)

7.

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits. (Surah al-Baqara, 2: 190)

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقَفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجْتُمُوهُمْ ۚ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ ۚ وَلَا تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّىٰ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ ۚ فَإِن قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ ۚ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from whence they drove you out, and persecution is severer than slaughter, and do not fight with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you in it, but if they do fight you, then slay them; such is the recompense of the unbelievers. (Surah al-Baqara, 2: 191)

فَإِنْ أَنْتَهُوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

But if they desist, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (Surah al-Baqara, 2: 192)

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةً وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ ۗ فَإِنْ أَنْتَهُوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

And fight with them until there is no persecution, and religion should be only for Allah, but if they desist, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressors. (Surah al-Baqara 2: 193)

8.

وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفَّارًا

Many of the followers of the Book wish that they could turn you back into unbelievers after your faith. (Surah al-Baqara, 2: 109)

These were some examples of verses about the issue of Jihad. Without doubt it is clear that most of these verses have a defensive tone and inform the Prophet and the Muslims about the instructions to defend. The last verse also explains the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims by which they would both obstruct the development of Islam and even try to turn back Muslims from the path of Islam.

Some of the verses that were quoted from Sura at-Tawbah clearly state that after the expiration of the oath of separation (mut'arake) with the polytheists it was allowed to fight with them.

Verses of this kind and other verses imply that Islam has offered only two courses of action to the polytheists. One is Islam and the other is war. However, a third option is open for the followers of the revealed religions which is to pay (a special) tax and live under the protection of Islamic government.

A Study Of Islamic Governance

Regarding this subject of the (spread of Islam by) sword and the topic of Jihad in Islam, a few issues should be examined.

1. Islam did not accept any other means than the two above mentioned options for polytheists and the idol- worshippers.
2. The followers of other religions having a Book and those who attributed themselves to the spiritual leaders of the past were obliged only to accept the governance of the Muslims but were completely free in regard to their religious beliefs.
3. Did Islam fight a war against anyone other than disbelievers? If yes, against which group?
4. Why did Islam impose its governance over other societies?
5. What is the manner of war in Islam?
6. What was the issue of Jaziyah (*a tax paid by non- Muslims living in Islamic lands to the state*)?
7. Was Islam spread using the sword and war?
8. Did Islamic rule spread through war?

Islam Only Accepted Two Possibilities For The Polytheists

This matter has been proven from the viewpoint of Islamic jurisprudence and authentic history. Islam has given only two choices to the polytheists: Either they must accept Islam or they must get ready for war.

If we study the depths of human conscience we will see that the issue of existence of an Intelligent Designer and his Oneness is the most profound of all phenomena which can be observed in the average human psyche (thoughts). Even those who deny existence of God admit implicitly (subconsciously) that if such a being exists it would be the most glorious of all the beings and the concept of such a being would be the most important of all concepts. On the other hand, considering the glorious station of Lordship so low as to attempt to make it equal to a piece of stone made by human hands is not only an insult to the exalted station of God but the biggest insult to the whole of humanity, for even after the knowledge that a stone or a piece of lifeless metal submissive itself to the laws of nature does not have any intelligence or sentiments, they take it as an object of worship assigning it a partner to God. If a human being is ready to lower the most sacred and exalted of his concepts and ideas—the exalted station of Lordship—to such an extent then for such a person no useful concept or idea can have any importance

For this reason Islam rose against the polytheists in war, for otherwise had these polytheists claimed that they were from among the People of the Book and, like them, admitted the exalted station of God, Muslims would have dealt with them in the same way that they dealt with the People of the Book. In other words, they could have lived equitably under Islamic governance by paying tax like others of the People of the Book who lived in Muslim territories.

The Followers Of Other Religions Were Only Obligated To Accept The Governance Of The Muslims

The matter is also well established from the view of Islamic jurisprudence and history that the Prophet never forced his beliefs on the chiefs of other religions but on the contrary would look at their beliefs with respect. He only used to object to deviations as he is quoted in the verse of the Qur'an to have said:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

***'Say: O followers of the Book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate aught with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.'* (Surah aali-'Imran, 3:64)**

The chiefs of the other recognized religions had three choices with regard to Islam:

1. Accepting Islam
2. Submitting to the Islamic rule (government) and paying tax for protection of their individual and social life (and lifestyle)
3. War

As we will explain later the wars were not fought for imposing beliefs but rather, they were fought to enforce the rule of a just Islamic government.

Did Islam Fight A War Against Anyone Other Than Disbelievers?

Yes, it fought against any rebellion inside Islamic territories and against defrauders of Zakat even in the case that they were not rebellious. (Because the rationale for these two matters is logically clear, we refrain from giving details).

Why Did Islam Impose Its Governance Over Other Societies?

This perhaps is the most important issue of our discussion.

It must be said that we have recourse to decisive arguments which certify in clear terms the strong and just principles of Islamic government. Our arguments in this regard will be based on the Islamic laws themselves and the style applied by its main leaders.

Firstly, Islam recognizes human nature and has evaluated humans according to reality (the truth). It is

clear, therefore, that the focus of government, which is the leadership of humanity to the farthest point of felicity, is one of the most sensitive and important issues in Islam.

We should not take the issue of governance lightly and comfort ourselves with flowery expressions and words. It must be said without any concealment that the value of a statesman or a form of governance—and even a school of sociology or religious thought—depends upon the manner of its assessment of humankind which is the axis of all efforts and activities. The fact that the Prophet of Islam understood the nature of humanity in its best possible form and assessed it logically can be verified in two ways: The first way being the principle that has been mentioned in the Qur'an (the fundamental law of Islam) about humans, which was explained in brief at the beginning of this discourse and which will be explained again generally here. The second way encompasses testimony of those who are well acquainted with Islam in addition to the method that the Prophet himself and his close associates used in relation to training people.

As said earlier, the principle that Qur'an has mentioned about humankind is not a single-faceted principle but explains different aspects of humanity:

1. With regard to felicity and iniquity humankind is not a static being but rather has the capacity of change and alteration.
2. These two qualities can grow infinitely in a human being. In felicity one can reach the station of divine proximity like Ibrahim, Musa son of Imran, Isa son of Marium, Muhammad son of Abdullah and Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon them all); similarly, a person can plunge infinitely into iniquity like the Pharaohs, the oppressors amongst the Children of Israel, Ibn Muljim and likes of them.
3. Neither of these two qualities can be actualized without taking into account the potentials and the limits of human free will (choice).
4. The original nature of humankind is like a valuable gem that has the capacity of bearing both this ascent and fall.
5. Humankind with regard to its material form and innate inclinations is a profit-motivated being and, if an external force of faith does not restrain him, he is a self-centered profit seeker more than which is not seen in other beings.
6. Keeping in mind the foundational structure of humankind, the true value of a human being before God, the Exalted, is related to cutting off from these incidental characteristics that pull one towards corruption. Humankind's real worth is over and above all other values and one such individual is equivalent to the whole of humanity.

If one takes into consideration any other social, philosophical or political school of thought they will see that it does not view human beings according to their real nature and does not assess humans

corresponding to reality. In the writings of different schools about humankind, the person has not been looked at from all the different perspectives mentioned here and, even if we suppose that there is a school of thought that has introduced humankind in a way similar to Islam then this school is compatible with Islam and guarantees its own existence throughout eternity. Apart from this, Islam has also examined humanity by focusing just on the non-human aspect (that is, his animal aspect). Islam has examined in detail animals under the category of beings that have a soul and life in the following manner:

The life of no living being can be taken without a valid reason even in the case that such a being may not be beneficial to humankind.

We mention some of the rights of animals in brief here:[5](#)

1. A person who has a certain animal under his protection must provide for all the basic necessities of its life. If he cannot or does not want to take this responsibility and if the meat of the animal is edible, then he can perform the ritual slaughter of the animal and use its meat, etc. If this is not possible or the meat of the animal is not halal for food, then the owner should sell it or rent it and in one way or another provide for its living and otherwise he should release the animal so that it is able to fend for itself.

2. If a person who owns a certain animal does not act upon one of the above-mentioned ways, then the Islamic ruler (judge) can force him to act upon one of the above-mentioned strategies keeping in mind the interests of both the owner and the animal.

3. If the owner refuses to act on any of the alternatives, the authority of the animal then lies with the Islamic ruler (judge). A judge can sell the liquid assets of the owner so as to provide for the animal's livelihood. Rather it is even possible that the only option for providing for the living of the animal might be to sell the fixed assets of the owner and a judge can take these steps if necessary.

4. Extra milk that is left after the animal provides for its young ones can be used by the owner. However, if excess milking causes harm to the young then the owner is blameworthy.

For example, if we have access to water that is sufficient for only one of two animals under our protection—an animal whose meat is permissible to eat and an animal whose meat is not permissible, such as a dog—according to the verdict of some fuqaha (jurists), the water should be given to the animal whose meat is not permissible (a dog for example) because, on the one hand, use of the meat of animals like cow is permissible, and on the other, allowing the death of any animal, including dogs, from thirst is not permissible.

Islamic jurists that explain the basis of this right say that animals are living beings and we must not be indifferent to them.

The just nature of laws in an Islamic government can be discovered from the worth that it maintains for

all living beings, especially humankind, even without further investigation. The fact that no school of thought has recognized humanity like Islam can be verified from a large number of non-Muslim historians. Will Durant⁶ the American historian and the author of *The Story of Civilization* says the following in this regard:

“They gave him [the Prophet] affection and care, but no one seems to have bothered to teach him how to read or write; this feeble accomplishment was held in low repute by the Arabs of the time; only seventeen men of the Quraish tribe condescended to it. Mohammed was never known to write anything himself; he used an amanuensis. His apparent illiteracy did not prevent him from composing the most famous and eloquent book in the Arabic tongue, and from acquiring such understanding of the management of men as seldom comes to highly educated persons.”⁷

In the last sentence Durant clearly states that Prophet’s recognition of humanity was without any parallels. We also quote another sentence from the same author. In this same book he says:

“If we judge greatness by influence, he was one of the giants of history. He undertook to raise the spiritual and moral-level of a people harassed into barbarism by heat and foodless wastes, and he succeeded more completely realized his dream.”⁸

The same author at another place in the same book says, *“...he built a religion simple and clear and strong...”⁹*

He again says that the Islamic government *“promoted for three to six centuries the prosperity of areas never so prosperous again, and stimulated and supported such a flourishing of education, literature, science, philosophy, and art as made western Asia, for five centuries, the most civilized region in the world.”¹⁰*

Also, *“It can be said that the Islamic civilization had reached the peak of its development.”¹¹*

In addition, *“Spain in its entire history has not seen a more sympathetic and just period of rule than the Islamic rule.”¹²*

In short, in view its just rules and regulations the Islamic government was able to dominate over all societies.

In an Islamic government privileges like status, race, etc. have no worth when it comes to statesmanship and it is possible that a person of lower social status having the necessary qualifications can take administration of a society in his hands because Islam has considered purity of soul and piety to be the only factors for judging a person’s character.

