

The  
Sayings  
&  
Wisdom  
of  
Imam 'Alī



Publisher: Muhammadi Trust *in association with* Zahra Publications

ISBN (Printed Version): 0-946079-91-9

ISBN (E-Book Version): 978-1-919826-59-2

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<http://www.zahrapublications.com>

First Published in 1992

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## Book Description

Imam `Ali, who was a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, was the first man to accept Islam, when he was still a young boy, and for the next twenty-three years he was one of the Prophet's closest companions. Imam `Ali was constantly at the side of the Prophet, learnt from him, and also married his daughter Fatima. The Prophet said of Imam `Ali: 'I am the city of knowledge, and `Ali is the gate'.

Although a great many of Imam `Ali's sayings and letters were accurately remembered and recorded during his lifetime, they have until now remained virtually inaccessible to the English-speaking world. *The Sayings and Wisdom of Imam `Ali* is a selection of this great man's recorded sayings – gathered together from authentic and reliable sources and arranged in easily accessible sections in Arabic by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri. These have been carefully translated into modern English, a great effort having been made to remain true to the intended meaning of the original Arabic text.

Imam `Ali possessed not only a profound understanding of the nature of existence, but also a deep and penetrating insight into the changeless condition of human nature. The clarity and relevance of Imam `Ali's words remain; therefore, as true today as when he first uttered them.

The sayings and wisdom of Imam `Ali transcend superficial differences, to reveal everlasting truths that can only serve to guide and illuminate the seeker and traveler on his or her journey through life, as clearly, constantly, and unerringly as the Pole Star.

## **About the Author**

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

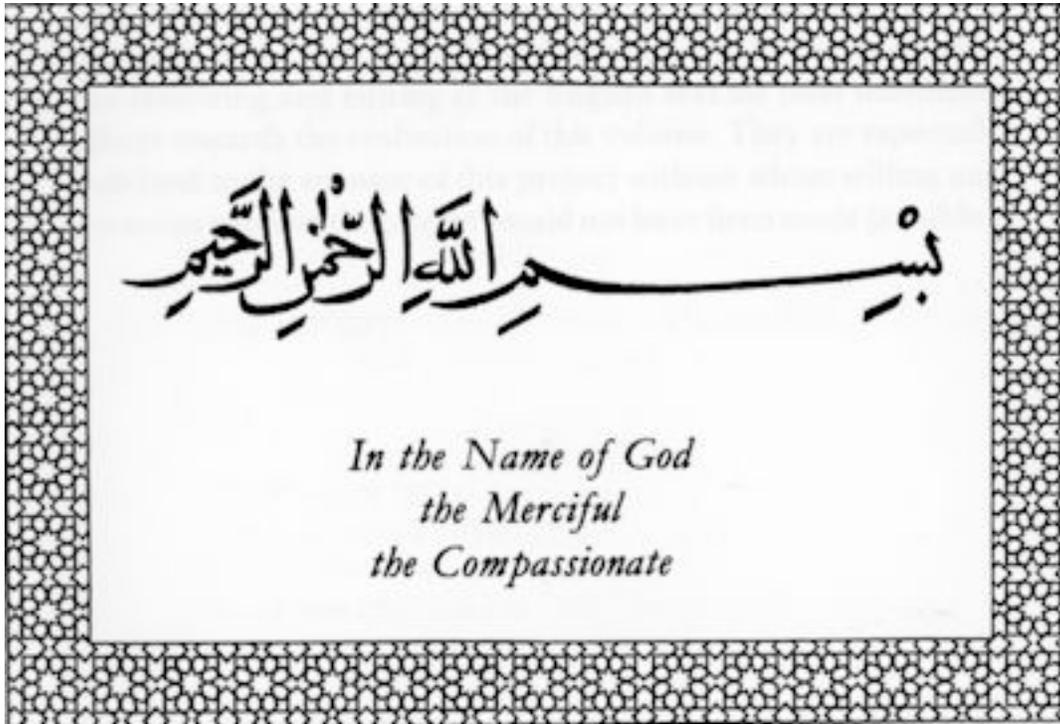
He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years.

He is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.



## **Acknowledgement**

The Muhammadi Trust would like to express their deepest gratitude to the translator, as well as to those who have helped in the reviewing and editing of the English text for their unstinting efforts towards the realization of this volume. They are especially indebted to the sponsor of this project without whose willing and generous support the project would not have been made possible.

## Introduction

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam `Ali, peace be on him, was the person closest to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who said of him: ‘ `Ali stands in relation to me as I to myself. Obedience to him is obedience to me, and disobedience to him is disobedience to me.’

In this sense, love for Imam `Ali indicates belief, and hatred for him indicates hypocrisy.

