

# Hazrat Imam Ali's Biography and Selected Portions from Historic *Farman* Addressed to his Commander-in-Chief Malik-e-Ashtar

It is very difficult to introduce a man like Imam Ali (A.S.) in this short article. Many people have written about his life and character. None of these are sufficient to introduce such a great man. Perhaps the best way to know him is to refer to the sayings of our beloved Prophet Mohammed, "peace be upon him", to study the history of Islam or to read his book "Nahjul-Balaghah" from which this paper is selected.

The life of Imam Ali (A.S.) can be divided into three phases. In the first 23 years of his life (first phase) he struggled along with the prophet (PBUH) for the propagation of Islam and for the establishment of an Islamic government. In the second phase, consisting of about 25 years after the life of the Prophet, he remained silent in order to preserve the unity of the Islamic Ummat (nation). The final period, close to 5 years, he led the Islamic Ummat trying to establish Islamic justice. Unlike many revolutionaries who fight for justice and endanger their lives just to obtain leadership and then become conservative, Imam Ali (A.S.) remained a revolutionary throughout his life.

Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) once said, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali (A.S.) is its

gate." Dr. George Gordagh in his book, "Ali, the Voice of Human Justice" says, "O, mother nature it would have been wonderful of you if you would have employed all your powers and potentials to once again give birth to a great man, a genius and a hero such as Imam Ali (A.S.)."

Dr. Ali Shariati, a contemporary Muslim writer speaks of Hazrat Imam Ali (A.S.) as follows:

"Ali was one spirit with many potentials.

He was the best in speech, on the pulpit.

He was the best in worship, at the alter.

He was the best of workers, in the farm.

He was the best in being faithful, with Mohammed.

He was the highest feeling of responsibility, in society.

He had the best writing, in Nahjul-Balaghah.

He was the most pious, in life.

He was the most knowledgeable, in Islam.

He was the father of revolution, in time.

He was the example of justice, in government.

He was the best father and teacher of humanity, at home and...

He was the best obedient of God, always and everywhere."

Hazrat Imam Ali (A.S.) was born 30 years after the holy Prophet's birth. His father, Abu Talib was the prophet's uncle and his mother was Fatimah.

Abu Talib raised the Prophet after the death of his parents and grandfather, Abdul Motallib. The Prophet Mohammed cared for and loved Ali as a son. He grew up in an atmosphere of virtue and piety, which no other home could provide. This early training left a lasting effect on Ali's mind. It gave him a keen vision and a passionate love for truth. Above all, it made him a fearless fighter following the true path of Allah. These qualities of the Hazrat were later to prove a rare asset for Islam. He was the first youth to join the fold of Islam. He was only 9 years old when the prophet (PBUH) was called to the divine mission. Accepting Islam at an early age was a rare act of independent judgement for a boy especially in a society where idol worship prevailed. Ali grew up under the loving care of the Prophet and the faith. The night the holy Prophet was to leave for Madina, his house was surrounded by blood-thirsty men who were ready to kill him. Our holy prophet asked Ali to lie in his place in his bed and he himself left unnoticed. Ali gladly accepted

this suggestion and slept calmly in the Prophet's bed the whole night. He was happy that he had helped save the prophet's life.

Ali had very close blood ties with the holy prophet but the prophet wanted to bring him closer still. He gave his daughter Fatima in marriage to him. She was his youngest daughter and most dearly loved of all. Ali realised the honour that was done to him; he did not marry any one else as long as Fatima lived. Hasan and Husain were the sons of Ali and Fatima. The holy prophet loved them like his own sons. Ali actively took part in all the Islamic battles side by side with the holy prophet, Mohammed, except in the battle of Tabuk where the prophet decided to leave Ali in charge of Madina during his absence. This gave the hypocrites an opportunity to talk

ill of Ali. When the prophet heard this he said, "O Ali, do you not like that we have the relationship as Aaron had with Moses?" The prophet's words silenced the hypocrites. During his last illness of the prophet, Ali was constantly by the prophet's. When the holy prophet passed away it was Ali assisted by his uncle, Abbas, who performed the last rights. Ali was one of the scribes of the revelations. Letters sent out by the prophet were also written by him. The three caliphs before Ali depended much on Ali's advice. Ali was killed in the Jami mosque of Kufa at the age of 63. Ibn Muljam hit him with a sword while he was telling

people to get ready for prayer. Ali's wound was serious and he died the day after. At the last minute of his life he called upon his sons and gave them the advice, "O' my sons, always be truthful, be merciful and helpful to the people. Try to slay the oppressor and help the oppressed."