The mode of Islamic government whose form and effects can be seen in different societies can be better comprehended from a historic event that has been accepted by both Muslim and non-Muslim historians. It is as follows:

During the Caliphate of Umar ibn Khattab, Rome prepared a big army for war with the Muslims. The Muslims were informed of this at a time when the Muslim army had just conquered the city of Hamas, one of the cities in Syria, and they were collecting Jaziyah (Capitation Tax) from them. After hearing that Rome had prepared an army to attack the city of Hamas, the Muslims returned all the tax money they had collected from the people of Hamas and said to them, 'We are unable to help you and defend you against the attack of the Romans and you will have to manage these affairs yourself.' The people of Hamas replied: Your rule and justice is dearer to us than our condition in the past and certainly we were oppressed and helpless in the past. The Jews were foremost of them who said: We swear by Torah that we will fight against the Romans shoulder to shoulder with your commanders and we will not allow Roman commanders to enter Hamas but that we lose all our strength and we are overpowered. They closed the gates of the city and took charge of guarding the gates and also the Jews and Christians of other cities who had signed a peace treaty with the Muslims and were living under Muslim rule took similar steps. They said that if the Romans were to defeat the Muslims then they would be forced to return to their previous condition and if the Romans were not victorious then until the last Muslim alive they would fight along with them. When Allah made the disbelievers (the Romans) taste defeat and made the Muslims victorious, the people opened their cities to the Muslims and welcomed them, dancing in joy and playing music and even paid the Jaziyah (Capitation tax) to them yet again. [13](#)

This same event has been quoted by *Jurji Zaydan* [14](#) in his book the History of Islamic Civilization. [15](#)

It is from here—in that ancient society which lacked knowledge and understanding about human and natural principles and creation of true unity was impossible—that Islam with its mode of governance and the freedom it granted to all people within the limits of reason progressed with an impressive pace, as is acknowledged by Muslim and non-Muslim historians alike.

At this point we need to ask for an opinion from a renowned sociologist whose expertise in this field is testified by both Westerners and Easterners. Doctor Gustave Le Bon [16](#) was a sociologist whose works are recognized to this day to be amongst the most insightful of writings in sociology.

This scholar while expressing his opinion about the Islamic government and the pace of its progress says the following: The conduct of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in running the affairs of the state was more than mere knowledge of warfare and military techniques which they had learned in a short period of time. They from the beginning would involve themselves with the local people who for years had been subjected to the pressure and oppression of tyrant rulers who had inflicted on them all sorts of oppressions and tyrannies.

These oppressed masses submitted to the rule of the new rulers with complete liking because compared to the past they had complete peace and freedom. It was known in clear terms what should be done with these oppressed people. Especially the Caliphs because of their wise policies would never make an effort to spread their religion by force. Rather instead of using their influence to spread their religion (as it is claimed today) they used to declare explicitly that the customs, traditions and the religion of the

defeated nations will be respected and in exchange for this freedom they would have to pay a small amount of tax called Jaziyah to them and this amount was far less compared to what was taken from these people by the rulers of the past.

Before the Muslim army would set out for a place, it would present the conditions of peace through a special representative and these conditions, as quoted here by Abul Mahasin, were fundamentally the same as those presented by 'Amr bin 'As to the people of Gaza in 17 A.H., after they were surrounded by the Muslim army. A similar treaty was also signed with Iran and Rome. The text of the peace treaty was as follows:

“Our leader has ordered us that if you fail to accept the rulellaws of Islam we must fight you. So incline towards us and become our brothers and share with us in all the benefits and know that after this no harm or injury will reach you from us; however, if you do not accept these conditions, then every year as long as you are alive you must pay us an amount as tax (Jaziyah) and, in return, we pledge to fight anyone who wants to harm you or harbors enmity with you. We shall never breach this agreement that we are signing with you and, if you reject this as well, nothing other than swords can pass judgment between us and we will fight you until the command of God is executed.”

The agreement that 'Amr bin 'As signed with the people of Egypt was very similar to the above agreement. He made an agreement with them that they would be free with respect to their religion and religious practices and that the law of justice would apply equally to all. Land and property, especially, would be managed according to principles of ownership. In the place of the exorbitant amounts that had been taken forcibly by the rulers of Constantine, it was agreed that a yearly amount that equalled fifteen Franks would be taken as tax (Jaziyah) from each individual. The people of the region and around appreciated this agreement so much that they promptly accepted it and while collecting a sum of money to be offered for peace they agreed to surrender.

The Islamic government was so firm on its oath and its behavior was so good with the people, who had not been reprieved for even a moment from the impositions and oppression of the previous rulers, that the people willingly and with enthusiasm accepted Islam as their religion and Arabic as a language and I repeat again that results like this can never be achieved through force and the sword and the conquerors who went to Egypt before the Arabs never managed to achieve this kind of success.

There is a distinction in the Arab conquests that is not to be found in other conquests. Considering that other nations, like the Barbarians (who had conquered Rome), the Turks and others, had also risen for world-conquest and also achieved outstanding victories, they failed to create a civilization but rather their main concern was to benefit from the wealth and possessions of the defeated nations. This was in contrast to the Muslim conquerors that in a short period of time laid the foundations of a new civilization and prepared a large section of the people of the defeated nations to accept all the components of this new civilization including its religion and language. [17](#)

This same social thinker explains the cause of the progress of Islamic rule as follows:

When we carefully take into account the conquests of the Muslims and consider the causes behind these successes we will see that they did not use their swords to spread Islam as they always left the individuals of the defeated nations free to choose their own religion.

If the Christian nations accepted the religion of the Arab conquerors and even adopted their language the real cause was that they saw the new rulers more just and fair as compared to the rulers under whose oppression they were living. In addition to this they found the religion of these new rulers simpler and closer to reality than their own religion.

History proves the fact that spread of any religion is impossible through force. When the Christians removed the Muslims from Spain, this nation was ready to accept death but did not accept to change its religion.

Without doubt not only was Islam not spread by the force of the sword but rather progressed through encouragement, power of propagation and speech. It was for the same reason that the Turks and the Mongols, even though they had defeated the Muslims, accepted the religion of Islam and in the Indian subcontinent, which was just a transit passage for Arabs, Islam progressed to an extent that today more than 200 million Muslims live there and this number is always in a state of increase. Today thousands of Christian missionary organizations with up-to-date facilities are busy propagating Christianity; in spite of this, the Muslim population is experiencing a faster growth rate.

Islam's progress in China is also worthy of attention and study of other sections of this book will make it clear how much Islam has progressed there. More than twenty million Muslims are present in China despite the fact that Arabs never attacked it nor occupied even a meter of their land. [18](#)

While listing the causes of successes of Islamic rule Jurji Zaydan wrote:

“Justice of the Muslims and their tolerance and piety had a great impact on those who came under Islamic rule from the Roman and Iranian empires. The Muslims were commanded to adhere to these principles when they were undertaking conquests. Abu Bakr ordered Osama as follows when he was departing towards Syria:

“Do not betray, do not cheat, do not bind people with chains, do not mutilate their bodies, do not kill children or old people, do not root out and burn palms, do not cut useful trees and do not kill goats, cows and camels except for the sake of God. You will pass by a group who has drawn itself aside and has crept in the monasteries. Leave them be.” [19](#)

Also, the event of a chicken that built a nest on the tent of ‘Amr bin ‘As indicates the compassion and kindness shown by the Muslim army. This event is as follows: The Muslim army under the commandership of ‘Amr bin ‘As had camped and pitched tents in Egypt at a place called Yamam. When

they wanted to depart, they gathered all the tents, but when they reached the tent of ‘Amr bin ‘As they saw that a chicken had built a nest to lay eggs on the tent out of grass and sticks. ‘Amr bin ‘As was informed about this. He said: Do not gather the tent until the young ones come out of the eggs and are able to fly.

Another cause of the success of Islam is that it considers all people equal to each other and shows no preferential treatment due to race, social level or wealth. The clearest proof of this is the story of Jabalah ibn al–Ayham the King of Ghassan who became a Muslim during the Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab. Ibn al–Ayham came to Medina with his army and ‘Umar welcomed his conversion to Islam. The people of Medina came out to the streets to watch the royal pomp of Jabalah and his horses whose necks were covered with golden chains. Upon his own head was a crown studded with jewels and diamonds. However, this did not prevent ‘Umar from punishing him when he wronged another person. The story goes as follows:

When a commoner from the tribe of Fazarah stepped on Jabalah’s garb during circumambulation of the Ka’ba causing it to fall off, Jabalah—due to arrogance and ostentation—slapped the man and injured his nose. This man from the tribe of Fazarah complained to ‘Umar. ‘Umar sent for Jabalah and asked him, “What is this that you have done?” He said, “*O Amir al-Mu’minin! He intended to unfasten my garments and had it not been for the sanctity of Mecca, I would have certainly split open his forehead with my sword.*”

‘Umar said, “*You have confessed to your offense. So you must compensate that man or you will receive retaliation (qisas) for your offense. I will issue an order that he can injure your nose in the same way that you injured his.*” He said, “*How can you issue such an order?! That man is an ordinary man and I am a King.*” ‘Umar said, “*Islam considers you and him to be equal and you do not enjoy any preference over him except through piety and virtue.*” Jabalah did not have any option against the command of ‘Umar other than carrying it out or escaping from Islam. So he fled to Constantine and did not return to the Arab lands.

One of the other reasons for the success of Islam was the issue of freedom—the freedom that the Islamic government granted to newly conquered societies. When Arabs would conquer a certain land, they would leave the people free in regard to beliefs, religion, financial dealings, civil and judicial law and they would not in any way impose their religious laws and beliefs on them. This was their mode of action with Egypt and other countries.[20](#)

Evidence to prove the just nature of Islamic government is ample; however, this short treatise about jihad in Islam cannot encompass all the details.

The Approach To War In Islam

Based on the decisive interpretation and view that Islam has about human beings and about life in

general the subject of war takes an interesting form. In order that this subject becomes clear we must always keep in mind the view that Islam holds about a human being or rather life in general. We know that Islam considers killing of a human being without a justifiable reason equivalent to the killing of the whole human race²¹. In addition to this, there are some other points that we mention here:

1. Without doubt Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a)—irrespective of all the spiritual and human distinctions that made him the most worthy of all people after the Prophet of Islam—was a soldier and a fighter of the highest caliber. All historians that have written about this issue say that it was never seen that he fled from the battlefield, from an enemy soldier or an entire army on account of fear. In all the military victories except in the battle of Tabuk he was the stander-bearer of the Muslim army.

This warrior of foremost rank says, *“I swear by Allah, even if I am given all the domains of the seven (stars) with all that exists under the skies in order that I may disobey Allah to the extent of snatching one grain of barley from an ant, I would not do it.”*²²

So we see that Islam has trained Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) in such a manner that he juxtaposes disobeying God in a very insignificant matter of stealing a husk of a grain from the mouth of a weak ant with the utmost benefit that can be imagined for a human being (that of owning the whole world) and considers this seemingly insignificant disobedience more destructive and terrifying than infinite benefit. These are the fighters of Islam; these are the people fighting against criminal natured people. They fight while knowing that it is incorrect to snatch even a husk of a grain from mouth of a living being like ant.

2. Compassionate conduct of Imam Ali (‘a) with his killer *ibn Muljim al-Muradi* clearly shows that swords were not used by Muslims to show their strength but rather for character building and self-purification. He said to his sons, *“If you forgive ibn Muljim it is closer to piety.”*²³

3. The general order of the Prophet of Islam in all expeditions was the following:

*“March in the name of God, with the help of God, in the path of God and for the nation of the Prophet of God (S). Do not commit treachery in war, do not bind people with chains, do not mutilate their bodies, do not cut trees except when needed, do not kill quadrupeds whose meat is usable except when there is no other option.”*²⁴

These are the explicit orders of Islam during war. If you carefully see it says: In the name of God, with the help of God and in the path of God. It does not say: In the name of swords and for the sake of victory. It does not say: In the name of Arabs, with the help of Arabs, in the path of victory for Arabs. It does not say: In the name of our race, with the help of our race, in the path of victory for our race.

It states that treachery, binding people with chains and mutilating their bodies is prohibited. These are the undeniable human principles and rights in war in the eyes of all the people. In addition, not only was it ordered that humane fighters must not take the sword lightly regarding the lives of the people in war but it was ordered not to harm animals as well, and above all this it was even ordered not to cut down

trees except in emergency and when needed.