There is no doubt that the proximity of Imam `Ali to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, together with his love for and loyalty towards him, are the most important factors in accounting for his spiritual stature and his capacity for receiving both outer and inner gnosis and penetrating judgment. They account too for his intimate knowledge of Allah (*wilayah*), his accession to the position of Spiritual Guardian, his inheritance of the prophetic knowledges, and for his unparalleled eloquence in, and mastery of, the Arabic language.

Various attempts have been made through the passing centuries to make compilations of Imam `Ali’s sayings and speeches. One of the most important of these pioneering works is the anthology compiled by Ash-Sharif Ar-Radi, entitled *Nahj Al-Balaghah*, which has been translated into several languages and published in both Beirut and Tehran. This anthology contains some of Imam `Ali’s speeches, commands, treatises, letters, judgments, and advice.

Other attempts to make compilations in addition to the material gathered by Ash-Sharif Ar-Radi include *Mustadrik Nahj Al-Balaghah* by Shaykh Hadi Kashif Al-Ghita and the work by Al-Qadi Abu Abdullah Al-Qada’i.

There are many other, shorter books which bring together this wisdom and which contain passages from these speeches and teachings selected by reliable scholars. One of the most important of these is the selection of Ibn Abi Al-Hadid. This is a comprehensive and delightful collection of the sayings of Imam `Ali, peace be on him, concerning history and philosophy and

correct behavior, for anyone who seeks enjoyment from them, and it is also an important publication for those who wish to study and learn about Islam.

There are other selections of Imam `Ali's speeches, peace be on him, together with some of his shorter sayings and profound judgments, which cannot all be listed here, and which have been published in several languages, although mostly in Arabic and Farsi.

In spite of all these earlier efforts by those who understand Islamic thought to collect the sayings of Imam `Ali, peace be on him, most of them do not make any distinction between what is historical, what deals with correct behavior, what deals with legal knowledge, and what is philosophical.

Accordingly we have tried in this book, in order to make it easy and enjoyable to read, to arrange various selections of his teachings and judgments in such a way as to summarize different topics consecutively in different sections, thus making it easier to consult and derive benefit from them. We hope by Allah that what we have attempted to do is free of mistakes, which we have tried to eliminate, and that it will be of use to the Muslim Community (*ummah*) in giving further access to the teachings and judgments of Imam `Ali, peace be on him, of whom the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: 'I am the city of knowledge, and `Ali is its gate.'

Allah is the One Who gives success.

## **A Short Biography of Imam `Ali (598-661 CE)**

Imam `Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, was a member of the tribe of Hashim and a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He became the Prophet's son-in-law, the fourth Caliph of Islam after the Prophet's death, and the first Shi`ite Imam. Today, as in his lifetime, he is still often referred to as Amir al-Mu`minin, the Commander of the Faithful.

Any attempt to describe the personal qualities of Imam `Ali is a challenging task, for he has assumed, to Sunni and Shi`ite Muslims alike, an almost legendary stature as a paragon of virtue, a fount of knowledge, and a model of chivalry, widely renowned for his piety, nobility, and learning. Indeed it is at times difficult to find the true balance needed to love him without idolizing him: He once said, 'Some will go to the Garden for love of me, and some will go to the Fire for love of me.'

Imam `Ali's courage in battle, his magnanimity towards his defeated enemies, his sincerity and straightforwardness, his eloquence, and his profound knowledge of the roots and meanings of Islam cannot be questioned, for they are a matter of historical record. He is reputed to have been one of the founders of the study of Arabic grammar and was one of the first reliable transmitters of the correct methods (there are seven) of reciting the Qur'an, all of which he knew by heart.

The sayings, discourses, and letters of Imam `Ali, (especially as collected in the *Nahj Al-Balagha*, which is considered by many Shi`ite Muslims as second only to the Qur'an in importance), are amongst the earliest writings on Islamic philosophy, metaphysics, and ethics, as derived directly from the Prophet Muhammad. It is for this reason that Imam `Ali is so highly respected and loved by the Sufis – for his being the direct link to the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, the fountain head of gnostic and esoteric knowledge in this age.

Before he himself became Caliph, Imam `Ali acted as counselor to the Caliphs preceding him, may Allah be pleased with them. Esteemed as the best of judges, his judicial decisions are highly regarded by both Sunni and Shi`ite experts in jurisprudence. `Ali's caliphate is looked upon,

especially by Shi`ite Muslims, as a golden age, when the Muslim community was led, as it always should be, by a divinely appointed Imam.

## **Note on the Text**

It is customary to invoke the blessings of Allah on the Prophet Muhammad whenever his name is mentioned, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all his sincere followers.

