

Imam Ali's Letter to Malik al-Ashtar: The Richest Treasure

Be it known to you, O, Malik, that I am sending you as Governor to a country which in the past has experienced both just and unjust rule. Men will scrutinise your actions with a searching eye, even as you used to scrutinise the actions of those before you, and speak of you even as you did speak of them.

The fact is that the public speak well of only those who do good. It is they who furnish the proof of your actions. Hence the richest treasure that you may covet would be the treasure of good deeds. Keep your desires under control and deny yourself that which you have been prohibited from, for, by such abstinence alone, you will be able to distinguish between what is good to them and what is not.

Develop in your heart the feeling of love for your people and let it be the source of kindness and blessing to them. Do not behave with them like a barbarian, and do not appropriate to yourself that which belongs to them. Remember that the citizens of the state are of two categories. They are either your brethren in religion or your brethren in kind. They are subject to infirmities and liable to commit mistakes.

Some indeed do commit mistakes. But forgive them even as you would like God to forgive you. Bear in mind that you are placed over them, even as I am placed over you. And then there is God even above him who has given you the position of a Governor in order that you may look after those under you and to be sufficient unto them. And you will be judged by what you do for them.

Do not set yourself against God, for neither do you possess the strength to shield yourself against His displeasure, nor can you place yourself outside the pale of His mercy and forgiveness. Do not feel sorry over any act of forgiveness, nor rejoice over any punishment that you may mete out to any one. Do not rouse yourself to anger, for no good will come out of it.

Do not say: "I am your overlord and dictator, and that you should, therefore, bow to my commands", as that will corrupt your heart, weaken your faith in religion and create disorder in the state. Should you be elated by power, ever feel in your mind the slightest symptoms of pride and arrogance, then look at the

power and majesty of the Divine governance of the Universe over which you have absolutely no control.

It will restore the sense of balance to your wayward intelligence and give you the sense of calmness and affability.

Beware! Never put yourself against the majesty and grandeur of God and never imitate His omnipotence; for God has brought low every rebel of God and every tyrant of man.

Let your mind respect through your actions the rights of God and the rights of man, and likewise, persuade your companions and relations to do likewise. For, otherwise, you will be doing injustice to yourself and injustice to humanity. Thus both man and God will turn unto your enemies. There is no hearing anywhere for one who makes an enemy of God himself. He will be regarded as one at war with God until he feels contrition and seeks forgiveness. Nothing deprives man of divine blessings or excites divine wrath against him more easily than cruelty. Hence it is, that God listens to the voice of the oppressed and waylays the oppressor.

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