Yet another of the jurisprudential rulings about jihad is that it is forbidden to poison enemy positions and facilities [such as with chemical weapons].

4. If the disbelieving enemy were to use women, children, insane people or the elderly during a war as a shield – for example, they place this group of people in front of their ranks to shield themselves from the Muslim army – in this situation fighting becomes prohibited until the this situation changes except in the case of head to head combat where if Muslims were to observe this rule in respect to this group of people they would suffer a defeat.²⁵ In such a situation, with complete care, they are to continue fighting ensuring that the least possible number of such people is killed.

If in this situation a soldier of the Muslim army kills a person from this group while it was prohibited for him to kill or attack such people, he must compensate for the murder and also pay atonement (kaffarah) if the killing was deliberate; however, if the killing was not deliberate the blood money of the killed person will be taken from the relatives (Aaqeleh) of the soldier and will be paid to the heirs of the killed.²⁶

5. It is disapproved (makruh) to start battle before the noontime.

6. A necessary condition before starting the battle is to explain the Islamic principles and beliefs. Masma' ibn Abdul Malik narrated from Imam Sadiq ('a) that Imam Ali said: The prophet sent me to Yemen and gave me instructions that without explaining the Islamic principles and beliefs I should not fight anyone and said, *'O Ali, if Allah guides one person through you it is better for you than becoming the owner of all upon which the sun rises and sets.'*²⁷

Also it is necessary to explain to the disbelievers that our aim is not money and worldly power. If a Muslim soldier kills a disbeliever before invitation to Islam, he would be considered guilty of a crime and some jurists (fuqaha) have said that he will be accountable for the blood that was shed. When we keep in mind the above conditions, it is easy to accept this fact that at the time of his last breaths the Prophet of Islam (S) was ruling over a region larger than the whole of today's Europe (excluding Russia) and more than a million people were living in these lands and these lands were conquered with loss of only 150 people from the side of the enemy (from amongst these were the Jews of the tribe of Banu Qarizah who were killed because of their own contravention) and the number of casualties amongst the Muslims in this ten year period, if counted monthly, was one casualty per month. These 120 people along with the 150 casualties of the enemy equal only 270 casualties and a region larger than the whole of Europe became inclined to Islam and accepted Islamic rule.²⁸

7. Muslims are not allowed to breach a pact made during war. In addition, in the case that two groups of disbelievers who were at war with each other and later a peace treaty was concluded between them and one of these two groups were to decide to conclude an agreement with the Muslims against its enemy, such a pact would be forbidden for Muslims. A tradition has been quoted in the book Jawahir page 625 in the section of Jihad as follows:

Talha ibn Zayd narrates from Imam Sadiq (‘a): Two groups of disbelievers each having independent rule fought with each other and thereafter concluded a peace treaty. After this one of the two kings, acting deceitfully against his enemy, wants to enter a pact with the Muslims to fight against the other king. Is it allowed to conclude such an agreement? The Imam said, “*Muslims are not allowed to commit deceit, order others to be deceitful or assist those who act deceitfully. Muslims can fight against polytheists, but Muslims cannot aid a party of disbelievers that has signed a peace treaty with another and fight against the other party.*”²⁹

1. Sirah ibn Hisham, vol. 1, page 293–294.
2. Sirah ibn Hisham, vol. 1, page 321
3. Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa Al-Nihayah, vol. 3, page 94.
4. Narrated from Sirah ibn Hisham, vol. 1, page 467.
5. The writer has not mentioned the sources of these jurisprudential rulings.
6. William James Durant (1885 AD – 1981 AD) was a prolific American writer, historian, and philosopher. He is best known for his book The Story of Civilization published in 11 volumes.
7. The Story of Civilization, Will Durant, Arabic translation, vol. 13, page 22; (see Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 4: The Age of Faith, section II Mohammed in Mecca).
8. The Story of Civilization, Will Durant, Arabic translation, vol. 13, page 47; (see Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 4: The Age of Faith, sec IV Mohammed Victorious).
9. The Story of Civilization, Will Durant, Arabic translation, vol. 13, page 116; (see Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 4: The Age of Faith, sec IV Mohammed Victorious).
10. The Story of Civilization, Will Durant, Arabic translation, vol. 13, page 151; (see Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 4: The Age of Faith, Chapter XI: The Islamic Scene: 628– 1058, IV: The Government).
11. The Story of Civilization, Will Durant, Arabic translation, vol. 13, page 165.
12. The writer has quoted this from Will Durant. But this line belongs to the Christian Orientalist Stanley Lane-Poole and Will Durant has quoted this sentence from him in his book The Story of Civilization, Arabic translation, vol. 13, page 292. Stanley Lane-Poole is the author of the book named The Moors in Spain about the Muslim rule in Spain.
13. Futuhul Baldan, Abul Hussain Baladhari, page 187.
14. Jurji Zaydan (1861 (زيدان جرجي) AD – 1914 AD) was an Arab Lebanese Christian writer and historian.
15. Tarikh at-Tamaddun al-Islami (History of Islamic civilization), Jurji Zaydan, vol. 1, page 57, 58
16. Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931) was a French sociologist.
17. The Civilization of Arabs, Gustave Le Bon, Arabic translation, page 169–172.
18. The Civilization of Arabs, Gustave Le Bon, Arabic translation, page 162–163.
19. Tarikh at-Tamaddun al-Islami (History of Islamic Civilization), Jurji Zaydan, vol. 1, page 55–56.
20. Tarikh at-Tamaddun al-Islami (History of Islamic Civilization), Jurji Zaydan, vol. 1, page 56.
21. Refers to the Verse:

مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

Whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men (Surah al-Ma`ida, 5:32)

22. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 224, vol. 1, page 210.
23. Shi'a fil Qur'an, Muhammad Jawad Mughni, page 39.
24. Jawahirul Kalam, Sheikh Jawahiri, vol. 21, page 67.
25. Jawahirul Kalam, Sheikh Jawahiri, vol. 21, page 72.
26. Jawahirul Kalam, Sheikh Jawahiri, vol. 21, page 72.
27. Jawahirul Kalam, Sheikh Jawahiri, vol. 21, page 81.

[28.](#) Rasul e Akram dar Maidan e Jang, page 21.

[29.](#) Jawahir al-Kalam, Sheikh Jawahiri, vol. 21, page 79.

Chapter 3: Ali And Nahj Al-Balaghah

The day Nahj Al-Balaghah is studied without prejudice with a vigilant mind we will become free of want from all social, moral, economic and philosophic schools of thought.

Nahj Al-Balaghah, The Book Of Truth And Reality

We do not want to introduce Nahj Al-Balaghah with just these words because the champions of knowledge, philosophy and true wisdom even today are benefitting from this book and it is unknown how much more it will be understood tomorrow. Nahj Al-Balaghah is not just a book of the past or the present but it is a book of tomorrow as well. The reason being that the reality of humankind and the true nature of this world has been explained in a unique and eternal way in this book and the principles mentioned relating to human beings and the world are not limited to a certain place or time so as to become limited by the boundaries of a certain period or a certain century. Each period trains its own intellectuals and geniuses who benefit from the Nahj Al-Balaghah to the extent of their understanding and information.

What book explains the meaning of life like Nahj Al-Balaghah which spells out the ailments and remedies of life and sheds light on its reality the way it is ought to be?

Is it possible to find the truth of life and death with all its mystery in any book other than Nahj Al-Balaghah?

Can the economics, which Imam Ali has laid the foundations for in Nahj Al-Balaghah, be derived from other various schools of thought which, despite their large number, are deficient, being a construct of the limited human intellect?

Every school of economics, even though has its own merits, is not free of defects and inadequacies. While one school sacrifices human beings for the sake of economics the other considers economics futile and meaningless for humanity. A third school of thought leaves the individual with absolute freedom emptying the society of all human values while a fourth one considers society to be of primary importance and completely neglects the individual.

However, due to its adherence to the balanced religion of Islam, the Nahj Al-Balaghah does not disregard the rights of any class. It takes both the individual and the society into consideration; that is, it gives freedom to the individual to an extent that it does not harm the society and otherwise it gives

priority to the society over the individual. In other words, it gives preference to the interests of the society over individual interests. The Nahj Al-Balaghah explains the principles and basis of economics formulated by Islam with such clarity that every rightful party receives his right and joins the society in a manner that all the individuals in the society become parts of one single body. If one part is harmed the other parts also feel the pain. At the same time, it keeps in mind that what one part can do and the aim it achieves differs from what other parts can do and the role they play. It also states that, despite all this, regarding human worth and value there is only one criterion, namely piety. Only one who is God-fearing and dutiful is more precious and respectable in an Islamic society.

Similarly the principles of governance that are mentioned in Nahj Al-Balaghah are superior to all the laws known to us. They contain solutions to all social problems. In addition to many fine points that others have failed to mention, every enduring and just law that has emanated from human intellect, be it specific to one place or pertaining to the whole world concerning the relation between the government and the people, can be found in the letter that Imam Ali ('a) wrote to Malik ibn Ashtar which is documented in Nahj Al-Balaghah. [1](#)

What adds to the amazement is the ability of Nahj Al-Balaghah to explain different ideas in an attractive manner as if they are one single cohesive idea. When it explains a certain metaphysical issue, no conflict or contradiction between the understanding of the heart and the intellect can be perceived in the issue. This is despite the fact that in philosophical texts when the author desires to analyze a certain idea he is incapable of using an approach that appeals both to the heart and the intellect at the same time and issues related to the spiritual illumination (the heart) and intellectual understanding (the intellect) are always separated from one other because the source of these two differs from each other in the human soul.

The most outstanding feature of this book is that while explaining every sublime reality about human beings and the world which is of importance to humanity, it employs a method that elucidates in such a way that a better explanation for that subject cannot be imagined. For example, regarding asceticism and piety it is as if the orator had not been occupied with any activity other than these since his birth and as if he had never lived in this world full of corruption. On the other hand, when it introduces the human society it appears as if his only occupation was study of people and the society. One by one it explains the different essential elements of a society and points out its ailments and cures as if he himself were the society. And similarly regarding the preparations, the consequences and the techniques of war it makes us think that this man was born in the battlefield and left this world amidst the turmoil of war.

When the Nahj Al-Balaghah explains the unfaithful nature of this world and its contradictory experiences, we are forced to think that Hadhrat Ali ('a) constantly lived in the company of the people since the beginning of time and had watched over every detail of every small and large event of the people's lives from beginning to end. At another place where he explains the principles of governance to Malik ibn Ashtar, it appears as if he was the leader in charge of the management of the affairs of society

since its formation. Even today in this age, which is known as the age of civilization, it would be possible to correct the society if we were to seek help from the directives of governance present in Nahj Al-Balagha.

From yet another aspect, if we look at the similes and metaphors used to explain subtle meanings, it seems as if the entire life of this person was spent in the field of literature, and at the places where in his sermons he speaks about the lofty themes of Monotheism all the things said by philosophers on monotheism appear like a few simple words.

In summary, when explaining the personality of Imam Ali (‘a) we encounter the loftiest human qualities which seemingly cannot be unified in one person at the same time. The Nahj Al-Balaghah is the book of Ali (‘a) that, like its author, is a complete book in terms of the individual and social aspects covered in it.

Some Objections To Nahj Al-Balaghah

Another important point regarding Nahj Al-Balaghah which should be considered is that some people who are either uninformed or biased and spiteful have imagined that Nahj Al-Balaghah is a fabrication of its compiler, Syed Sharif Radhi, and that only a small part of the book is the actual words of Ali (‘a). The first of those who raised this baseless objection was Ibn Khalkan² and later on some others followed his lead.