It is customary to invoke the blessings of Allah on Imam `Ali whenever his name is mentioned, peace be on him, and on all the close companions, may Allah be pleased with them.

These invocations are intended throughout this book, even though they do not always actually appear in the text.

Definitions of all words appearing in italics in the text are to be found in the Glossary of Arabic Terms, at the end of this book.

## Sources

The number which appears after each saying in the text refers to the source – book from which it has been selected.

1. Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, *Al-Alif Al-Mukhtara*.
2. Asbahi As-Salih, *Nahj Al-Balagha*.
3. Ash-Sharif Ar-Radhi, *Nahj Al-Balagha*.
4. *Dastur Ma'alim Al-Hikma*.
5. Ath-Tha'labi, *Al-Ijaz, wa'l-Ejaz*.
6. Al-Amuli, *Asrar Al-Balagha*.
7. *Al-Hikam Al-Qasira Al-Warida fi Nahj Al-Balagha*.
8. Ibn Qutaiba, *`Uyun Al-Akhbar*.
9. Al-Mubarrad, *Al-Kamil*.
10. Al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayan wa't-Tabyin*.

## Part One: Allah and the Life Transaction (Religion) of Islam

### Chapter 1: Allah

#### Oneness and Lordship

After completing the night prayer Imam `Ali would often say: ‘I bear witness that the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them are signs which point to You, and that they are proofs which testify to what You have commanded people to do. Everything that comes from You is a proof testifying to Your Lordship. I seek refuge in You from indicating other than You with my heart or my tongue or my hand. There is no god but You, the One, the Single, the Unique, the Eternal, and we are submitted to You.’<sup>1</sup>

Shall I not show you the fruit of the Garden? It is ‘*La ilaha illa'llah*’ (There is no god but Allah), provided that it is said with sincerity.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the *deen* is knowledge of Him. The perfection of knowledge of Him is affirmation of Him. The perfection of affirmation of Him is affirming His Oneness. The perfection of affirming His Oneness is being sincere towards Him. Whoever makes a comparison to Him has set up a second with Him. Whoever sets up a second with Him has divided Him. Whoever divides Him is ignorant of Him. Whoever tries to indicate Him has given Him limitations, and whoever gives Him limitations has rendered Him finite.<sup>2</sup>

He has no child in the sense that He gave birth to it, and He was not born, which would have given Him limitations. He is too majestic to have had any sons and too pure to have been in contact with women.<sup>2</sup>

He has no child, glory be to Him, so as to have a partner in His glory, and He was not born, so as to have become one who inherits. All praise belongs to Allah, Whose being was before the existence of the divine Seat, or the divine Throne, or the heavens or the earth, or *jinn* (invisible entities) or man. He cannot be conceived of by the imagination and He cannot be determined by

comprehension. He cannot be perceived by the senses and He cannot be compared with any person. He is One but not numerable and He is Eternal without end. He is the One Who supports without being supported.<sup>2</sup>

Praise belongs to Allah, for Whom one state does not take precedence over another so that He is the First before He is the Last, or so that He is the Outwardly Manifest before He is the Inwardly Hidden. All things to which oneness is ascribed are insignificant in relation to Him, and all things to which exaltedness is ascribed are low in relation to Him, and all things to which strength is ascribed are weak in relation to Him.<sup>2</sup>

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, Alone, without partner. He is the First and there is nothing before Him, and He is the Last and there is no end to Him. He has no partner who shares in bringing the marvels of creation into being. Creation was perfected by His command and submitted in obedience to Him and responded to His call.<sup>2</sup>

On hearing a man say ‘Surely we come from Allah and surely to Him we return’, Imam `Ali, peace be on him, said: ‘Our saying “Surely we come from Allah” is an affirmation to ourselves that He has dominion over us, and our saying “Surely to Him we return” is an affirmation to ourselves that we are mortal and perishing.’<sup>3</sup>

O Allah, just as You have protected my face (honor) from prostrating to other than You, so protect my face (honor) from asking [for anything] from other than You.<sup>1</sup>

O my God, may it be honor enough for me that You are my Lord, and may it be glory enough for me that I am Your slave. You are as I desire, so make me as You desire.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Attributes of Allah**

He is the One on Whom [descriptive] attributes do not impose limitations, [for] no definition of Him exists. He cannot be measured in time, and there is no fixed term appointed for Him. Perfect purity of devotion to Him is not to define His attributes, because every attribute testifies to the fact that it is not itself that it describes, and because everything described testifies to the fact that

it is not itself the attribute. Whoever defines the attributes of Allah, glory be to Him, has associated something with Him.<sup>2</sup>

