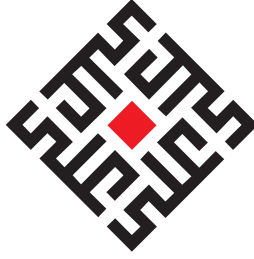


Ḥazrat ʿAlī^(c)



Rashida Noormohmed-Hunzai



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by

Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai

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Important Note

The following symbols have been used in the essay with the names of holy personalities. They have been used once only when the name appears the first time.

^(s) = *ṣalla'llāhu ʿalayhi wa-ālihi wa-sallam* (May Allah send blessings and peace through him and his progeny).

^(c) = *ʿalayhi's-salām/ʿalayha's-salām* (May peace be through him/her).

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The Family of Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat ʿAli

Introduction

Hundreds of books, in many different languages, have been written about Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c), the first Imam of the sixth cycle, the Cycle of Prophet Muḥammad^(s), the Seal of Prophets.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's history is inextricably woven with that of the mission of Islam. He was the cousin, son-in-law, deputy (*khalīfah*), minister (*wazīr*) and chief marshal of our holy Prophet Muḥammad. He was designated legatee (*waṣī* or *asās*), by the holy Prophet at the historic events of *Daʿwat-i ʿAshīrah* and *Ghadīr-i Khumm*. He was therefore, the *Asās* or Foundation Imam, of an unbroken chain of Imams.

It is clear from the above that Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c) lived during a period of history, by turns turbulent, challenging and dangerous. This fact alone makes it difficult to write about Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c). However, there are other factors which compound the difficulty of writing about him. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c)'s personality comprised such seemingly opposite characteristics, that many a writer and historian has failed to grasp his true reality. For example, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c) was the bravest and invincible soldier of Islam, yet he displayed the greatest compassion for his enemies, even in the thick of battle. Many examples are recorded of how he spared the lives of his enemies.

When Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c) emigrated from Makkah to Madīnah, he found himself in greatly straightened circumstances, having left all his possessions behind. However, as Islam spread and the Muslims won battle after battle, their wealth also increased. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c) became the worldly Caliph of Islam and as such, the head of a wealthy state. Nevertheless, he continued to live the simple life of a *darwish*;¹ he was completely unaffected in his person or his behaviour by the change in his material circumstances. One of his famous sayings is: “*Kun fi'd-dunyā wa lā li'd-dunyā*, i.e., Be in the

world but not for the sake of the world.”

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c), in addition to his supremacy on the battlefield, was the acknowledged master of the pen and the tongue. None could surpass him in combat, in writing or in oratory. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c)'s comprehensive qualities in each of which he was at the peak of excellence makes it extremely difficult for historians to write a balanced history about him. Many have often resorted to miracles to provide an explanation for his supremacy in every conceivable field.

This paper is written with a number of important premises in mind.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c)'s life is portrayed with due regard to balance. The first section describes his unique relationship with the holy Prophet Muḥammad, culminating in the momentous event of Ghadīr-i Khumm. He is next shown as the foremost soldier of Islam, about whom the angels recited ‘*Lā fatā illā ʿAlī, lā sayfa illā Zulfāqār*’, and the exact meaning of this phrase is discussed. In later sections, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c)'s knowledge of the Qurʾān, his contribution to Arabic calligraphy and grammar, his supremacy as an orator and writer, his unsurpassed skill as a Judge, his far-reaching social reforms, are all discussed in detail.

Secondly, wherever possible, the information is culled from primary sources. For example, much use has been made of *Nahju'l-Balāghah*, which is a collection of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c)'s own sermons, letters and maxims. However, since the two translations used were not always accurate, the quotations and excerpts used have been specially translated for this paper.

Secondary sources have been used selectively and as far as possible both Sunni and Shia sources have been quoted. Orientalist sources, however, have been sparingly used, for instance, only in the section on ‘Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c) and *Taşawwuf*’, ‘Ghadīr-i Khumm’, ‘Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c) as a Calligrapher’ and ‘Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī^(c)'s Titles’. In the last section, it is demonstrated how misleading some of the sources can be.