Firstly, the knowledge, wisdom and literary capabilities of Syed Radhi are accessible to us. We can know him best through his poetical works. Even though he can be considered amongst the best of the poets and literary men, he was not a man of comprehensive wisdom in social sciences, economics and ethics, etc. In other words, even the simplest of the sermons of Ali (‘a) concerning wisdom, society or other issues is not in consonance with Syed Radhi’s intellectual level.

Secondly, the sermons and the letters of Imam Ali (‘a) that are present in the Nahj Al-Balaghah which is in our hands today were recorded in other books even before the birth of Syed Radhi. This baseless objection is a product of ignorance and prejudiced malevolence and this book is not a fabrication of Syed Radhi.

Thirdly, from the time of Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) until the time of Syed Radhi, or rather even until our own time, who can explain various realities with such eloquence and consistency of style? Sermons and letters of the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods are within our reach. Hundreds of books have been written on these topics up until today. They are available to us for reading. Can the style of Nahj Al-Balaghah be found in any of them?

Some have attributed the well-known sermon entitled ‘This world is a passage while the next world is the place of permanent abode’³ to Mu’awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. This attribution is utterly astonishing and in the words of Jahiz, ‘*When did Mu’awiyah find time out from his immersion into worldly desires and love*

*of power and sensuality that he could utter these words?!'*⁴ If you refer to the above mentioned book (from whose words Syed Radhi also has quoted) you will see this matter mentioned there and will be convinced that Mu'awiyah was far too base to utter such eloquent other-worldly words.

Fourthly, fabrication and false attribution of a text to someone is far from the religious personality of Syed Radhi and is distant from a person of his stature.

However, some people—for the sake of proving their false imitated beliefs—have not only not restrained themselves from calling a just person a transgressor but are even ready to call great Muslims like Abu Talib and Abu Dharr disbelievers!!—in order remove these glorious personalities of Islam from around Ali ('a); therefore, it does not really matter for such people that they accuse Syed Radhi of being a liar.

Lastly, if Nahj Al-Balaghah is a fabrication of Syed Radhi then how can we explain the following expressions that are present in Nahj Al-Balaghah? For example, after mentioning a certain sermon Syed Radhi says, *'We have quoted this sermon before but because of the difference in the narrations we mention it again.'* He also says, *'This sentence has occurred in a preceding sermon differently; therefore, we state it here again due to the difference in the narrations.'*

The Motives Behind These Objections

Two main reasons have been mentioned to explain why some people have denied that Nahj Al-Balaghah is a collection of words of Ali ('a):

1. The first thing that is shown by the supporters of Ali ('a) as evidence to prove his superiority is Nahj Al-Balaghah. They say, 'If others also had reached the status of Ali ('a) we would have at least one-third or one-fourth of something similar to Nahj Al-Balaghah attributed to them.' Or in other words, Ali has Nahj Al-Balaghah, what do others have?!
2. At numerous places in Nahj Al-Balaghah Ali ('a) has clearly expressed his displeasure with his predecessors and this matter indicates the people's failure to heed and abide by the words and recommendations of the Prophet (S) about Ali ('a).

Certainly, remedying one's ideas and beliefs and conducting an impartial inquiry into them based on indisputable historical accounts is better than making efforts to create doubt about historical facts.

The best evidence that is available to us for proving that Nahj Al-Balaghah consists of the words of Ali is that that no one has ever heard or, rather, it is impossible that someone can make a such a claim that none of the sermons and letters present in Nahj Al-Balaghah have originated from Ali ('a). All the narrators and historians both Shi'a and Sunni have consensus that at the very least a portion of Nahj Al-Balaghah without any doubt originates from Imam Ali ('a). If someone accepts this proposition (I do not think that anyone would deny this fact unless such a person is completely unaware of Islamic principles and narrations) then he will be forced to accept that all of its contents are from Imam Ali ('a). Because

even a person who is to some extent familiar with Arabic literature would testify to the fact that the entire subject-matter of Nahj Al-Balaghah has a particular distinctive manner and style and hence this book must have originated from one person. Truly if this great book was in need of affirmation of these prejudiced and spiteful people, it would have preferred to stay in seclusion and would have chosen to remain unknown!

[1.](#) Nahj Al-Balagha, Letter No. 53, vol. 2.

[2.](#) Ibn Khalkan – Ahmed Al-Barmaki (1282–1211 AH) He was born in Urbil. He studied in Halab, Syria and Qaherah. He served as supreme judge. He is writer of the book ‘Wafayaat ul ‘Aayaan wa Anbaa uz Zamaan’.

[3.](#) Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 203; vol. 2, page 138.

[4.](#) Jahiz, Bayan wa al-Tabyin, vol. 2, page 271,272

Chapter 4: Ali And Positive Gnosticism (Irfan)

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي

Say: If you love Allah, then follow me. (Surah aali-Imran, 3:31).

This is the true Irfan (Gnosticism) that Imam Ali has taught us:

“O my Allah! Thou are the most attached to Thy lovers and the most ready to assist those who trust in Thee. Thou seest them in their concealments, knowest whatever is in their consciences, and art aware of the extent of their intelligence. Consequently, their secrets are open to Thee and their hearts are eager for Thee. If loneliness bores them, Thy remembrance gives them solace. If distresses befall them, they beseech Thy protection, because they know that the reins of affairs are in Thy hands, and that their movements depend upon Thy commands.”¹

Any person who has impartially studied the principles and the laws of Islam from the Qur’an or the authentic traditions will acknowledge the fact that Islam has shown human beings all the paths towards gnosis and perfection or rather has set gnosis as the true goal of his existence. If it is claimed that Islam has even a slight inadequacy in showing the path of perfection to humanity then such a person either lacks sufficient knowledge of Islam or spiteful of it. The claim that Islam does not have any imperfection in its reality has been clearly announced to the world by the leaders of Islam not only in this century but since the rise of Islam until today. Is there any eternal truth that the human mind has nourished and Islam has not touched upon it?

All that is important and conforms to reality in fields of philosophy, science, ethics, sociology, economics, metaphysics (life after death) is explained by Islam in one form or another even though in general terms.

If theology is considered, Islam has presented the most sublime intellectual and spiritual ways in this regard. With regard to philosophy Islam has mentioned that amount which the human intellect has the capacity to deal with. Islam also has made available to the world the best ethical prescriptions in the form of short and eloquent expressions and aphorisms. It has opened the doors of knowledge for everyone and has considered search for the outer and inner aspects of nature a necessity of faith. Islam has explained permanent social principles with such a high degree of precision and perfection that never before Islam nor after Islam has reached the mind of anyone, and anything people to come might say will not be superior than it. It has set forth and explained the fundamental principles related to economics such that no other school of economic thought has reached the level of care taken by Islam in a manner that when these schools of thought tried to patch one aspect of the society, the garment of society was torn from other sides. It has elucidated the events of the Day of Resurrection in such a manner that humans see the hereafter personified despite being in this world.

We do not consider it necessary to fill these pages with evidence from the people of the East and the people of the West and prove that the origin of any true gnosis about humanity and the world of existence should be searched in Islam. Islam has approved all the lofty teachings that have reached us from the heavenly books and sound human intellect from before the advent of Islam and, from after the advent of Islam, it can be said that Islam was the fountainhead of every reality said in relation to theology, physical sciences and gnosis of humanity in prose or poetry. Today when people read Sa'di's poetry they are fascinated by its sublime contents whereas if you exclude the odes and stories specific to his style you would see that he has taken these sublime human and divine themes either directly from the Qur'an or Islamic narrations or from the previous poets and philosophers like Mutanabbi, Syed Radhi Sharif, Mihyar Daylami and others who themselves had benefited from the teachings of Islam. For example, one of the best couplets recited regarding spiritual-independence from an individual and social perspective are from Taghrai which can be found in his famous book *Lamiatul Ajam*.

*Certainly the only free person in this world is
A man who takes refuge with no one in the world.*

Or (as expressed in this Persian couplet):

*I am a servant of he who under this blue sky
Is free from anything that takes on the taint of attachment.*

You should know that the meaning that is expressed in these couplets has been repeated many times in the verses of Qur'an and narrations where we are asked to seek refuge only with Allah. We will present some more examples in relation to this in coming discourses, but it was a shortcoming on the part of our predecessors that when they narrated for us these sublime teachings in the form of prose or poetry, they did not point out for us that this meaning is what is understood from a certain verse of the Holy Qur'an or a certain narration. In addition, the language in use in Iran is Persian and, therefore, the knowledge of Qur'an and Hadith does not go beyond the surface meaning of the words that was heard from the pulpits

at gatherings. As a result of this, the general public started thinking that all that was said by these poets and sages was originally from themselves and therefore the poetry of these sages has been more popular amongst the people than the verses of Qur'an and the narrations whereas if these writers had mentioned the source of these lofty teachings not only would nothing decrease from their respect but rather their words would have acquired Divine approval.

This mistake on the part of our predecessors has caused two harms to the Islamic society. The first one is that it has led people away from the verses of Qur'an and the narrations and it has led them to believe that our poets and sages were directly inspired from the heavens with these lofty teachings. The second one being that due to the attractiveness of these sublime teachings other baseless and whimsical ideas have infiltrated the society.

It is from the signs of loftiness of the soul of a Gnostic who has tasted true Gnosticism that at the time of conveying a certain meaning that has appeared in Qur'an or the narrations he acknowledges that the Qur'an and the narrations are the original sources of these teachings.

In any case, that which was desired from matters mentioned previously was to show that Islam has not neglected anything that is necessary for the progress and perfection of humankind.

The service that our Islamic poets and sages have performed was to render these sublime teachings in the form of pleasing and artistic expression or in the form of poetry which would arouse the sentiments of common people.

Positive Gnosticism, which is the topic of our discussion, is a school and a path whose true leadership after the Prophet (S) lay with Ali ('a) and his purified progeny.

We have used the term Positive Gnosticism because this school or path recommends that everyone—or rather, considers recognition and knowledge of all the fundamentals and means of gnosis of God, the lofty attributes of the soul and a path in accordance with these necessary and, similarly, it considers the knowledge of other realities and events in the world of existence necessary to the extent possible for a human being.

In this path of true gnosis the positive aspect of the human soul is taken into consideration. In other words, only the realities that find their way to the heart through intellect and enlightenment are considered effectual. In Positive Gnosticism any reality that is outside this positive aspect of the human soul is considered fancy, illusion and imagination. Positive Gnosticism does not consider the Divine grandeur and the infirm natural world alike. It considers acquiring lofty attributes and perfections which have been taught to us by the leaders of Monotheism necessary for human souls. It considers the teachings of the Prophets the only way for reaching proximity of God. It considers everyone capable of reaching the peaks of human perfection and spiritual stations and it considers inclusion of any intercessor in the station of attention towards the source of Existence as polytheism even if that included being is the Holy Prophet (S).

The first and the last true embodiment of this true Gnosticism is Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) who during the day is busy farming, planting trees and irrigating gardens and in the darkness of the night after taking account of his soul and becoming attentive of only the one Lord has become unaware of himself, desiring His nearness and fearing separation from Him. The true Gnosticism that we have mentioned in our discussion till now is the only path of Gnosticism that leaders of the Higher Realms have taught us. Although there are other schools of Gnosticism, they lead us to nothing but forgetting our own selves and wasting our lives.

In this true Gnosticism of Ali (‘a) self-praise for the sake of self-praise is identical with polytheism and also it is not true that everyone has a share of this true connection with God.