He is Allah, the Clear Truth, truer and clearer than the eyes perceive. The intellects cannot reach Him by any definition, since that would be to compare Him; and the imagination cannot reach Him by any evaluation; since that would be to give Him a likeness. There is no beginning to His primacy and there is no end to His eternity. He is the First and the Eternal, and He is the Everlasting without end. Foreheads bow down before him and lips declare His Oneness. He gave all things limitations when He created them, so as to make it clear that He is not like them.<sup>1</sup>

The eyes cannot perceive Him with the sense of sight, but the heart can perceive Him through the realities of trust. He is close to all things without being associated with them. He is remote from them without being distanced from them. He speaks yet without speech. He wills yet without wanting. He creates yet without physical means. He is Subtle yet obscurity cannot be attributed to Him. He is Great yet aloofness cannot be attributed to Him. He is Seeing yet sensory perception cannot be attributed to Him. He is Compassionate but sentimentality cannot be attributed to Him.<sup>2</sup>

O Allah, You possess beautiful attributes, and many in number. If one reflects upon You, You are the best upon whom to reflect, and if one places hope in You, You are the best in whom to place hope.<sup>2</sup>

Blessed is Allah, the One Whom even the most far-reaching aspirations cannot reach, and Whom even the most swift of comprehension cannot attain. He is the First without any finality that terminates and the Last without any end that concludes.<sup>2</sup>

Time never changes for Him so as to cause a change in His state, and He is never in any particular place so as to entail His moving to another place. He knows of the secrets in the minds of the secretive, and the intimate meetings of those who meet behind closed doors, and the thoughts and opinions of those who speculate.<sup>2</sup>

Surely the wrongs that His slaves do by night and day are not hidden from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. He knows these things through His subtle awareness and encompasses them with His knowledge. Your limbs are His witnesses, your efforts are His army, your hidden thoughts are His eyes, and your times of seclusion are His clear seeing.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the First so that there is nothing before Him, and the Last so that there is nothing after Him, and the Outwardly Manifest so that there is nothing outside Him, and the Inwardly Hidden so that there is nothing inside Him. His knowledge penetrates the innermost hidden secrets and encompasses the mysteries of beliefs concealed in the heart.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Greatness of Allah**

Beware of comparison with the sublimeness of Allah in His greatness, and of simulation in respect of His might and power, for surely Allah abases everyone who is mighty and powerful, and humiliates everyone who is conceited.<sup>2</sup>

I attained realization of Allah, may He be glorified, by the dissolution of resolutions, and by the solution of complexities [untying knots].<sup>3</sup>

I am amazed at the one who has doubts about Allah, when the creation of Allah is there for him to see.<sup>3</sup>

It is amazing that anyone can go out into the garden to marvel at the power of Allah! Does not his contemplation of the One Who has this power distract him from contemplating what He does with His power?<sup>1</sup>

Just marvel at man: he sees by means of some gristle, and speaks by means of some flesh, and hears by means of a bone, and breathes by means of a perforation!<sup>3</sup>

### **Praise and Gratitude towards Allah**

Gratitude towards Allah and piety are shields which clarify speech.<sup>4</sup>

Surely Allah has blessed His slaves in accordance with His sovereignty, and He has made gratitude an obligation for them in accordance with their capability.<sup>1</sup>

If the most abundant of benefits reach you, then do not drive them away by your lack of gratitude.<sup>5</sup>

If a blessing descends on you, then make it last by being grateful<sup>1</sup>

Thank Allah for what He has guided you towards, and praise Allah for what He has tested you with.<sup>4</sup>

Gratitude is the adornment of the rich.<sup>4</sup>

The proper way to treat any blessing is to avoid whatever might destroy it.<sup>1</sup>

Surely Allah has a right over every blessing. Whoever fulfils it then He increases him in it, and whoever ignores it runs the risk of losing his blessing.<sup>3</sup>

Beware of being ungrateful for blessings, lest retribution be your rightful lot.<sup>4</sup>

Praise to Allah, the One Whose glorification is beyond all words and speech, and Whose blessings cannot be reckoned by those who count, and Whose prerogatives cannot be fully served by those who strive. He is the One Who cannot be perceived by the most far reaching yearnings, and Who cannot be comprehended by the wisest intellect. I praise Him, seeking the fulfillment of His blessings, and submitting to His eminence, and desiring to be held back from disobedience to Him, and asking for help from Him in my need so that He is enough for me.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the First before every other first, and the Last after every other last. With His primacy there cannot be any first before Him, and with His everlastingness there cannot be any last after Him. I testify that there is no god but Allah, witnessing thereby that what is secret corresponds to what is manifest, and that what is in the heart is on the tongue.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the One Who gives evidence of His existence through His creation, and Who by making His creation come into being indicates His eternity, and Who by the similarities in it indicates that He has no likeness.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, of Whom gnosis by contemplating His attributes is not possible, and Whose greatness cannot be grasped by the intellect, so that you have no access to the furthest extent of His dominion.<sup>2</sup>

Praise to Allah, the One from Whom no part of the heavens nor any part of the earth is hidden.<sup>2</sup>

We praise Him for all that has been, and we ask Him for help in our affair in all that will be. We ask Him to be forgiving with regard to our religious affairs, just as we ask Him for His forgiveness with regard to our bodily affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Among the noble qualities of the words ‘Al-hamdulillah’ (Praise be to Allah) is that Allah the Exalted has placed them at the opening of His Book, and He has made them the seal of the supplication of the people of the Garden by saying: ‘And the last of their supplication is “Truly all praise belongs to Allah the Lord of the worlds.”’<sup>2</sup>

### **The Decree and Destiny**

When Imam `Ali was asked about Destiny he replied: ‘It is a dark path, so do not follow it; it is a deep ocean, so do not enter it; it is the secret of Allah, so do not burden yourselves with it.’<sup>3</sup>

And He has prescribed for everything a measure, and for every measure an appointed time, and for every appointed time a written record.<sup>2</sup>

All affairs are subject to what has been decreed, so that even death is part of this arrangement.<sup>3</sup>

Once what has been decreed has set in, warning is of no avail.<sup>6</sup>

For every affair, there is an outcome, be it sweet or bitter.<sup>3</sup>

Surely with every person there are two angels guarding over him. When what has been decreed happens then they leave him alone with it: surely the appointed time is a protecting shield.<sup>3</sup>

### **Seeking Help from Allah and Relying on Him**

Do not ask from other than Allah, for surely if He gives to you it will free you from all want.<sup>1</sup>

No one has become affluent by Allah's grace but that others have become dependent upon him.<sup>1</sup>

Seek help from Allah, the Majestic and Mighty, concerning your affair, for surely He is the best of helpers.<sup>4</sup>

Moving a mountain would be easier than avoiding an approaching change of fortune, so seek help from Allah and be patient, for surely the earth belongs to Allah and whomever He wishes will inherit it.<sup>1</sup>

Do not put your hopes in other than your Lord, and have no fear except about your wrong actions.<sup>7</sup>

If you are able to act so that no one possessing favors and fortune comes between you and Allah, then do so.<sup>4</sup>

If you need something from Allah, may He be glorified, then begin by asking blessings on His Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and then make your request, for surely Allah is too generous not to be asked for two things without granting one request along with the other.<sup>3</sup>

Seek protection in Allah the High, and ask Him for good in your affairs, for surely He will not forsake the one who seeks protection, and He will not withhold from those who ask for good.<sup>1</sup>

Make your self turn to your God in all your affairs, for then you are giving it refuge in a fortified sanctuary and an impregnable stronghold.<sup>4</sup>

## **Chapter 2: Prophethood: The Message and Spiritual Succession**

### **The Message and Prophethood**

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, bearing witness with trust and certainty, and with sincerity and obedience, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, sent by Him and given knowledge of guidance by Him. When the open way of the life transaction (religion) had been effaced, He transmitted, and the revealed Book which was recorded, and shining light, and dazzling radiance, and the command which He openly declared.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Messengers and the Prophets**

He sent His Messengers amongst them, and from time to time He sent His Prophets to them, to call them to fulfill their natural contract with Him, and to remind them of His blessings, of which they had become oblivious, and to explain the message they were conveying to them, and to transmit the hidden treasures of the intellect to them, and to show them the signs of what has been decreed.<sup>2</sup>

Allah sent His Messengers with the particular guidance which He gave to each of them, and made them examples for His creation, lest the absence of any proof provided an excuse to ignore them. Thus He invited people to the Right Path by the language of Truth.<sup>2</sup>

And if you want, remember what I have often said about Moses (Musa), the word of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when he said: ‘My Lord, surely I am in need of whatever good You send down.’ By Allah, he would not ask for anything except bread to eat, for he used to eat the plants of the earth. The greenness of the plants could be seen through the transparency of the skin of his belly, due to his emaciation and the wasting-away of his flesh. And if you want, remember what I have said about Jesus (‘Isa), the son of Mary, peace be on him, for surely he would use a stone as a pillow, and wear coarse clothes, and eat coarse food. The seasoning of his food was hunger, and his light at night was the moon, and his shelter in the winter was the East

and the West of the earth, and his fruits and vegetables were the plants that the earth produces for animals. He had no wife that might be a trial for him, and no son that might cause him grief, and no wealth to distract him, and no desires to beguile him. His legs were his riding-beast, and his hands were his servant.<sup>2</sup>