Finally, this paper has been written primarily for the voluntary teachers of religious education and parents who are the initial teachers. Its main objective is to form a solid foundation of information about Ḥazrat ʿAlī^(c), based on which, they can convey a balanced portrait of Ḥazrat ʿAlī^(c) to their students, a portrait which can inspire awe and admiration and at the same time a deep love for him and his progeny.

PART 1

The Special Bond Between Prophet Muḥammad and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī

Introduction

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was born on the 13th day of the month of Rajab, in the year (approximately) 601 C.E – about thirty years after the birth of Prophet Muḥammad.

It is said that Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah bint Asad^(c), Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s mother, was visiting the Kaʿbah. Since it was the month of Rajab, there were many pilgrims from all over the Arabian Peninsula, also visiting the Sacred House. However, there was an important difference between Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah bint Asad and the other Arabs. Whereas most of the others were pagans and idol worshippers, the members of the house of the Prophet² were believers in one God.³ Being descended from Ḥaẓrat Ismāʿīl^(c), they were worshippers of one God, as substantiated by the following verses of the Qurʾān:

“And afterward We inspired you (Muḥammad, saying): Follow the religion of Abraham, as one by nature upright (*ḥanīf*). He was not of the idolaters”. (16:123)

“And strive for Allah with the endeavour which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours).

He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Scripture) that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that you may be witnesses against humankind. So establish worship, pay the religious due, and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protecting Friend. A blessed Advocate and a blessed Helper!” (22:78).

Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah bint Asad, started her birth pains in the Kaʿbah.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī was, therefore, born in the holy precincts of the Sacred House. It is well-known that he alone was born in the Ka'bah and martyred in a masjid in Kufah.

His mother, in the absence of his father, Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib^(c), named him “Asad” and “Haydar”, both of which mean “Lion”. Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib, on his return to Makkah, called him “Zayd”. However, when the Prophet returned to Makkah, he gave him the name “°Alī” which means ‘high’, ‘lofty’, ‘sublime’, etc.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī's childhood

It is recorded by several historians that in the early years of Ḥaẓrat °Alī's childhood, Makkah suffered a severe famine. Prophet Muḥammad and his uncle Ḥaẓrat °Abbās were men of means. They each took a child from Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib to ease his situation. Ḥaẓrat °Abbās took Ḥaẓrat Ja'far. Prophet Muḥammad took Ḥaẓrat °Alī into his family.

Other reasons are also given for Ḥaẓrat °Alī's adoption by Prophet Muḥammad. It is said that Prophet Muḥammad showed his gratitude for his own adoption by Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Abū Ṭālib, when he was orphaned as a child and his grandfather, Mawlānā °Abd al-Muṭṭalib^(c) also died. It is even suggested that the Prophet had lost both of his baby sons, Qāsim and °Abdu'llāh and therefore he took Ḥaẓrat °Alī in as a son.

It could be that in addition to the above reasons, Prophet Muḥammad adopted Ḥaẓrat °Alī at such a tender age in order to prepare him for the great destiny which awaited him. Whatever the real reason, the upbringing of Ḥaẓrat °Alī under the constant and loving supervision of Prophet Muḥammad ensured that from the very beginning of his life, Ḥaẓrat °Alī absorbed the high qualities and noble virtues of the Prophet.

In the words of one writer; ‘He (Prophet Muḥammad) lived in the midst of his society as an island of knowledge, wisdom and

civilisation surrounded by an ocean of barbarism and ignorance'.⁴ Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī from his very childhood benefitted from this island of knowledge, wisdom and civilisation of the Prophet. In his own words in *Nahju'l-Balāghah*, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī says:

“And he (the Messenger of God) never found an untruth in my words or any wrong in my deeds. God had attached to him (Muḥammad) from the time of his weaning the greatest of His angels to walk him through the path of virtue and to teach him the highest ethics of the world... and I was following him as a baby following his mother. He used to raise for me every day a banner of his ethics and command me to follow it. He used to seclude himself every year in Hira and I was with him when no one else could see him. And during the early period of Islam, there was only one house sheltering the Messenger of God, Khadijah, and myself as their third, seeing the light of revelation and smelling the fragrance of Prophethood.”

First to Accept Islam

Prophet Muḥammad started to receive revelation around the age of forty. At that time, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was a boy of around ten years.

A great deal of controversy exists about who was the first to accept the Prophet's Divine mission. A compromise solution (put forward by some historians) is that Ḥaẓrat Khadijah^(c) was the first woman to accept Islam, Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr the first man and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, the first boy to do so. However, in the light of the description of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's childhood (see section above), during which he lived and breathed Islam with the Prophet, the question of whether he accepted Islam first becomes irrelevant.

Further, as we have seen in the section above about his mother that there were in Arabia well established monotheists called '*ḥanīfs*' who were following the religion of their forefathers, Ḥaẓrat Abraham^(c) and his son Ḥaẓrat Ismāʿīl^(c) whose line was continuing

in the house of the Prophet's grandfather, Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā °Abd al-Muṭṭalib^(c). In other words, Ḥaẓrat Khadijah and Ḥaẓrat °Alī's accepting the prophethood of Ḥaẓrat Muḥammad was not in the sense of converting from idolatry or any other faith, but in the sense of confirming the Prophet's exalted status and supporting his mission.⁵

Ḥaẓrat °Alī's declaration on the occasion of inviting the nearest kin: *Da°wat-i Ashīrah*

Three years after the Prophet's revelations started, he received the following command from Allah:

“And warn your nearest kin, And lower your wing (in kindness) unto those believers who follow you”. (26:214–215)

In accordance with this command, the Prophet invited the descendants of Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā °Abd al-Muṭṭalib (some forty men) to a meal. After they had eaten, the Prophet addressed them, telling them of his sacred mission and inviting them to accept Islam. He ended by saying:

“O Children of °Abd al-Muṭṭalib (*Banū °Abd al-Muṭṭalib*), follow me and you will be the kings and rulers of the earth. God has surely never sent a Prophet without appointing his vicegerent (*waṣī*), minister (*wazīr*), heir (*wāris*), brother (*akh*) and *walī* (legatee). Who among you then will be my vicegerent, my heir, brother and minister?”

The kinsmen present kept silent. The Prophet then asked this question to each of them individually, but there was no response. Only Ḥaẓrat °Alī, at this time, no more than about thirteen years old and the youngest among them, was left. The Prophet then asked him and he replied: ‘O Messenger of God, I will be’. The Prophet said: ‘Yes, O °Alī, you will be’.⁶

Ḥazrat ʿAlī fulfils his Promise

Ḥazrat ʿAlī's words: 'O Messenger of God, I will be' so confidently pronounced at this tender age, were shortly seen to be true. Soon after the family meal, the Prophet started to proclaim his message publicly. This aroused the anger of the powerful clans of Makkah. For the next few years, until the Hijrah, this anger was expressed in diverse ways – ranging from young Makkan boys throwing stones and spitting at the Prophet, to economic and social ostracism by the Makkan clans, finally ending in a plot to assassinate the Prophet. During all these trials and tribulations, Ḥazrat ʿAlī was at the Prophet's side. As a teenage boy, he accompanied the Prophet around the streets of Makkah. So well known was his reputation and zeal for defending the Messenger of Allah that no Makkan urchin dared to throw a stone at Prophet Muḥammad when Ḥazrat ʿAlī was at his side.

The night of the Prophet's Hijrah

The years passed. In spite of persecution and opposition, Prophet Muḥammad continued to preach Islam openly and fearlessly. As the number of converts to Islam increased steadily, so too did the anger and the enmity of the Quraysh, the most powerful tribe in Makkah. During these first troubled years some members of the two major tribes of Yathrib, Aws and Khazraj had accepted Islam on the Prophet's hand, and he had been assured of a cordial welcome to that city. In order to safeguard the lives of his followers, the Prophet had encouraged them to emigrate to Madīnah in small groups.

This period of uncertainty and outright persecution culminated in a plot to assassinate Prophet Muḥammad. One member of each clan of Makkah joined the conspiracy to kill the Prophet. It was decided to carry out this murder quite openly since every clan was involved in it. The Prophet knew of this plot against his life and he decided to leave Makkah on the very night designated for his death. However, in order to foil his enemies (who had already surrounded his house), the Prophet asked Ḥazrat ʿAlī to cover

himself with his usual coverlet and to lie in his bed. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's foremost concern was the safety of the holy Prophet. Without the slightest hesitation, he took the Prophet's place in his bed. He was completely unperturbed about facing the anger and frustration of the plotters when they discovered in the morning that the Prophet had eluded them. All historians agree that the selfless service which Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī rendered to the Prophet and the cause of Islam on that particular night has no equal. It is said that the following verse of the holy Qurʾān, refers specifically to this sacrifice of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī:

“And of humankind is he who would sell himself, seeking the pleasure of Allah, and Allah has compassion on (His) bondmen”. (2:207)

On this same occasion, Prophet Muḥammad had charged Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī with another responsibility. Prophet Muḥammad, known as *al-Amīn* (the most trustworthy man) in Makkah was entrusted with the custody of the valuables of a number of Makkans. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī discharged the duty of returning the possessions of the various Makkans over the next three days. When he finished this task, he escorted several women of the Prophet's household to join the Prophet in Madīnah.

The First Year in Madīnah

The arrival of Prophet Muḥammad with the small band of Muslims in Yathrib was to be the turning point in the history of Islam. To mark this momentous occasion the city of Yathrib was re-named *Madinatu'n-Nabī* (the city of the Prophet).

It was here in Madīnah that Prophet Muḥammad was able to put into practice the tenets of Islam, unhindered by the enmity and opposition of the pagans of Makkah. One of his first public actions was to declare a bond of brotherhood between members of the *muhājirūn* (emigrants) and the *anṣār* (helpers i.e., Madīnans). This was a revolutionary step, since it replaced the age-old ties of blood kinship and clan loyalties with the Islamic bond of spiritual

brotherhood.

The *muhājirūn* (emigrants) had left Makkah in unhappy circumstances. Leaving behind all their material possessions, they had chosen to follow the Prophet and the religion of Islam. By designating one member of the emigrants as a brother to one Madīnan, the Prophet also ensured that the young Muslim community would demonstrate practically a spirit of sharing and co-operation. During the ceremony of assigning brothers between the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār*, it is reported that at the end only Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī remained. At this time, the Prophet said to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī:

‘You are my brother in this world and in the Hereafter’.

This famous episode is recorded by all historians of Islamic history. There are some interesting points to consider in it. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was already related by blood to Prophet Muḥammad, since he was his first cousin. He was also thirty years younger than the Prophet. What did this ‘brotherhood’ imply? It was a re-affirmation of the Prophet’s earlier statement in Makkah on the occasion of inviting the nearest kin, as well as an indication to the spiritual relationship between him and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, and an echo of another famous *ḥadis*:

‘I am from ʿAlī and ʿAlī is from me’.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s marriage to Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’^(c)

The marriage of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah, the only daughter of the Prophet took place in the second year of the Hijrah. A number of the outstanding companions of the Prophet, some rich citizens of Madīnah, as well as many mighty chiefs of Arab clans had tried to woo the hand of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. The Prophet had refused all their offers. However, when Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī declared his intention, the Prophet readily agreed. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah were married at a simple ceremony and she moved to his house after the Battle of Badr. In the two succeeding years, she bore two sons, Ḥaẓrat Ḥaṣan^(c) and Ḥaẓrat Ḥusayn^(c) about whom the famous *ḥadis* of the Prophet is: ‘Ḥaṣan and Ḥusayn are the leaders of the youth

of Paradise’.

History books abound in the descriptions of the exemplary life that Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī, Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah and their children led. Even though Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī was the ‘brother’ and son-in-law of the Prophet, and the outstanding hero of the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khaybar and Ḥunayn, their daily life consisted of hard work and spartan simplicity. In the context of the straightened circumstances of the early years in Madīnah, their generosity to the poor and needy is legend. It is well-known that the following verses of the holy Qur’ān are a direct reference to the incomparable self-sacrifice of Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī’s family:

“Lo! The righteous shall drink of a cup whereof the mixture is the water of Kāfūr, a spring wherefrom the (honoured) servants of Allah drink, making it gush forth abundantly, (because) they perform the vow and fear a day whereof the evil is wide-spreading, and feed with food the needy wretch, the orphan and the prisoner, for love of Him, (saying): We feed you, for the sake of Allah only. We wish for no reward nor thanks from you”. (76:5-9)

The Debate with the Christians of Najrān

Najrān was an important centre of Christianity in Yaman. In the ninth year after the Hijrah, a learned delegation from there arrived in Madīnah to discuss and debate with the Prophet about Islam and the status of Jesus. The Prophet conducted a dialogue with them however the Christians were adamant about Jesus being the son of God. At this time the following verse of the Qur’ān was revealed to him:

“And whoso disputes with you concerning him, after the knowledge which has come unto you, say (unto him): Come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then we will pray humbly (to our Lord) and (solemnly) invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie.” (3:61)

This type of invocation is called ‘*Mubāhalah*’ (imprecation) in Arabic and the Prophet, in compliance with the command of Allah revealed to him, summoned Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah, Ḥaẓrat Ḥaṣan and Ḥaẓrat Ḥusayn and gathered them under his cloak. Ḥaẓrat Ḥaṣan and Ḥaẓrat Ḥusayn represented ‘our sons’, Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah, ‘our women’ and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Prophet Muḥammad ‘ourselves’. The choice of personalities in this event is highly significant. Prophet Muḥammad did not include any of his wives or other members of his family. The inclusion of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī in the category of ‘ourselves’ shows the special place he had in the Prophet’s esteem. This historical event also confirms that the holy Prophet had two households: the physical *ahlu’l-bayt* which comprised his wives and the spiritual *ahlu’l-bayt*, known as the *Baytu’n-nubuwwat wa’l-wahy* (the House of Prophethood and inspiration). The spiritual *ahlu’l-bayt* are also called the *Panj tan-i pāk* or the five holy personalities.

When the Christians of Najrān saw that the Prophet had gathered together those most near and dear to him, they lost their confidence and declined to participate in the ‘*Mubāhalah*’. They chose instead to sign a treaty and pay the *jizyah* (poll tax).⁷

The expedition to Tabūk and the appointment of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to deputise for the Prophet in Madīnah

In the year 630 AD, the Prophet mounted a major military expedition to the northern areas of Arabia, to check on the expansionist moves of the Byzantine empire, which had finally routed the Persians.⁸ The Prophet asked Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to remain behind to look after his family and Madīnah. The enemies of Islam, such as the Hypocrites, some Bedouin tribes and the Makkans were still actively working against Islam. The Prophet would therefore choose only a man of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s calibre to deputise for him during his absence. However, no sooner had the expedition set out, than the Hypocrites spread a rumour that Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī had been left behind because he was a burden to the Prophet. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was so distressed by this, that he armed himself and overtook the Prophet at his first halt. He told

the Prophet the reason why he had left Madīnah to join him. The Prophet replied: “Are you not content, °Alī, that you are unto me as Aaron was unto Moses, except that there will be no Prophet after me?”⁹ This *ḥadīṣ* which speaks about the resemblance of Ḥaẓrat °Alī to Ḥaẓrat Aaron^(c) is unanimously accepted by Muslims of all sects and is verified by the Qur’ānic story of Ḥaẓrat Moses^(c) and Ḥaẓrat Aaron, which is not only the most detailed and longest of all the Prophets’ stories, but also emphasises the blood relationship of both the Prophets and their ministers (*wazīrs*).¹⁰ Further, it not only demonstrates, once again, the special bond between them, but it is a proclamation for the future when Prophet Muḥammad would declare Ḥaẓrat °Alī as his successor.

The holy Prophet instructed Ḥaẓrat °Alī to return to Madīnah, much to the consternation of the Hypocrites, who had hoped to make trouble in his absence.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī is asked to recite the Sūrah-yi Barā’ah in Makkah

In the ninth year of the Hijrah, a group of Muslims set out on Ḥajj, under the leadership of Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr, whom the Prophet had charged with the responsibility of reciting Sūratu’l-Barā’ah, also known as Sūratu’t-Tawba, to the idolaters and polytheists. It is the only chapter in the holy Qur’ān which does not begin with *Bismi’llāhi’r-Raḥmāni’r-Raḥīm*, because of the harsh nature of its message, which was to abrogate the alliance of the Prophet with the pagan tribes and to forbid, henceforth, the pilgrimage of any unbeliever or non-Muslim to the Holy Sanctuary.

When the Muslims had travelled some way, the Prophet received a further revelation from Allah, the gist of which was that the Sūrah-yi Barā’ah (or Renunciation or Repentance) was only to be delivered by the Prophet himself or a man related to him. The Prophet, therefore, sent for Ḥaẓrat °Alī and ordered him to ride his she-camel al-*Aẓbā’* and to overtake the pilgrims, to take the Sūrah from Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr and to read it out to the pilgrims gathered in Makkah.¹¹

The indications in the Prophet's action of withdrawing the recitation of Sūrah-yi Barā'ah from Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr and giving it to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, according to the command of Allah, are very profound. The treaty had been signed by the Prophet with the idolaters and it could only be abrogated by himself or somebody who could replace him in nobility and high status – somebody who had already been, on many occasions, singled out as his brother, minister, *wazir* and vicegerent.

A Summary of Prophetic Traditions or *Aḥādīs* related to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī (with reference to this section only)

1. 'Yes O ʿAlī, you will be' (i.e., my vicegerent, my heir, brother and minister)

The above *ḥadīṣ* was declared by Prophet Muḥammad about three years after the revelation started, when in accordance with the command of Allah, he gathered all his near kinsmen at a dinner at his home. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was only thirteen years old at the time.

2. 'You are my brother in this world and in the Hereafter'.

This statement was made in Madīnah by the Prophet to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī at the time when the Prophet declared a spiritual brotherhood between the Madīnans (*anṣār*) and the Emigrants (*muhājirūn*).

3. 'God, these are the members of my House (*ahlu'l-bayt*)'.

Prophet Muḥammad made this statement when, in response to the command of Allah, he gathered Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, Ḥaẓrat Fāṭimah, Ḥaẓrat Ḥaṣan and Ḥaẓrat Ḥusayn in preparation for the prayer of '*Mubāhalah*' with the Christians of Najrān.

4. 'Are you not content, ʿAlī, that you should be unto me as Aaron was unto Moses, except that there will be no Prophet after me!'

This famous *ḥadīṣ* was pronounced by the Prophet, when he left

Ḥaẓrat °Alī in charge of Madīnah during the expedition to Tabūk.

5. ‘No one should deliver it except me or a man from me (or the members of my House). And °Alī is from me’.

This *ḥadīṣ* was said when the Prophet asked Ḥaẓrat °Alī to deliver the Sūrah-yi Barā’ah to the pagans in Makkah.

The above are some of the *aḥādīṣ* about Ḥaẓrat °Alī (particularly relevant to this first section), which are very famous and have been recorded by writers of all Muslim schools of thought. These and other Prophetic Traditions about Ḥaẓrat °Alī were in such wide circulation that the majority of the historians and traditionists from the earliest times had to record them. They were so well-known that they have even survived the attempts of the people in power in the early centuries of Islamic history to suppress them.¹²

PART 2

Ghadir-i Khumm and the *ḥadīṣ* al-*Saqalayn* (i.e., the Tradition of the Two Significant or Weighty Things)

In 632 C.E, Prophet Muḥammad made his final or farewell pilgrimage to Makkah. He was accompanied by thousands of pilgrims from all over the Arabian peninsula. On their return journey, on 18 Zu'l-Hijjah (10th March, 632), the Prophet called a halt at a place called Ghadīr-i Khumm. It was a marshy area with a pool and some shady trees, a few miles from Makkah on the road to Madīnah. It was from there that the pilgrims dispersed in all directions to return to their homes. The reason for this halt was that Prophet Muḥammad wanted to tell them some important news before they departed for their homes – news for which he had received the following revelation:

“O Messenger! Convey that which hath been revealed unto you from your Lord, for if you do it not, you will not have conveyed His message and Allah will protect you from humankind. Lo! Allah guides not the disbelieving folk”. (Sūrah 5:67) Jalālu'd-Dīn Suyūṭī, a Sunni commentator says in his *Tafsīr-i Durr-i Manṣūr*, (Miṣr, n.d.) III, 398 that this verse used to be recited during the life time of the Prophet as follows: “*Yā ayyuha'r-rasūlu balligh mā unzila ilayka mir-rabbika anna °Aliyyan mawla'l-mu'minīna, wa il-lam taf°al fa-mā ballaghta risālatahu wa'llāhu ya°ṣimuka mina'n-nās*” = O Messenger! Convey the command that has been revealed to you about °Alī, that he is the Mawlā (master) of the *mu'mins*. For, if you do it not, you will not have conveyed His message and Allah will protect you from humankind.”

Messengers were sent to gather the pilgrims together. A special pulpit (*minbar*) from camel and horse saddles was erected for

the Prophet. The Prophet praised Allah and led the huge crowd in congregational prayer. When the prayers were over, he made his last public address to the largest gathering before his death three months later.

He took Ḥaẓrat °Alī by the arm and made him stand next to him, and said:

“O people, know that what Aaron was to Moses, °Alī is to me, except that, surely, there shall be no Prophet after me, and he is (my) Plenipotentiary (*wali*) to you after me. Therefore, he to whom I am Master (*mawlā*), °Alī is his Master. Then he lifted the arms of °Alī, until the whiteness of his armpits was visible (to the people assembled) and said to them: O God, be affectionate to him who is devoted to °Alī, show enmity to him who is his enemy, give victory to him who helps °Alī, and forsake him who forsakes °Alī, and turn the truth in whatever direction he turns.”¹³

The Prophet continued his address by pronouncing the *ḥadis* al-Ṣaqalayn as follows:

“I am leaving two important things among you: the Book of Allah and my progeny (*°itrah*), the people of my House. If you hold on to both of them you will never go astray, for they are not going to separate till they will come to me at the Pond (*Kawṣar*).”

The Prophet ended his discourse by commanding the gathered assembly, including several of his wives, to give *bay°ah* to Ḥaẓrat °Alī. Amongst those who congratulated Ḥaẓrat °Alī profusely was °Umar b. al-Khattab, who is recorded as having said: ‘I congratulate you O °Alī today. Hail to you O °Alī. Bravo, bravo °Alī, you have become my master and the master of every believing man and woman’.

Ḥassān bin Ṣabit, who was the Prophet’s official poet, composed some verses spontaneously to mark this historic occasion.

The Prophetic Tradition declared at Ghadīr-i Khumm

‘Man kuntu mawlāhu fa ʿAliyyun mawlāhu. Allāhumma wāli man walāhu wa-ʿādi man ʿādāhu’. ‘He of who I am the Mawlā, of him ʿAlī is the Mawlā. O God, be the friend of he who is his friend, and be the enemy of he who is his enemy’, is widely accepted by Muslims of all schools of Islam.

According to Jaʿfirī: “A contemporary scholar, Ḥusayn ʿAlī Maḥfūz, in his penetrating researches on the subject of Ghadīr-i Khumm has recorded with documentation that this tradition has been narrated by at least 110 companions, 84 *tābiʿūn* (those who followed the companions), 355 *ʿulamāʾ*, 25 historians, 27 traditionists, 11 exegetists, 18 theologians and 5 philologists. Most of them were later counted by the Sunnis as among their own number”.¹⁴

According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam

“Most of those sources which form the basis of our knowledge of the life of the Prophet (Ibn Hisham, al-Tabari, Ibn Saʿd, etc.) pass in silence over Prophet Muḥammad’s stop at Ghadīr-i Khumm, or, if they mention it, say nothing of his discourse (the writers evidently feared to attract the hostility of the Sunnis who were in power, by providing material for the polemic of the Shiʿis who used these words to support their thesis of ʿAlī’s right to the Caliphate). Consequently, the western biographers of Prophet Muḥammad whose work is based on these sources equally make no reference to what happened at Ghadīr-i Khumm. It is, however, certain that Muḥammad did speak in this place and utter the famous sentence, for the account of this event has been preserved, either in a concise form or in detail, not only by al-Yaʿkubi, whose sympathy for the Alid cause is well known, but also in the collections of traditions, which are considered canonical, especially in the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal; and the *ḥadīṣ* are so numerous and so well-attested by the different *isnāds* (chains of transmission) that it does not seem possible to reject them”.¹⁵

It is clear from the above discussion that the *aḥādīