



Selected Sayings of
IMAM ALI
IBN ABU TALIB (as)

From the Recently Edited
NAH'JUL-BALAGHA

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302. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said the following at the grave of the Messenger of Allah (?) at the time of his burial: "Certainly endurance is good except in your regard, O Messenger of Allah! Fretting is bad except over you. And the affliction about you is great while every other affliction before or after it is petty."

303. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Do not associate with a fool because he will beautify his actions for you and wish that you, too, will be like him." ¹

304. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) was asked once about the distance between the East and the West. He replied as follows: "A day's trip for the sun."

305. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Your friends are three and your enemies are (also) three: Your friends are: your friend, your friend's friend and your enemy's enemy. And your enemies are: your enemy, your friend's enemy and your enemy's friend."

¹A fool considers his ways of action to be the most appropriate, and he wants his friend also to adopt the same ways, so that he should become as he himself is. This does not mean that he desires that his friend should become as foolish as he is. He cannot be thinking like this because he does not consider himself to be a fool. If he, in fact, considers himself to be foolish, then he will not have been as such! Rather, he considers his ways of action as being correct and desires his friend to be equally "wise". That is why he presents his view before him in an embellished way, desiring him to act on it. It is possible that his friend may be influenced by his advice, so he treads the same path. Therefore, it is better to keep away from him.

306. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) saw a man busy scheming against his enemy with what was harmful to his own self as well, so he said: "You are like one who pierces a spear through himself in order to kill the person sitting behind him!"

307. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "How many the objectives of lessons are, yet how few those who take lessons are!"²

308. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Whoever goes too far in quarreling is a sinner, but if one falls short, he becomes oppressed, and it is difficult for a quarrelsome person to fear Allah."

309. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "I am not worried about a fault after which I get time to offer prayers in two units (rek`as) and beg safety from the wrath of Allah."

310. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) was asked once: "How will Allah conduct the accounting of all persons despite their large number?" He replied: "Just as He provides them livelihood despite their large number." Then it was said to Him: "How will He conduct their accounting without their seeing Him?" He replied: "Just as He provides them with livelihood although they do not see Him."

²If the vicissitudes and changes of this world are observed, the circumstances and conditions of the people attended to, and their histories noted, then from every corner edifying stories can be heard. Such stories are fully capable of arousing the mind out of its forgetful slumber or providing instruction and imparting teaching and clear mindedness. Thus, the creation and dissolution of everything in this world, the blossoming of flowers and their withering, the thriving of vegetation and its withering away and the subjugation of every atom to change provide such instructive lessons that they are enough to curb any hope of attaining eternity in this deceitful life as long as the eyes and ears are not closed to these instructive events.

A Persian couplet says:

*The world is full of stories of folk gone by,
But unless one lends an ear to it, its call is feeble.*

311. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Your messenger is the interpreter of your intelligence, while your letter is more eloquent in expressing your true self."

312. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "The person who is afflicted with hardship is not in a greater need for praying than the one who has been spared affliction but is not immune to it."

313. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "People are the progeny of the world and none can be blamed for loving the mother."

314. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "The destitute person is a messenger of Allah. Whoever denies him denies Allah, and whoever gives him gives Allah."

315. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "A self-respecting man never commits adultery."

316. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "The fixed limit of life is enough to remain watchful."³

317. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "A man can sleep over the death of his child but cannot sleep over the loss of his property."

³The idea here is that lightning may flash a hundred thousand times, tempests may rise, earth may quake and mountains may collide with each other. But as long as the fixed period of life has yet to run its course, no occurrence can cause any harm, nor the typhoon of death may put the flame of life out. There is a fixed hour for death, and nothing can cut it short before that time. Thus, death itself is the watchman and guardian of life. A poet has said, "What is known as death is (actually) the watchman over life."

Sayyid ar-Radi says: "This statement means that a man remains patient about the death of his children but does not do so at the loss of his property."

318. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Mutual affection between fathers creates a relationship between sons. Relationship is more in need of affection than affection is for a relationship."

319. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Be afraid of the thoughts of believers because Allah, the most Exalted One, has placed the truth on their tongues."

320. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "The belief of a person cannot be regarded as true unless his trust in what is with Allah is greater than his trust in what he himself has."

321. When Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) came to Basra, he sent Anas ibn Malik to Talhah and az-Zubayr to remind them of what he (Anas) himself had heard the Messenger of Allah (?) saying concerning them both, but he avoided doing so. When he came back to Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?), he said that he had forgotten that matter. Thereupon, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "If you are speaking a lie, Allah will afflict you with white spots (leucoderm) which even a turban may not cover." And so it was.

Sayyid ar-Radi says: "White spot means leucoderma. After sometime this disease did take place to Anas's face, so much so that he was never seen with his face uncovered."⁴

⁴The occasion and circumstances surrounding this statement, as related by Sayyid arRadi, were as follows: During the Battle of Jamal (Camel), Imam Ali ibn AbuTalib () ? sent Anas ibn Malik to Talhah and az-Zubayr so that he should remind them of the Prophet's statement to the following effect: "You both will fight Ali and will commit excess in his regard." Anas ibn Malik went back stating that he had forgotten to mention it. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) then uttered these words about him. However, it is said that Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) made this statement when he wanted Anas to confirm the Prophet's saying: "Whoever accepts me as his master, Ali is his master. O Allah! Love whoever loves Ali and hate whoever hates Ali." Consequently, numerous persons have testified to this *hadith*,

but Anas kept quiet [and did not narrate it]... Then, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said to him, "You, too, were present at Ghadir Khumm. What is keeping you silent on this occasion?" Anas said, "I have grown old and my memory does not serve me well." Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) made this statement then, as we read in these references: *Ansab al-Ashraf* of al-Baladhiri where the biography of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) is discussed on pp. 156 - 57; *Al-A`laq anNafisah* of Ibn Rustah, p. 221; *Lata'if al-Ma'arif* of ath-Tha`alibi, pp. 105 - 106; *Muhadarat al-Udaba'* of ar-Raghib, Vol. 3, p. 293; Ibn Abul-Hadid, Vol. 4, p. 74; *Arjah al-Matalib* of Shaikh `Ubaydullah al-Hanafi, pp. 578 - 80. In this regard, Ibn Qutaybah (Abdullah ibn Muslim ad-Dainuri [231 - 276 A.D./828 - 889 A.D.]) writes the following: "People have related that Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) asked Anas ibn Malik about the Prophet's saying: `O Allah! Love whoever loves Ali and hate whoever hates Ali,' and he replied, 'If you are a liar, may Allah afflict you with white spots which even a turban may not cover,'" as recorded on p. 580 of *Al-Ma`arif*. Ibn AbulHadid has also supported this view. Denying his knowledge of the incident mentioned by Sayyid ar-Radi, he writes the following: "The incident mentioned by Sayyid ar-Radi that Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) sent Anas ibn Malik to Talhah and az-Zubayr is an unrecorded event. If Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) had sent him particularly to remind them of the Prophet's saying concerning them, then he could hardly have come back and said that he had forgotten it because when he left Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) and went to those two individuals, he should have admitted and remembered the saying; therefore, how could he, on his return after an hour or a day, plead that he had forgotten it and deny it? This is something which cannot happen," as stated on pp. 217 - 18, Vol. 19 of *Sharh Nahjul-Balagha*.

322. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Sometimes the hearts advance [towards their Creator] and sometimes they retreat. When they advance, get them to perform the optional [acts of worship] (as well). But when they retreat, keep them confined to only what is obligatory."

323. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "The Qur'an contains news about the past, predictions about the future and commandments for the present."

324. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "Throw a stone in return from where one comes to you because evil can be met only with evil."

325. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said to his secretary `Ubaydullah ibn Abu Rafi`: "Put a cotton flake in the ink pot, keep the nib of your pen long, leave some space between the lines and close up the letters because this is good for the beauty of the writing."

326. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said: "I am the ya`sub (leader) of the believers, while wealth is the leader of the wicked."

Sayyid ar-Radi says: "It means that the believers follow me while the wicked follow the path that take them to wealth and riches just as the bees follow their ya`sub, leader."⁵

327. Some Jews said to Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?): "You did not bury your Prophet when you picked up differences about him." It is then that Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) replied thus: "We did not differ about him; we differed after him (i.e. about his succession). You had not dried up your feet yet, having come out of the river, when you began asking your Prophet: 'Make for us a god as they have gods of their own.' Said he;

⁵We have already explained the meaning of the word "ya`sub" in the footnote of saying No. 262 above and pointed out that this title was given to Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) by the Holy Prophet himself. We quoted some of his different statements on this subject. Here we quote one of the traditions in which this word appears: It is narrated by Abu Layla al-Ghifari, Abu Dharr, Salman, Ibn Abbas and Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman. It states that the Holy Prophet used to say: "Soon after my death, there will be discord. When it occurs, uphold Ali ibn Abu Talib since he will be the first person to see me and the first to shake hands with me on the Day of Judgment. He is the greatest man

of the truth (*as-siddiq al-akbar*), and he is the one who discriminates between right and wrong (*faruq*) from among this umma, and he is the *ya`sub* (leader) of the believers while wealth is the *ya`sub* of the hypocrites. In addition to the references given in the above-mentioned footnote, see also: *Fayd al-Qadir*, Vol. 4, p. 358; *Kanzul-`Ummal*, Vol. 12, p. 214; *Muntakhab al-Kanz*, Vol. 5, p. 33; Ibn Abul-Hadid, Vol. 13, p. 228; *Tarikh* of Ibn `Asakir (where the biography of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) is discussed), Vol. 1, pp. 74 - 78; *As-Sirah al-Halabiyyah*, Vol. 1, p. 380; *Thakha'ir al-'Uqba*, p. 56 and *Yanabi' al-Mawaddah*, p. 62, 82, 201 and 251.

'Verily you are a people behaving ignorantly' (Qur'an, 7: 138)."⁶

328. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) was asked: "With what did you overpower your adversaries?" He answered: "Whenever I confronted one of them, he helped me against himself."

Sayyid ar-Radi says: "Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) is pointing out his striking of awe in the hearts."⁷

329. Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?) said to his son Muhammed ibn al-Hanafiyya: "O my son! I fear lest destitution overtakes you. So, you should seek Allah's protection from it because destitution is [an indication of] a deficiency in religious beliefs, perplexity of the mind, and it is conducive to hatred of obstinate people."

⁶The purpose behind this criticism by the Jews was to show that the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammed (?) was a controversial matter. But Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib () ? clarified the fact that the exact focus of controversy was not about Prophethood but about his succession and vicegerency. Then, commenting on the status of the Jews, he pointed out that those who were today criticizing the differences among Muslims after the Prophet were of the same kind as those who had begun to waver about belief in the Unity of Allah even during the lifetime of Moses (?). Thus, on becoming free of the slavery of the Egyptians, they reached the other side of the river and saw

the figure of a calf in a temple in the Sinai desert. It was then that they asked Moses () ? to make a similar figure for them to worship, whereupon Moses rebuked them for being still as stubborn as they were in Egypt. This meant that people who were so immersed in their desire for idol-worship that even after being initiated into the belief in the Unity of Allah, they still became restless on seeing an idol and made the request for a similar idol to be made for them. Such people had no right to criticize any differences among the Muslims.

⁷The man who is over-awed by his adversary is sure to be defeated because in facing a foe, physical prowess is not enough but steadfastness of heart and strength of courage are also necessary. When the adversary loses courage and feels sure that he will be defeated, he will certainly then be defeated. This is what happened to the adversary of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (?); he was so affected by his acknowledged reputation that he was sure of his own death, in consequence of which his spiritual power and self-confidence came to an end and eventually this mental state dragged him to his own death.

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IGNORANCE IS A CHOICE

*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)