Ali was undoubtedly one of the greatest sons of Islam and the closest companion of the prophet. His understanding of the Quran was very deep. With him ended the great Islamic

**...Remember, Malik, that there are two kinds of people; those who have the same religion and they are your brothers and those who have other religions and they are human beings like you.**

tradition of combining political power with self-imposed want and selfless service. Ali was the last representative of the truly democratic spirit of Islam and was also the last of the pious caliphs.

Malik-e-Ashter was a famous person during the time of the Imam. He was the head of the Bani Nukha's clan disciple, a companion of the Imam, a brave warrior, he acted as Commander-in-Chief of the Imam's armies. His valour earned him the name "Fearless Tiger". The Imam had specially trained him in the principles of administration and jurisprudence.

He venerated and loved the

Imam sincerely; because of this he earned Moavia's enmity. Moavia intrigued against him and had him killed by his gang of paid murderers. His untimely death brought great sorrow to Imam who, expressing his grief, said, "He was to me, what I was to the Holy prophet".

The following instructions, in the form of a letter, were written to him by the Imam who was appointed Governor of Egypt in the place of Mohammed-Ibne-Abubaker.

This letter is a precise of the principles of administration and justice as dictated by Islam. It deals with the duties and obligations of rulers, their chief responsibilities, priorities of rights and obligations, dispensation of justice, control over secretaries and subordinate staff, distribution of work and duties amongst the

various branches of administration and their co-ordination with each other's cooperation and oppression amongst the officers, to control markets, imports and exports, and to curb evils of profiteering, hoarding, and black-marketing. He also explains the stages of the various classes of society, government duties towards the lowest class (the poor and have-nots), how they are looked after and how their conditions are improved. The principle of equal distribution of wealth and opportunities, orphans and their upbringing, care of the crippled and their maintenance, and substitutes in lieu of homes for the aged and disabled

are other subjects in this letter. Then he discusses the army, what it should consist and how ignorant, ruthless and corrupt mercenaries should not be allowed to make the army their profession. He lays great stress upon the honour and nobleness of volunteers who offer their services to defend the Islamic state. Finally, he comments on the rights of rulers over the ruled and the rights of the ruled over the rulers.

There is a predominant theme running through these instructions. It is that of God. The Government is of God, the governors and the governed are both creatures of God and their respective duties are laid down by God. He expects each one to fulfil his obligations and duties; the orphans and depressed are the trust of God; the army is the army of God, whose soldiers should not behave like haughty and arrogant mercenaries, but like honourable and noble knights. Everyone is expected to do his duty to the best of his ability and to be rewarded in Heaven accordingly.

In short, this letter is the gospel of the principles of administration as taught by Holy Quran and a code to establish a kind and benevolent rule, throwing light on various aspects of justice, benevolence and mercy. It is an order based on the ethics of a benign and pious rulership, where justice and mercy is shown to human beings irrespective of class, creed and colour,

where poverty is neither a stigma, nor a disqualification, and where justice is not tarred with nepotism, favouritism, provincialism or religious fanaticism. Lastly, it is a thesis on the higher values of morality.

The famous Arab Christian jurist, poet and philosopher, Abdul maseeh-e-Anthaki, who died in the beginning of the 20th century, writes this letter is a far superior code than those handed down by Moses and Hamurabi. It explains what a human administration should be like and how

Merciful and Kind God. These are the orders issued by the creatures of God. Ali, the son of Abu-Talib, to Malik, the son of Ashter.

...I order you Malik to always keep the fear of God in your mind, to give priority to His worship and to give preference to obey His Order. Carefully and faithfully follow the commandments and interdictions given in the Holy book and traditions of the Holy prophet (AS) because the success of man to attain happiness in this world and the next depends upon these qualities. Failure to achieve these attributions brings about total failure here and hereafter...

...Let it be known, Malik, I am sending you as a governor to a country which had seen many governments before. Some of them were benign, sympathetic and good, while many were tyrannical, oppressive and cruel. People will judge your government as critically as you have studied the activities of other governments; they will criticise you in the same way as you have censured or approved other rulers...

...You must know that a virtuous man is recognised by the good that is said about him and the praises which God has destined him to receive from others...