At this point it appears necessary to narrate a small incident about the Commander of the Faithful Ali (‘a). Ali (‘a) gave five Wasq² of dates to a certain person from his garden. A person who was sitting next to these pleasant date palms said to Ali, “*This person did not ask you for the dates. Why are you sending them to him?*” Ali (‘a) replied “*May Allah not increase those like you among the believers. I am ready to give and you desire to be stingy. If I would have sent these dates after his asking me then I would have exchanged them for a price because after his asking me he would have been forced to lose face in exchange for these dates, while one’s face should only be tinged by earth in prostration and worship of our Lord!*”³ Now, you yourself think about the universal significance of this beneficent sentence.

This is the same true Gnosticism that gives one a true taste of duty in relation to other individuals and society. This is the same true Gnosticism which—if the children of Adam become conscious of themselves and think about rectifying relations between individuals, societies and governments in all their aspects—everyone would be compelled to make it their model and code of action.

This is the same true Gnosticism that the leaders of spirituality have driven mankind towards. This Gnosticism is from the teachings of Islam which day and night are proclaimed in a loud voice by the Holy Qur’an to the heavy ears of the sons of Adam,

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي

Say: If you love Allah, then follow me. (Surah aali-Imran, 3:31)

True Gnosticism considers all the people to be different parts of one single body. It says that every part should put in maximum effort for the comfort and well-being of the other parts. If someone can relieve another’s pain at night and can fulfill his need but leaves this duty for the morning, they have not understood this true Gnosis.

True Gnosticism gives foremost importance to order and discipline in the affairs of life and says,

وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

“And whoever is blind in this, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter” (Surah al-Israa’ 17:72).

and also says, “There is no hereafter for one who does not have an organized life in this world”. In addition, “I advise you (both) and all my children and members of my family and everyone whom my writing reaches, to fear Allah, to keep your affairs in order...”⁴

It considers intellect and reflection about creation one of the necessary principles of life.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

“Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are signs for men who understand.”(Surah al-‘Imraan 3: 190)

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain! Glory be to Thee; save us then from the chastisement of the fire.” (Surah al-‘Imraan 3: 190)

So this true Gnosticism does not constitute only some momentary efforts which are carried out for purification of the soul while the rest of the time of one’s life is spent in the slavery and entanglements of lowly desires in such a way that a person does not attach importance to the weak and does not benefit from this life which is a path and a way for reaching true proximity of Allah and considers himself excused from all upright behavior and duties.

Certainly, true Gnosticism is not of this kind. In positive Gnosticism humankind is the intended existence that constitutes the highest and most sublime goal of the whole of creation and none of the material and outwardly impurities of this world can become an obstacle in his path. The whole of creation is not worth a penny in comparison with the greatness of the human soul and despite all this it considers organizing the outwardly life of this world the best way for purifying one’s soul and actualizing its greatness.

Therefore, in reality one of the indisputable principles of this true Gnosticism is to give attention to this world of change and extinction and the necessity of making the maximum use from events and realities in the path of human perfection.

The path of love in positive Gnosticism which consists of practices for purifying the soul from worldly attachments is something the beloved God has himself invited us towards because love in positive Gnosticism is only directed straight towards the one God, and other attachments—if they are the result

of observing the commands of God—are in reality love of God Himself. If you are fond of someone you sympathize with him in difficult times and try to relieve him from the trouble that is bothering him. If he is sick, you visit him to soothe his heart and this, in reality, springs from the love of God. On the Day of Judgment Allah will ask, ‘I was sick. Why you did not come to visit Me?’ The servant will ask, ‘O Allah! How do You become sick?’ Allah will answer, ‘A servant from among my servants was sick and you did not go to visit him.’ We have so many narrations of this kind from the Prophets and the Ahlul Bait (‘a) that they cannot all be mentioned here.

We all know that Allah is not in need of a loan from anyone but He says in the Qur’an,

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا

“Who is it that will offer Allah a goodly loan.”(Surah al-Baqara 2:245).

Therefore, such bonds of affection and permissible social relations are, in fact, love of Allah Himself; hence, such bonds are among the undeniable principles of positive Gnosticism.

Do not think that the love which the true mystics acquire with regard to Allah is material or sensual; rather, it is a spiritual and pure love. To explain more about the meaning of spiritual or pure love we state a short introduction first.

Gnosis And Spiritual Love

The same destiny which befell other words has befallen this elegant word of Gnosticism (Irfan). Words of this kind throughout the history of science and philosophy have searched in every direction in order to gain their true meaning. This word has become like those sly idols which take any form they like and appear in any attire they desire and this has been one of the irremediable problems throughout history. The word Irfan (Gnosticism) is another infinitive form of the word ma’rifat which means gnosis and knowledge, so an ‘Arif (Gnostic) is a person possessing gnosis and knowledge.

In Arabic literature and etymology two differences have been mentioned between the meanings of the words ‘Arif (Gnostic) and ‘Alim (scholar). Firstly, ma’rifat is knowledge that was preceded by ignorance while it is possible that ‘ilm was not preceded by ignorance. As a result, it is incorrect to say that Allah is Arif (but he can be called ‘Alim). Secondly the word ma’rifat is used mostly in individual and particular issues while the word ‘ilm has a more general meaning and is used in both individual and particular issues and general and universal issues.

In the terminology of philosophers from Avicenna onwards, however, the word ‘Arif (Gnostic) has acquired a specific meaning which is stated with different expressions. It is outside the scope of this discussion to quote all the different meanings and expressions related to this word. The general meaning

which can be considered the comprehensive common denominator of all these expressions is as follows:

‘Arif or a Gnostic is a person who has cut his inner self off from all attachments and has approached the exalted station of lordship مقام شامخ ربوبی (by traversing specific journeys that are mentioned in the books related to spiritual wayfaring). Slowly this proximity reaches the station of ‘annihilation in Allah’ فناء في الله which in the terminology of philosophers is called the ‘station of identity هو هو بعينه and you will read further in this book that this meaning is agreed upon by all the scholars of the science of *Irfan* in their poetry and their prose.

On the other hand, all questions like the following should be discussed in detail in Negative Gnosis: Is love the first of the initial steps in this path or not? Does it originate from instability of creation? Is it just delusion or imagination?

In a certain sense *Irfan* should not have any deniers. Which sensible person would distance himself from knowledge and gnosis and which logical human being would deny it?! However, we must understand the meaning carefully so that it does not lead us to inappropriate suppositions. This Gnosis and true *Irfan* which is the only way of reaching the highest perfections possible for a human being is called Positive Gnosis. Allah himself has taught the meaning of *Irfan* to mankind in these words:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي

Say: If you love Allah, then follow me. (Surah aal Imraan 3:31)

Two types of love can be identified in human beings:

1. Carnal or material love: The origin of which is the pleasing nature of the attributes of the object of love such that these attributes are agreeable to the soul in the eyes of the lover.
2. Spiritual or true love: The origin of which is presence of perfection in the object of love such that this perfection is agreeable to the soul of a person and he is also desirous of reaching that perfection.

For example, knowledge is perfection and therefore love of knowledge and learning is spiritual love and contrary to this is the love of money, physical beauty and personalities which is carnal love. That thing which plays a central role in Positive Gnosis (*Irfan*) is spiritual love. The reason being that the object of love in Positive *Irfan* is the Absolute and the All-Perfect Allah for Whom no imperfection can be imagined or, in the words of the philosophers, ‘He is the perfection that is entirely complete and the complete that is entirely perfect.’ The object of love in carnal love is always disposed to annihilation and extinction while the object of love in spiritual love is eternal—if someone desires to love.

*Every alluring face that attracts to you
its beauty desires to captivate you from afar.*

Turn your heart towards the One who

always was and always will be with you.

For those given to carnal-love, spiritual love is like arrhythmic music and, on the contrary, carnal love in the eyes of those possessing spiritual love is like the love of a bird confined to a cage who expresses its love through the gaps between the bars of the cage while the poor bird is unaware that these gaps will never lead him to true freedom. So, the mention of spiritual love to corrupt people is actually a kind of injustice. O Spiritual Love:

*Your praise is a pity if mentioned to the caged
So I mention it only in the gathering of the free.*

Carnal love is always in state of change and alteration with change in the object of love. Even if this love moves towards perfection, inevitably one day the heart must detach itself from the object of love. On the other hand, spiritual love—when it begins in accordance with the laws of intellect and the heart—can reach eternal and infinite perfection. If the soul is attentive of the object of this spiritual and true love it would inevitably say, O God:

*From Adam's clay I sensed Your fragrance
long distances travelled I along Your path.
Whatever I gave on Your way was from You
My soul remains and that too is Yours.*

But if the soul becomes the victim of carnal love it would say, O destiny:

*For a while in childhood we had teachers;
For a while we took pleasure in being teachers;
What was the result in the end?
We came from dust and left on the wind.*

One who has tasted the nectar of Positive Irfan and has acquired eternal love is very pleased, desiring to see his Beloved, and he says: like a bubble that bounces from place to place

Like a bubble bouncing from place to place to see the visage of the Beloved
We go around and seek and become water.

Certainly, the other—who submitted to carnal desires— would say the following in his heart even if he does not express it on his tongue: to build it

Whoever has come to better the world, his work is like a whirlwind
He exerts himself, leaves everything behind and disappears.

This is the meaning of Positive Irfan the first sign of which is to obey the commands of the eternal and All- Perfect Beloved. In Positive Irfan a person proclaims the phrase, 'There is neither power nor might

except in Allah's⁴ from the depths of his heart. This phrase makes its proclaimer adherent to Allah's commands and prohibitions. As a result, his whole existence manifests the meaning of this phrase; that is, when he starts his prayer with Takbir (Allahu Akbar) he is ready to welter in his own blood for Allah's sake. This phrase purifies the saintly spirit of the 'Arif from self and selfishness. 'I will do this'; 'I have done that' is meaningless for him (except for acts that are performed as a result of free will which are the axis of religious duties). He knows very well that:

*Unless you scatter the dust of your Self on the wind
You will never see the beauty of the One.*

Regarding the Arif in Positive Irfan: "He (the believer) kept his mind alive and killed (the desires of) his heart till his body became thin, his bulk turned light and an effulgence of extreme brightness shone upon him. It lighted the way for him and took him on the (right) path. Different doors led him to the door of safety and the place of (his permanent) stay. His feet, balancing his body, became fixed in the position of safety and comfort, because he kept his heart (in good acts) and pleased his Allah."⁵

"O Abu Dharr! You showed anger in the name of Allah; therefore, have hope in Him for whom you became angry, the people were afraid of you in the matter of their (pleasure of this) world while you feared them for your faith. Then leave to them that for which they are afraid of you... Only rightfulness should attract you while wrongfulness should repel you."⁶

This section was ended with selections from a masterpiece of true Irfan—the words of Hussein ibn Ali ('a) during the day of 'Arafah in which he is praising his Lord.⁷

¹. Nahj Al-Balaghah, Sermon 227: vol. 2, page 214.

². Wasq is a unit of measurement of weight used by Arabs. One wasq is approximately equal to 170 kg.

³. Jame' us Sa'adat, Mulla Ahmed Naraq, vol. 2, page 98.

⁴. Nahjul Balagha, Will 47, vol. 2, page 422.

⁵. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 220: vol. 2, page 190.

⁶. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 130: vol. 1, page 490.

⁷. See Dua Arafah of Imam Hussein ('a), A Shi'ite Anthology, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Translated by William C. Chittick.

Chapter 5: Ali And The Reality Of Death

Some introductory points that explain the likeness of life and death in the eyes of Ali ('a) are presented here.

The Extent Of Agreement On The Issue Of Death In Science And Philosophy

In this introductory discussion we consider it necessary to mention two principles which, although short, are of considerable importance.

1. Correct and complete understanding of a specific reality is possible to an academician or a philosopher only when the concept opposite to it is examined in clear terms. The famous age old saying, '*Things can be recognized through their opposites*' is valid in all our knowledge and understanding. Rather, it can be said that the epistemologically scientific and philosophical value of this principle has increased and today it is introduced as one the indisputable laws of knowing things through their opposites. On the basis of the law mentioned above, understanding of the issue of death is connected to our understanding of the reality of life. It is true, of course, that a summary understanding of an issue can be obtained without study of its opposite.

2. The extent of general acceptance and agreement on a certain topic or law in science or philosophy is related to whether the proof provided in this regard is a definite proof or a reliable roof or just a probable proof. Any issue in science or philosophy that is proved or established to a high degree acquires complete and universal acceptance. Similarly, if a certain issue reaches partial or limited clarity based on certain assumptions and theories, then only to the extent it is clear, it reaches acceptance. For example, today the issue that water is a compound made up of hydrogen and oxygen is a formally recognized fact such that the acceptance of this issue can be put at 100%. While, on the other hand there are many other issues that are not universally accepted and their general acceptance can be put for example at around 5%.

Now that these two principles are clarified we can say that: The issue of death from the aspect of our understanding of it in the domain of science and philosophy is one of those issues which, for two reasons, is not a universally accepted matter such that its acceptance can be put at 100%.

The first reason is that the complete reality of life itself is unknown and therefore as a result the reality of death also remains obscure. To explain this matter more it is necessary for us to look into the phenomenon of life and its reality.

A Look At The Phenomenon Of Life And Its Reality

As a result of the efforts carried out in various fields of biology during the last century many branches of knowledge have opened for human beings. This has made available more than ten theories about the phenomenon of life for scholars and philosophers to study. It can be said that these different opinions and studies each have a different perspective in mind.

We all are aware that the powerful laws of mechanics have had a profound effect on the thinking of the scholars of our time. As a result, they have tried to explain even physiological phenomena with the help of a few simple laws of mechanics.

Although it is true that in cases where the result is related to natural factors, this view has attained success and noticeable acceptance. It is said the quality of a certain cell brings about a specific phenomenon. For instance, colloidal particles in isolation have a certain behavior and in colonies behave differently. To a certain extent our knowledge within these limits about different phenomena release us from fancy in relation to the question of life. However, a more important point (the answer for which human thought has long been in search) is: Does this amount of clarity fulfill all our true scientific and philosophical aspirations about the reality and phenomenon of life?

If we assume that our current understanding about the reality of life is enough, then why would people, such as Henri Bergson¹, consider the reality of life with long and extensive philosophical formulations and due to weariness resulting from these considerations at times busy themselves with poetry? Specification of the matters of life, its activities and properties, is similar to determination of matters related to the functioning of the brain. Of course, no one denies that the brain is made up of different types of neurons and specific tissues linked in a complex and precise manner.

Similarly, it is known that memory, imagination, resolve, and thinking have definite physical centers in the body. Even with all the insight we have gained, it is not possible to explain the psychological apparatus definitively using mechanical laws of physiology. Even if we agree hypothetically that the matter of life consists of colloidal particles, how can we explain the instinct of reproduction, emotions and so many similar things with reference to these particles?! We consider the brain to be the center of memory, but the thousands of images of contradictory events that gather in a physical center throughout life cannot be explained using laws of physiology and understanding the parts of the system and we cannot even say that physiologists have been neglectful of this issue; rather, like scholars of psychology they have also realized that the tangible materials of life, such as cells, generate non-material entities. However, they appease themselves by referring to this well-known statement, "Attributes of living beings are qualitative attributes that are generated by quantitative attributes" and they satisfy themselves with this explanation.

We also believe that the puzzle of life will be solved forever when this vague philosophical statement is converted into a precise statement like the statements of mathematics and physics. Even though this statement is only mentioned in books of physiology, unfortunately it still asserts a vague philosophical claim.

At any rate if we want to give an example of this intricate issue, we must call to mind a picture of a landscape such that parts of this composite (made up of fragments) are individual material objects like a river, lush green trees, meadows, etc. but the combination of these quantifiable fragments produce a state and a qualitative attribute of pleasantness in us. This quality and state lacks the ability of any

quantitative comparison and cannot be explained using physical laws.

The difference between the conversion of quantity into quality in the natural world in the above example is that the main source of the qualitative attribute that is present in nature is related to our feelings, while in the reality of life, regardless of the reflection of nature on our feelings, a certain phenomenon called a qualitative attribute exists in itself in that living creature. In other words, in living beings the instinct of survival and reproduction, emotions and feelings, and resolve or will-power in higher beings like humans, and the faculty of imagination, the sense of beauty, thinking, and choice are qualitative attributes that have an independent external reality.

Keeping in mind all that has been said and acknowledging the fact that the matter of life is something that produces phenomena that are not quantifiable, the view of biologists and especially physiologists and zoologists who say, 'The limits of this discussion do not pass beyond events of life and stop just at giving explanations about the perceptible events' has been proven. As a result, our scientific and philosophical descriptions are insufficient to explain the reality and philosophy of life.

Even though we are living in the second half of the twentieth century if we recall the words of poets with philosophical temperaments, we see that, like them, we have also not solved the basic questions about life. Abul 'Ala says:

That in which perplexed are the people
Is creation of life from a lifeless matter.

Now let us assume that we have understood the reality and origin of life and no part of its reality remains obscure for us. As a result, we would understand death as well and this can be expressed in a simple mathematical expression: Death is subtraction (or absence) of life. Afterwards, however, we are faced with an even more perplexing question about the mysteries and events after death. This issue requires a more detailed discussion which we present in the coming pages.

A Look At The Common Perception Of Death

A Look At The Common Perception Of Death (A Collection Of Contradictory Views About Death)

Any intellectual who has studied the contradictory views about death would certainly be confused and perhaps even terrified. It can be said that these people are justified in having these feelings because it is very natural for a person to lose his senses when he visualizes the strong and terrible embarrassment of life before the frightening visage of death. As we pointed out in our previous discussions, intellectuals have failed to explain the reality of death on the basis of laws of physiology. Consequently, nowadays they resort to unrelated and jumbled philosophical arguments to explain the reality of death. It is evident that all their extensive scientific knowledge has failed to fulfill the aspirations of the instinct of curiosity and now they have assumed the responsibility of solving this puzzle of life through use of poetry!

It is a general rule that if an issue of scientific and philosophical inquiry is not analyzed using the senses and the intellect, people will draw a picture of the issue based on guesswork and in accordance with their own thoughts. Until today not even a single person from all of humanity has returned to life through conventional means after having passed completely through this mysterious forest of death so that he could describe the reality for us in simple language. For this reason, this reality manifests itself in an extremely repulsive and terrifying form to those who consider death itself to be the last destination for humanity.

Contrary to this, in the eyes of people who are aware of the reality of life and they have carefully studied its different aspects, death is a passageway. It is the beginning of the harvest season whose seeds were planted in the farm of life and for whose cultivation they had endeavored patiently. For such people death manifests itself in a beautiful and pleasant form. Based on the same clear reasoning, the resting place after death, the grave, for the first group of people who consider death to be the end of life is like a dark pit that, with a fiery whip, has set out towards him whereas for the second group the same grave takes the form of an honorable resting place and a place of immense peace.

This reality is perceived by all—young and old—by means of the conscience and the untainted God-given nature. It is up to us to express this reality in the form of philosophical expressions and moral admonitions or in the form of poetry.

Rumi says:

The death of each person is commensurate with one's own nature, my son

It is your enemy if you were an enemy and a friend if you were a friend.

O you who fear death and wish to flee it

That which you should fear O my dear.

It is your own repulsive visage and not that of death

Your life is like a tree whose leaves are death.

If you are weary of this abjectness, you yourself have sown it

And if you have reaped silk, you yourself have spun it.

Another has said:

“Live thou such that when your time arrives and you are summoned to a caravan whose number cannot be counted and which faces a mysterious realm ahead and when every person will settle in his own place in the silent valley of death, you do not become a servant who faces a terrible destiny but you become someone who with firm steps and high morale moves towards his eternal resting place and spreads his gown on the earth and at that moment goes under it and covers his eyes for a pleasant sleep full of beautiful dreams and in that glorious resting place waits for the meeting of the Last Day.”

Before Death And After Death

Maurice Maeterlinck² and some other intellectuals with great interest have taken up pens and filled many pages in order to depict the reality of death. Unfortunately, the people who have read these pages have not seen anything substantial written about the reality of death itself but whatever is reflected in these writings is related to issues before death or after death. If we liken death to a corridor and the life before death to a street and events after death to a courtyard then these people have ignored the corridor in order to reach the courtyard from the street. How true it is that a person who has never seen a Phoenix portrays it according to his own imagination.

We do not intend to say that issues related to before death and after death are not important. Rather on the contrary both these issues occupy extraordinary importance and, as we will mention, the mystery of what takes place after death is more important than death itself. However, what we intend to say is that even though these intellectuals have claimed to have described death, they have actually not succeeded in doing so.

It is here that we realize the academic and philosophical value of this brief statement of the unrivaled champion of life and death, Ali ('a):

“How many days did I spend in searching for the secret of this matter, but Allah did not allow save its concealment Alas! It is a treasured knowledge.”³

Consolation That Epicurus Offered To His Followers About The Chaos Of Death

The example of Epicurus⁴ and Epicures⁵ is that of a beautician who prepares the bride for the groom but he himself is deprived of any benefit from her. He presented death in a beautiful appearance to provide mental relief to the children of Adam from fear and apprehension during the last moments of their lives.

Epicurus said: Why do you fear death?

Fear of death is childish because, as long as you have feelings, there is no death and when death arrives, there are no feelings. Epicurus with these words, which very likely were said by him to open the way of escape from the sense of responsibility and pain of carrying out duties, reminds us of a child in the darkness of night that has tightly put his fingers in his ears while he is reciting these couplets:

I am the furious elephant and I am the enraged lion

My name is Bahram⁶ and I am also known as Father of the Mountain.

Or if we want to speak a bit more seriously we should have a look at a clearer example. This statement of Epicurus is indicative of the pleasure seeking and play of a child that nowadays fifty and sixty year old people in both the East and the West are carrying out. However, this pleasure seeking is not in accordance with the demands of their human nature. It only helps them to postpone the autumn of old

age but that too only for a limited period of time. This empty excuse at times is so cold and out of place that when they themselves pay attention to the reality of it they feel ashamed and disgraced. I do not really know, but it seems very unlikely that a person can be found who has settled the puzzle of death and what happens after death using the words of Epicurus and if such a person was to be found in history this philosophical statement of Epicurus would have become a proven formula.

If we reflect a little about the state of Epicurus we will understand that perhaps this is how he reached this conclusion: Epicurus the philosopher with a peaceful mind was having a walk in a garden. Nature full of life with its trees, flowers, animals and human beings was smiling at him and his eyes, his ears, his heart and all his faculties were engaged in performing their respective duties. Suddenly this expression surfaced in his talented mind, "That which the eyes see is a dream like the water flowing in the stream" and thus the most mysterious puzzle of human thought was solved forever!!

Do you know of any sensible person who says that feelings and death can gather in one place? Which intelligent person says that motion and stillness can come together? So that in answer to this foolish statement we would say: No, motion and stillness cannot come together.

However, the name Epicurus is counted amongst philosophers. It is hard to believe that this obvious and evident statement was made by him without any motive or reason. If we carefully think about the philosophical method of Epicurus and Epicureanism it appears to us that, like others, Epicurus was anxious and tormented by the sight of this vast universe winking at everyone through the crevices of the wall of death. (Which lionhearted man is not humbled by the sight of death? Which courageous person does not throb at the thought of apparent breaking of the string of life or the possibility of its continuation after passing through the corridor of death?) He only had two ways to redress this puzzle of death.

1. Intelligent acceptance which was chosen by the nations of the world through their adherence to the leaders of spirituality (the Prophets).
2. Disregarding this issue and consoling himself with the aforesaid expressions when death is mentioned or reassuring himself while thinking about death and the events after death which torment the conscience of every intellectual.

Epicurus chooses the second solution and does not consider the belief in life after death to be necessary. That which appears stranger than the words of Epicurus are the words of some of the so-called philosophers who say things like: Why do you trouble your mind to understand the reality of death?! All its secrets can be described in one short sentence: Life is the connection of soul and body and death is the separation of the soul from the body.

As if someone denied this concept and if this self-evident statement would not have come to the rescue, the puzzle of death would have remained unsolved forever! In answer to these kinds of claims it is enough that we say: Generally speaking, the first stage while analysing the issue of death would be to

comprehend the reality of life and the soul. Unfortunately, the meanings of these concepts today have been lost in confusing terminologies and ideas.

In any case, whether the children of Adam take this issue seriously or not, two issues of extraordinary importance

related to death have occupied the minds and senses of the people of knowledge and understanding:

1. Chaos of death, and
2. Confusion after death

Chaos Of Death And Confusion After Death

Any part of the body that has life will always try its best to protect its life. Wounds, injuries, illnesses, even if present for only a short period of time, are not in consonance with the demands of life. Therefore, at the time of conflict between a live body part and a wound, injury or illness the soul—or the ‘I’ or the ‘nervous system’—is in pain and torment and that part becomes a source of feeling pain for the entire structure of life. This pain can go on to the extent that, at times, the ill person wishes for death and seeks to end his life. Here we all are faced with a dilemma: When death is playing with all the outer and inner parts and one by one severs all the strings of life, does the dying person not feel any pain or torment?!

Some others have said: It is true that at the time of death there is conflict between motion and stillness and without doubt change from motion to stillness brings pain, but the duration of this pain is short and it is limited to few minutes or hours. I have not seen this sentence attributed to Epicurus, but it is not out of place if said to complete the words of Epicurus. It appears that this false optimism is a result of lack of reflection about this issue. Those who believe in this statement have imagined that feelings and perceptions of a person who is trapped in the powerful claws of death are the same as the perceptions of a vital and active person who in the hour of pleasure-seeking with a calm mind can assign a specific meaning for a minute, an hour, a day or a month. It is obvious that this is not the case because due to the approach of death the perceptions and senses of a person are deranged and the limitations of time no longer apply and time takes an incalculable extension. You and I who are watching the stormy events of death from a distance imagine that this person has crossed the corridor of death in an interval of few minutes or an hour.

It would not be out of place if we mention what the scholars of physiology say in this regard. At the time of death particular kinds of movements and vibrations coupled with electric currents are generated in the neurons of the brain. In this situation different kinds of fluctuations are observed in the brain. These fluctuations indicate that the memory is revealing the different events that this dying person had done during his lifetime.

It is very likely that these words of Imam Ali (‘a) are also indicate this phenomenon:

“He (the dying person) then thinks over how he wasted his life and in what (activities) he passed his time.”⁷

Coming together of thousands of events in a span of few minutes is incompatible with our ordinary measurements of time. This is the first issue (that of death) that has always engaged human thought.

The Confusion Of After Death

All human beings more or the less without exception face these questions: Will this life full of vigour and vitality one day turn into a terrifying calm and silence? Will this silence extend eternally? Or like this present life which was preceded by absolute silence, will a new eternal life begin after the end of this life?

Even though eternal silence is out of the question, death presents a very poetic and amazing appearance. Yes, the grave is a strange place. Identities and distinctions are obliterated and destroyed in such a manner that in a handful of earth we can observe the just heart of Socrates alongside the reckless head of the oppressive Genghis Khan and we can see the bones of Jamshid and Alexander mixed with the bones of others. How can a person engrossed in the pleasures of life with drunken eyes, rosy cheeks and delicate body while ruling over millions of people imagine that a day will come when the same sun and the same moon and the same stars would all be busy illuminating others without having the slightest concern and his drunken eyes, rosy cheeks and delicate body would have turned into a handful of dust?! Afterwards also a thorny bush would grow over this dust and thereafter a farmer would uproot the thorns and bushes and this man would turn into earth that will be a place where plants will grow. This turning of humans into dust creates a pitiful sight for onlookers although at the same time it is place of feasting for worms, ants and writhing snakes below the ground.

It is certain that the destiny of this person enamoured of life does not end here because that farmer is in search of a free watchman to look after his plantations. So he cruelly empties the contents of this skull and inserts a stick through one the holes of the eyes or the nose and erects a scarecrow in his farm. Here this eventful skull is busy doing two things. Firstly, it is guarding the farm and, secondly, it is looking at the vast expanse of nature which, along with the stars, has witnessed the events of the past.

This is the eventful journey that all people set out for with the caravan of time. Throughout the centuries and ages this swift vehicle of time has carried each one of the children of Adam from enthusiastic young men and women to old men and women with bent backs, from the simple-minded to clever people, from the weak to the powerful, from ordinary people to philosophers, learned men and Prophets and has put them under the earth which becomes their resting place till eternity.

If the children of Adam had certainty that the issue of ending of life and their destiny would finish here, it would not be so much a source of worry and discomfort. Because certainly everyone is going to face these events in the future while saying:

*Some of us bury some others and generations
To come will walk on the bones of their ancestors.*

And,

*Life left the body of you and me
Bricks were layered on the tomb of you and me.
And now for the tomb of others
Bricks are prepared from ashes of you and me.*

However, despite all this humans admit defeat against two questions and express their inability to answer them. The first of these questions is: Despite so many consolations offered by the deniers of metaphysical realities, why do people still fear the severing of the cord of life?!

And the second question: What clear proofs exist to support the claim that the reality of human beings is confined between being a foetus and reaching the dreadful valley of death?!

If there are any clear proofs, why are they not explained for all so that everyone can attain tranquillity and no one has to have any apprehension about death?!

How suitable it would have been if, when these intellectuals wished to offer temporary consolations as philosophical discussions and prevent people – in their own opinion – from thinking about the gravity of death and what comes after, they came to themselves and pondered this issue with more care and in a more useful manner and would have shown the children of Adam a logical and safe path.

Death In The Viewpoint Of Ali

As a result of these introductory discussions it is now possible for us to understand how life and death were alike for Ali ('a). Rather, if we reflect a bit more about life from the viewpoint of Ali ('a) we may be able to fathom the pleasure that Ali ('a) felt when he welcomed death at the time he realized his death was imminent.

Here you will read some of the astonishing statements made by this unrivaled champion of life and the death.

- 1. By Allah, whether I proceed towards death or death advances towards me, I fear it not.* [8](#)
- 2. By the Worshipped One, death has not proffered me anything new that is distasteful.* [9](#)
- 3. By Allah, the son of Abu Talib is more intimate with death than an infant with the breast of its mother.* [10](#)
- 4. When he was inflicted with the deadly blow that led to his death he said, 'By the Lord of the Ka'ba, I*

have achieved salvation. ['11](#)

As Ali ('a) said: "By Allah, whether I proceed towards death or death advances towards me, I fear it not." Yes, when a lifeless canvas is being painted by an expert artist, it does not make a difference whether the brush is extended towards it or it is extended towards the brush. Ali ('a), this complete example of the path of the leaders of Monotheism, surrendered himself like a lifeless canvass under the hand of the painter of life and death, and it did not make any difference to him whether death came to him or he went towards death. Certainly Ali ('a) had no worry or apprehension about death or the confusion that follows death. Death did not hold anything new that he did not already know about.

Without doubt for a person who has understood the reality of life with all its implications and details and, as a result, nothing remains unknown to him about death, what new thing can death reveal to such a person?!

Again, a general principle that applies to human knowledge and is accepted by all is that it is possible to understand a reality by studying its opposite. Rather, if we desire complete understanding of an issue we should know it's opposite comprehensively.

If we impartially reflect about the entire life of Ali ('a), taking into account all its dimensions, this would serve as the most convincing proof for the claims made by him.

Faultfinders and criticizers in all times—before his Caliphate, after his Caliphate and even in the period when the oppressors were trying to hide their faults and disgraces—could not prove through proper evidence regarding any particular issue or certain social event that Ali ('a) took a step following his desires or committed a mistake.

Who can deservingly reach this lofty station in this world full of intrigue and wonder? Can one possibly say that Ali ('a) had not understood the meaning of life correctly!?

Yes, Ali ('a) had understood the meaning of life correctly and this caused him not to have even the least fear of death. This fact can also be explained in other words which would be in accordance with the capacity of our intellect.

This man, Ali ('a), was alert in the presence of the intoxicated. He was thinking about the society among others who were drowning in selfishness and individualism. He considered that the financial portion and identity of every individual in society was related to one's labour and efforts and achievement of results. He was vigilant in an environment where conflict between survival of the fittest and trampling the rights of the weak had taken away basic human values from the people. Does such a man who is aware while in such a detestable society not feel death every moment?! This is why Ali does not have any apprehension of the turmoil of death and the events after death.

Again he says, *"By Allah, the son of Abu Talib is more intimate with death than an infant with the breast*

of its mother.”

Rare are claims similar to this claim which is supported by evidence; rather, most such claims do not go beyond mere rhetoric. History, which has fabricated many false events and conveyed them to mankind as truth—this disgraceful history with all its prejudices and baseless disputes— could not deny the sincerity of this apple of Abraham’s eye in his love for God.

More than fourteen hundred years have passed; however, history has repeatedly announced to us: Ali feared neither death nor the events that would follow death.

One can see that Ali (‘a) did not exaggerate his claim about his love for God by taking his claim in one hand and the history of his life in the other and comparing the two. Why should Ali, this friend of Allah, not have the desire to meet his beloved and hasten to His lofty presence? Ask the Divine Book (the Qur’an) and it will also tell you that a true lover desires meeting with his beloved.

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ هَادُوا إِن زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ لِلَّهِ مِنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوْا الْمَوْتَ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

Say: O you who are Jews, if you think that you are the favorites of Allah to the exclusion of other people, then invoke death if you are truthful. (Surah al-Jumu’a, 62:6).

Why should death not be sweeter to Ali (‘a) than mother’s milk to an infant?! He did not desire the life of this world the way an infant desires his mother’s milk. Ali (‘a), as a result of his sound intellect and God-given nature, perceived that death is the opening of the doors of eternal life.

Death means freedom from the bondages and darkness of the material realm. Indeed, when a farmer has sown seeds in the appropriate season, has taken care of their cultivation and has not exercised any negligence in carrying out his duty as a farmer, why should such a person not look forward to the day when the harvests will be reaped and why should he not become happy remembering the day when in front of his eyes he sees the accumulation of the fruits of his labour?!?!

Is it not true that life in this world is the sowing season of humanity?! And is it not true that death is the beginning of the harvest season?! Indeed, Ali (‘a) is rightfully justified if he does not fear death and the events after death.

Why should Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a)—when he received that fatal blow—not welcome death as if for years he had been waiting for this honoured guest, while the weeping of those suffering from the farthest point of the territories under his rule was echoing in his ears and his heart and it had turned life into a dungeon where hands and legs are tied in chains and it is impossible to live in peace.

Life is extremely bitter for a man who is himself a symbol of justice but is forced to observe the occurrence of an anklet being oppressively grabbed from the leg of a woman living in a territory under

his rule—even though that woman is not Muslim.

If complete submission to justice and considering property, life, family and power insignificant occupies the same merit that Ali showed through his character, and if fear and apprehension of even a tiny bit of oppression to the rights of others is a virtue just as Ali demonstrated saying, “If you ask me to snatch husk of a grain from the mouth of an ant in exchange for the whole world and whatever is in it, I would certainly not do this”, then certainly it is an undeniable reality that Ali did not fear death or the events that would follow death.

But the shameful history of the undutiful children of Adam announces clearly: Shame on the children of Adam who—when their wars and oppression are witnessed by the skies, the stars, and the whole universe—disgrace humanity. The children of Adam have trampled human values oppressively without any apprehension so much so that even wild beasts are not unbridled to this extent. If such an enemy of humanity knows that killing the enemy by burning him to death is faster and more destructive, will he allow the time to kill them with water?! Certainly Not! If the enemy can be destroyed faster and better by drowning them instead of depriving them of water, there would be no need for arrayal of troops and killing the enemy by the sword.

History has made an exception only for the leaders of monotheism and the true exemplar of their path, the dear son of Abu Talib, from such a rule and convention.

Read the life of Ali (‘a). You will find in it that when Mu’awiyah took control of the river Euphrates in the battle of Siffin, he prevented the forces of Ali (‘a) from coming close to the water in order to defeat the enemy by way of thirst to avoid using their swords and gain a speedy defeat. At this moment an order was issued from Ali (‘a) and with a small attack on the enemy, the Euphrates was recaptured by the forces of Ali. It is evident that the supporters of Ali desired a tit for tat response from Ali (‘a) [wanting to control the water and defeat the enemy by way of thirst like Mu’awiyah’s army], but Ali never sacrificed human values and Islamic principles while fighting wars. Expressing his disapproval of the demands of his supporters, he opened the way to water and invited everyone to benefit from it. Because according to logic of life and the logical way of life of Ali war is for correcting and reforming men not for destroying them. History does not know of a person other than this pious and humble champion and dear son of Abu Talib who held a sword in his hands for fifty years and yet did not spill a single drop of blood unjustly.

History has witnessed the pure life of Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) and loudly and clearly tells us that Ali (‘a) neither feared death nor the life after death.

In the logic of Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) the only death that every individual and society should fear is the death of conscience and God-given human nature (fitrat). An individual or a society that has hung on to self-worship to such an extent that it considers human values limited to accumulation of wealth and power has certainly hastened towards destruction and extinction. In such an individual or such a society

where the conscience and God-given human nature has disappeared, a sense of responsibility is inexistent and human values—which separate humans from wild animals and teach men wisdom, ethics and religion—are replaced with survival of the fittest and trampling of the rights of the weak.

This world is such that above every powerful person there is someone more powerful and over every strong hand there is another one stronger than the first and the weak are destroyed and annihilated by these two. This is the death that everyone fears and in fact this is the death that everyone must fear! But this unique man, Ali (‘a), always reminded people of the importance of carrying out their duties and accepted his own death by surrendering himself before the law (he refused to punish his killer before the crime was committed). Even if Ali himself had not said anything about death, the voice of justice and dutifulness would announce to the people of the world that Ali had neither a fear of death nor of events to come after death.

Is it possible to imagine a person that fears death at the hands of an assassin, but despite knowing the bad intentions of his killer does not accuse him of planning to kill him?! However, it was not possible for Ali (‘a) to ignore the law and use the power he had to cleanse this earth of the criminal Ibn Muljim before he committed his infamous crime.

If Ali this perfect role model of the path of the leaders of Monotheism feared death, he would not have walked through the streets in the darkness of the night in the same way he walked in the brightness of the day without any weapon and without any guards among the multitude of enemies who desired wealth and power and who saw Ali (‘a) as nothing but an obstacle in their path. This unique exemplar of humanity who had reached the threshold of death many times in order to fulfill his duties had astonished death itself and his death, like his amazing life, cried out to us: Ali neither feared death nor events to come after death!

Certainly this pious courageous man whose garments had so many patches that it made the person who used to patch them feel ashamed, who looked equally upon the strong and the weak in respect to rights and whose sharp sword—despite the fact that it dripped in the blood of the corrupt and was in the foremost ranks of wars and thousands of events where revengefulness might strip away a person’s humanity—never spilled a single drop of blood unjustly. In addition, he made sure food was offered the man that inflicted him with a deadly injury, encouraged his children not to get excessively agitated over the death of their father and, at the time of crossing the corridor of death towards the realm of the afterlife, exchanged a patched garment for a simple shroud, like the clothing of Ihram, and surrendered his body to the earth

and his soul hastened to the presence of his Lord. What apprehension and worry can torment and distress such a man?! By the Glory of Allah I swear that those garments, that sword, that human who has acquired worth through following Ali (‘a), that kind and affectionate heart, and even the killer himself all testify to us that Ali (‘a) did not fear death nor the events that come after death.

The Midnight In Which He Received A New Life

The pale–yellow sun was for a few hours abandoning the blue sky and the night was spreading a curtain of darkness on mountains and plains, on green trees, on humble houses and elevated mansions. The stars, as usual, were floating quietly in the vast expanse of the sky and with mysterious smiles on their faces they looked with amazement at the human beings exhausted as a result of the tiresome efforts of the day. The farmers had returned to their humble dwellings and the sounds of the caravans were inclining to silence like the sounds of the members of the caravans themselves. Even captivated lovers were exhausted from wandering in the vast expanse of imagination and had put their heads on cushions to rest.

However, for Ali the veils of darkness of this material world, like always, remained unfurled. The moments of spiritual climax (at the time of death) were near for Ali. Sometimes at night he would busy himself with a careful accounting of his soul or he would spend his time pondering walking in the deserts around Kufa. Sometimes he would wander around the quarters of orphans, widows and the afflicted to see if they had retired to sleep with a relieved heart or sometimes, he would move the walls of the Kufa Mosque to tears through his sorrowful but eager and fervent lamentations.

For a few moments he would close his eyes—that only knew truth—out of pity for his tired body and to avoid becoming saddened by looking at the corrupt.

The eyes and the hearts of all men, animals, and birds would still be engrossed in deep sleep while the vigilant heart of Ali would be soothing his eyes and preparing himself for supplication with his Lord and very soon the eyes of Ali would open again to this world. He would say:

I am now on the path of caravans that have left behind the abode of this world and have taken dwellings in the darkness. O blue sky [that is a canopy over me] full of stars, neither did you shed a single tear on their departure nor did you wait anxiously hoping for their return, but you are rightfully justified in doing so because whatever you have recorded from these people cannot be narrated without embarrassment.

I desire that the future generations not register their corruption in your name. So record on your aged canvas these steps that I am taking towards the presence of the Divine in order that it serves as a proof of your innocence and acquittal and paint on your canvas the scene of the last arrow that I shot in the path of fulfilling my duties.

Alas! The opportunity I had in hand to read the Qur'an, which expounds the reality of humankind, has come to an end. Indeed, I could open but the first page of this book and recite a few lines of it to the children of Adam when suddenly the pages of my life came to an end.

*The soul now is released from shackles towards the realm of the Unseen
This free bird will now fly from the limits of the body to limits not seen.*

Today even the rare birds in the yard accompanied this traveller to the door to see him off. Not only were the birds that had always been moved to excitement by the breeze of the movement of the patched garments of Ali moved to tears but also the sounds of the last greetings of this world were reaching his ears from every corner of the street. Even the azure sky and the stars—which had witnessed countless events up to this day and were not affected by them in the least—were worried due to their affection for Ali.

Ali was also looking at them with eyes full of glitter and it was as if he was quietly murmuring something under his breath.

It was amazing indeed that the light breeze which could sink even the mountains, the valleys, the jungles and the stars into a deep sleep through its subtle coquettish glances would come proudly towards Ali hoping that its chilling breath could calm the fervent heart of Ali. It would gently pat his exhausted body so that perhaps it might restrain the sun of his eager heart from rising from slumber until daybreak. All this was in vain for did it not know?!

*The morning tore the heart of the horizons in the east
But slumber did not touch the eyes of Ali in the least.*

Why should Ali not seek intimacy with the darkness of the night while he had partaken of the drink of eternity in this darkness?! This night also he performed ablution (wudhu) like any other night and readied himself for the eternal journey ahead. His footsteps today were very different from his steps on other nights.

Today the same brownish garment that he would put on everyday seeking reformation of the society and the people was worn to welcome death. The dark but fragmented clouds were in motion together with the light breeze of the dawn. Dreadful silence continued to prevail over all the creatures. The stupefied pale moon from the steep horizons was casting feeble moonlight full of despair on the forehead of Ali (‘a) as if it was regretful of its actions and as if his killer—who in fact committed this devious crime against all humanity—had also realized that if he desires to raise his oppressive hands—shaking in terror—towards this lion-hearted man, it is possible only when Ali (‘a) is in the presence of the Divine and has submitted himself entirely at the Divine threshold.

On his first day in this world the Holy Ka’ba welcomed him with open arms and in the final hours of his life he was in the prayer niche—the sword struck his head and took his life while he was worshipping his Lord. Each moment of his life between these two places of worship were spent worshipping the One God, whether in the battlefield or in the political arena, whether in the prayer niche or on the seat of power.

The deathbed of Ali taught all those who came to see him in his last moments the true meaning of life and death— not that these people had not seen their dear ones, their relatives or other people die in the battlefield or on the deathbed. More or less all of them had seen the frightening face of death during their

lifetimes. However, they had never seen the amazing tranquillity that this man of wisdom, courage, piety and justice showed after receiving that deadly blow to his head.

They watched this great man as his face turned pale like a faded yellow leaf due to the blow that this murderer inflicted upon him with a poisoned sword. They looked at the pale face and withered lips of a man who had not spoken anything in life but the words of reform and eternal bliss. The people who were with him at his death bed have informed us and the book Nahj Al-Balaghah has also informed us that during his last moments and in that dreadful and frightful state he advised them about the importance of Qur'an and emphasized Monotheism. He instructed them to keep their affairs in order and emphasized that they keep away from enmity and reconcile their mutual differences. He reminded them to take care of orphans.¹²

In between he would utter the phrase

لا اله الا الله

'There is no God save Allah'

and shake the hearts of all the people gathered around his deathbed or rather the entire creation.

They say that his weary lips were continuously repeating this phrase when he closed his eyes to this world never to open them again and opened them in the world of eternity to begin his true life.

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُبْعَثُ حَيًّا

And peace be upon him on the day he was born, and on the day he dies, and on the day he is raised to life. (Surah Maryam, 19: 15).

¹. Henri-Louis Bergson (1859 AD – 1941 AD) was a major French philosopher, influential especially in the first half of the 20th century.

². Maurice Maeterlinck (1862 AD – 1949 AD) was a Belgian playwright, poet and essayist who wrote in French. The main themes in his work are death and the meaning of life.

³. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 149, vol. 1, page 544.

⁴. Epicurus (341 BC – 270 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher and the founder of the school of philosophy called Epicureanism.

⁵. Adherents of Epicureanism are called Epicures. Epicureanism is a system of philosophy based upon the teachings of Epicurus. It says that pleasure is the ultimate goal of human beings, that pleasure and pain are the measures of what is good and bad, that death is the end of the body and the soul and should therefore not be feared, that the Gods do not reward or punish humans.

⁶. Bahram the fifth was a Persian Sassanid emperor. His mention can be found in the poetry of Omar Khayyam.

⁷. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 109, vol. 1, page 416.

⁸. Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 55, vol. 1, page 230.

[9.](#) Nahj Al-Balagha, Will 24, vol. 2, page 304.

[10.](#) Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon 5, vol. 1, page 76.

[11.](#) Ghayatul Maram, vol. 5, page 196.

[12.](#) Nahj Al-Balagha, Will 47: vol. 2, page 422. These were apieces of advice of Imam Ali ('a) to his family on the deathbed.

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