Allah, may He be glorified, has never left His creation without a Prophet sent by Him, or a Book revealed by Him, or a clear proof of Him, or a true way to Him. They are the Messengers, who cannot be ignored just because they are few in number, or because there are many who deny them. The one who came before always named the one who came after him.<sup>2</sup>

He is the One who has filled the world with His creation, and has sent His Messengers to the *jinn* (invisible entities) and human beings, to remove its veils for them.<sup>2</sup>

### **Muhammad the Messenger of Allah**

To continue, surely Allah, may He be glorified, sent Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, when not one of the Arabs recited from a book or possessed prophethood or divine guidance. He fought along with those who obeyed him against those who refused to obey him. He led them to their means of salvation and made provision for them before the Hour which would come to them.<sup>2</sup>

He chose him from the family tree of the Prophets, from a niche of radiance, from the eminently sublime, from the centre of the earth's plain, from lights shining in the darkness, and from the springs of wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

When the conflict intensified, we would seek the protection of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, and there was not one of us who was closer to the enemy than him.<sup>8</sup>

O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, whenever those who remember him, and bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, whenever those who are forgetful forget to

remember him. O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as much as the number of Your words, and as much as the extent of Your knowledge, with blessings that have no end and no limit to their extent.<sup>1</sup>

Allah sent Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, as a witness, and a bringer of tidings, and a warner. He was the best of creation as a child, and the most noble in maturity, and the most apparent of those who are pure in nature, and the most generous of those who constantly request favors for others.<sup>1</sup>

I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger, and a blessing to His slaves. Whenever Allah caused people to split into two groups, He put him in the better of the two, the one in which there was no adulterer taking part, and in which no immoral man had room to move.<sup>2</sup>

My father and my mother be your ransom, O Messenger of Allah, with your death prophethood and prophecy and revelations from the heavens have most surely come to an end, as they have never come to an end through death before, for you directed your attention towards giving comfort and solace to everyone else, and you dealt with all of them so that all people became equal in your sight.<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad despised and disdained the world, and belittled it and derided it. He was aware that Allah had removed it from him deliberately, and made it freely available to others disdainfully. So he turned away from the world with his heart, and killed any reminder of it in his self. He longed for its adornment to be hidden from his sight, in case he put on its fine clothing, or hoped for importance in it. He conveyed the message of his Lord while asking for himself to be excused, and he gave good advice to his community while giving them warning. He called them to the Garden, giving them tidings about it, and he made them fear the Fire by cautioning them against it.<sup>2</sup>

Imam `Ali said, peace be on him, at the grave of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, as he was being buried: ‘Surely patience is beautiful except when being

away from you, and surely grief is ugly except when it is for you. Surely whoever is grief-stricken for you is exalted, and surely what was before you and after you is of no consequence.’<sup>8</sup>

### **The Imamate and Spiritual Succession**

I am a slave of Allah and a brother of the Messenger of Allah. No one will say this after me without being a liar.<sup>1</sup>

I am to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him, as the upper arm is to the shoulder, and as the forearm is to the upper arm, and as the hand is to the forearm. He looked after me when I was small, and was a brother to me when I was older, and surely he transmitted in trust to me what none of his other companions and the Family of his Household received. I will say something that I have not said to anyone before today: I once requested him to ask for forgiveness for me, so he said: ‘I will do so.’ Then he stood and prayed, as he held up his hands in supplication I listened to him and heard him saying: ‘O Allah, by `Ali’s claim with You, grant `Ali forgiveness.’ So I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, what is the meaning of this?’ And he replied: ‘Is there anyone more honored by Him than you? So I seek intercession with Him accordingly.’<sup>1</sup>

They, the Family of the Prophet, are the foundation of the life transaction (religion) and the pillars of certainty, to whom the deeply devoted and faithful followers pay their true allegiance. They in particular are rightly the owners of spiritual guardianship, and in them rest spiritual succession and inheritance. Now, this right has been returned to its people, and it has been given back to those from whom it was taken.<sup>1</sup>

Surely there is nothing that the Imam has to do except what he has been entrusted with by the command of his Lord: to deliver warnings, to strive to give good advice, to revive the lifestyle of the Prophet (*sunnah*), to inflict the prescribed punishments (*hudood*) on those who deserve them, and to distribute the share of wealth to those who are entitled to it.<sup>2</sup>

O people, surely I have given you the same warning as the Prophets gave to their respective peoples, and I have fulfilled the same duties as their spiritual successors did after them.<sup>2</sup>

[They said:] When news of the pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr at Saqifah after the death of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, reached the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him, he said: ‘What did the Helpers (*ansar*) say?’ They replied: ‘They said: “A leader (*amir*) from us and a leader from you.” ‘He said, peace be on him: ‘O people, surely the person who has the truest claim in this affair is the one who is the most upright, and who is the most knowledgeable about the command of Allah in it. If anyone tries to instigate sedition, he should be censured, and if he refuses to cease he should be fought.’<sup>2</sup>

‘By Allah, a certain person has put on the robes [of this affair], and surely he knows that my right to it is like the right of the axle to the grindstone. The flood pours down from me and no bird can rise up to me, so I have put on another robe, and I have turned away from it.’<sup>2</sup>

The Messenger of Allah passed away, may Allah bless him and his family, while his head was resting on my chest, with his breath flowing into the palm of my hand, which I then passed over my lace. I was entrusted with washing him, may Allah bless him and his family, and the angels helped me. There was a commotion in the house and the courtyards as one group of them descended and another group ascended, and where they met I heard them saying softly ‘Ameen’ uninterruptedly. They continued to bless him until we had buried him in his grave. Be sincere in your intentions in your struggle against your enemy, for by the One – and there is no god but Him – surely I am on the path of truth, and surely they are in the slipperiness of falsehood. I am indeed saying what you hear, and I seek the forgiveness of Allah for myself and for you.’<sup>2</sup>

By Allah, I had no desire to be the ruler (*khalifah*), and no wish to govern. However you called me to it and entrusted me with it, so when it came to me, I looked to the Book of Allah and what it prescribes for us, and how it commands us to govern, and I followed it. Whatever the Prophet did, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them peace, I have emulated him.’<sup>2</sup>

By the One Who splits the seed and creates the breeze, surely the untutored Prophet promised me: ‘Surely the Muslim Community (*ummah*) will be faithless towards you after me.’<sup>1</sup>

### **The Family of the Prophet**

Surely the likeness of the family of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, is that of the stars in the sky: when one star fades, another appears. And so Allah has perfected the creation through you, and has shown you what you hoped to see.<sup>2</sup>

They are the place of His mysteries, and the sanctuary of His command, and the storehouse of His knowledge, and the refuge of His judgment, and the caves of His scriptures, and the mountains of His life transaction (religion). By them the bent back of religion was straightened, and the trembling of its limbs was removed.<sup>2</sup>

We, the Family of the Prophet, have access to the gates of judgment and the radiance of the command. Surely the paths of the life transaction (religion) are one, and its ways are moderate. Whoever takes them will arrive at the truth and win the booty, and whoever avoids them will go astray and feel regret.<sup>2</sup>

‘So where are you going?’ and ‘How you turn away with your lying!’ The way signs have been set up and the signs are clear, and the light house has been raised up, so where is there for you to wander astray, and how can you err when the Family of your Prophet is amongst you! They are the guiding reins of truth, and the way signs of the life transaction (religion), and the tongues of truthfulness. So come to rest with them in the best of what has been revealed, the Qur’an, and come to drink from their source like the thirsty wanderer.<sup>2</sup>

Look to the Family of your Prophet, and behave like them, and follow in their footsteps, for they will never make you leave guidance, and they will never lead you back to destruction. If they remain in a place, then remain there with them, and if they set out, then set out with them. Do not overtake them and get lost, and do not fall behind them and perish.<sup>2</sup>

No one from this Muslim Community (*ummah*) can compare with the Family of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, and no one on whom similar blessings have been bestowed will ever be their equal.<sup>2</sup>

All the ill-feeling directed by the Quraysh at the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, has been displayed towards me, and it will continue to be shown towards my son after me.<sup>1</sup>

This is my hand – meaning Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah – and these are my eyes – meaning Hasan and Husayn – and man will always use his hand to shield his eyes.’ Imam `Ali said this to someone who said to him: ‘Surely you are exposing Muhammad to being killed, and casting him out to be sacrificed by the enemy, instead of his two brothers.’<sup>1</sup>

### **The Companions of Imam `Ali**

Is it not strange that Mu`awiya calls upon the coarse common people, who then follow him without good cause or reward, while I call upon you – and you have submitted to Islam and are the surviving people – to a good cause and some reward, and yet you disperse from me and dispute with me. You are for Allah! Is there no life transaction (religion) that unites you, no feeling of dignity that strengthens you?<sup>1</sup>

O people, with selves that disagree and hearts that differ. What is present is their bodies and what is absent are their intellects. I turn you towards the truth, and yet you flee from it.<sup>1</sup>

O people, whose bodies are present and whose intellects are absent, whose desires differ and whose leaders are tested through them: your master obeys Allah and you disobey him, and the master of the people of Sham disobeys Allah and they obey him.<sup>1</sup>

I have called you to the struggle (*jihad*) but you have run away, and I have asked you to listen but you have not heard. I have invited you to the truth in private and in public but you have not responded, and I have given you good advice but you have not accepted it. Are those who witness the same as those who are absent? Are slaves the same as masters?<sup>1</sup>

‘What harm has been done to our brothers whose blood was shed at *Siffin*? Would they prefer to be alive today, choking with anguish and drinking bitterness? By Allah, they have met with

Allah, Who has granted them their reward in full, and brought them to the abode of safety after their fear. Where are my brothers who rode the path leading to the truth? Where is Ammar? And where is Ibn at-Tayhan? And where is Dhu Shahadatayn? And where are their like from amongst their brothers who made a pact with death and whose heads were sent to the wicked?’ Then Imam `Ali wept and said: ‘Alas for my brothers who recited the Qur’an and judged by it, and who reflected on what is obligatory and established it. They revived the lifestyle of the Prophet (*sunnah*) and put an end to heresy. They were called to the struggle (*jihad*) and they responded, and they trusted their leader and followed him.’<sup>1</sup>

When he heard the saying of the Khawarij, ‘There is no rule but Allah’s’, he said, peace be on him: ‘These are true words being used to express a falsehood. Yes, surely there is no rule but Allah’s, but they also say that there is no command but Allah’s, and surely the people must have a leader (*amir*), be he good or evil, under whose command the believer (*mu’min*) can work and the unbeliever (*kafir*) can be at ease.’<sup>2</sup>

O you who look like men but are not men, with the minds of children and the intellects of bridesmaids, I wish I had not seen you and had not known you at all; by Allah, this would cause regret and occasion grief, may Allah make you perish! You have filled my heart with purulence and overwhelmed my breast with anger.<sup>2</sup>

If I command you to go against them when the days are hot, you say: ‘This is the hottest part of the summer; give us a respite until we are relieved of the heat.’ If I command you to go against them in the winter, you say: ‘This is a time of intense cold; give us a respite until the cold has left us.’ All this is merely fleeing from the heat and the cold. So if you flee from the heat and the cold like this, then by Allah, how much more you will flee from the sword!<sup>2</sup>

Imam `Ali said, peace be on him, when news of Muhammad bin Abi Bakr’s death reached him: ‘Surely our grief for him is as great as their joy at his fate. Surely they are rid of someone we love.’<sup>3</sup>

Talking about Malik al-Ashtar, he said: ‘To continue, I have sent you a slave . . .’<sup>3</sup>

One of Imam `Ali's sayings is: 'You are the princes of the Arabs, and the crowns of nobility, and the leaders in eminence, and the exalted peaks.'<sup>1</sup>

You are the supporters of the truth, and brothers in the life transaction (religion) of Islam, and a shelter on the Day of Fear, and close friends – unlike other people.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Knowledge of the Imam**

Ask me questions before you lose me, for by the One in Whose hand my self is, you will not ask me about anything between your time and the Final Hour, or about any group that guides a hundred people or leads a hundred people astray, but that I will tell you their spokesman, and their leader, and their commander, and where their stables are, and where they rest on their journeys, and who of them will be killed in battle, and who of them will die a natural death. And if you lose me, and a hateful matter befalls you, or a difficult affair arises, then many of those who ask will leave the path, and many of those who are asked will be fainthearted and fail. So it will be, when your battles diminish and lessen, and the world becomes a very constricted place for you; for you will live long days of trial, until Allah gives victory to the righteous amongst those of you who still remain.<sup>2</sup>

O people, ask me questions before you lose me, for surely I know more about the ways of the heavens than I do about the ways of the earth – before war tramples you underfoot while still tethered, and destroys the dreams of its people.<sup>2</sup>

Where are those who assert that they and not I are firmly established in knowledge? They are liars and do us an injustice. Surely Allah has raised us up and has put them down, and has given to us and has withheld from them, and has made us enter and has turned them out. It is through us that guidance should be sought, and it is by us that the blind may seek light.<sup>2</sup>

Even if the veil were lifted for me, this would not increase my certainty.<sup>5</sup>

If I speak then they say: ‘He is greedy for power.’ If I am silent then they say: ‘He is anxious about death; come away with you after such lengthy discussions!’ By Allah, the son of Abu Talib is more intimate with death than a baby with its mother’s breast. Surely I have penetrated the most secret knowledge, and if I were to reveal it to you, you would tremble like quivering ropes in a deep well!<sup>5</sup>

When asked about the distance between the East and the West, Imam `Ali replied: ‘It is as far as the sun travels in a day.’<sup>3</sup>

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