...Remember, Malik, that there are two kinds of people; those who have the same religion and they are your brothers and those who have other religions and they are human beings like you.

**MEN OF EITHER CATEGORY SUFFER FROM THE SAME WEAKNESS AND DISABILITIES THAT HUMAN FLESH IS HEIR TO; THEY COMMIT SINS AND INDULGE IN VICES, EITHER INTENTIONALLY OR UNINTENTIONALLY WITHOUT REALISING THE ENORMITY OF THEIR DEEDS. LET MERCY AND COMPASSION COME TO THEIR RESCUE AND HELP IN THE SAME WAY THAT YOU EXPECT GOD TO SHOW MERCY AND FORGIVENESS.**

it should be carried on. It justifies the claims of Muslims that Islam introduces a Godly administration of the people for the people for the people and by the people. It wants a ruler not to please himself but to bring happiness to the ruled. No religion before Islam tried to achieve this end. Ali should be congratulated for having produced these principles in his government and for having written them down for posterity.

#### **An Order to the Commander-in-Chief, Malik-e-Ashter**

In the name of the All

Men of either category suffer from the same weakness and disabilities that human flesh is heir to; they commit sins and indulge in vices, either intentionally or unintentionally without realising the enormity of their deeds. Let mercy and compassion come to their rescue and help in the same way that you expect God to show mercy and forgiveness...

...Malik, you must never forget that if you are ruler over them, then the Caliph is a ruler over you, and God is the supreme Lord over the Caliph. And the reality is that he has appointed you governor and tested you through responsibility of this rulership over them...

...Never say to yourself, "I am their Lord, their ruler and all in all over them, and I must be obeyed submissively and humbly." Such a thought will unbalance your mind, will make you vain and arrogant, will weaken your faith in religion and will make you seek the support of any power other than God's (perhaps that of your party or your government)...

...So far as your own affairs or those of your relatives and friends are concerned, take care that you do not violate the duties laid down upon you by God and usurp the rights of mankind...

.. Remember that back-biters and scandal mongers are a mean and cunning group, though they pretend to be well wishers and sincere advisers. Do not believe the news they bring or the advice they offer...

...Gather honest, truthful and pious people around you as your companions and friends. Train them not to flatter you, and not

to seek your favour by false praises. Flattery and false praise create vanity and conceit; they make one lose sight of his real self and his duties...

...The things which most gladden the heart of a ruler should be that his state is being ruled on the principles of equity and justice and that his subjects love him...

...So far as the dispensing of justice is concerned, you have to be very careful in selecting officers. You must select people of excellent character, superior calibre and meritorious record. They must possess the following qualifications; abundance of litigations and complexity of cases should not make them lose their temper. When they realise that they have committed a mistake in judgement they should not try to justify it. When the truth is made clear to them they should not consider it below their dignity to correct their mistake...

...So far as collection of land, revenues and taxes are concerned, you must always keep in mind the taxpayer's welfare, this is more important than the taxes themselves, because these taxes and the taxpayers are the original source on which the welfare of your state and its subjects depends...

...Remember Malik, if a country is prosperous and well-to-do then it will happily and willingly bear any burden. The poverty of people is the actual cause of the devastation of a country. The main cause of poverty is the desire of rulers and officers to amass wealth and possessions whether by fair or foul means. They are afraid of losing their positions and rule; they want to

make the most of the shortest time at their disposal. They never learn lessons from the history of nations and never pay attention to the orders of God...

...Out of your work hours, fix a time for those who want to approach you with their grievances. During this time you should do no other work but to hear them and pay attention to their complaint...

...You must take care not to cut yourself off from the public. Do not place a prestige curtain between you and those over whom you rule. Such pretensions and show of pomp and pride are in reality manifestations of an inferiority complex and vanity. The result of such an attitude is that you remain ignorant of the conditions of your subject and actual causes of indecent happenings in the state...

...If your enemy invites you to sign a treaty acceptable to the Lord, then never refuse such an offer because peace will bring rest and comfort to your armies. It will relieve you from anxieties and worries, it will bring prosperity and abundance to your people...

...You must always try to remember the good and useful things done in the past, the activities of a just and benign government, the good deeds done by it, the good laws promulgated, the orders and traditions of the Holy prophet (AS), the orders of God given out in His Holy Book, and the things that you have seen me do or have heard me say. Follow the good actions and advices found therein.

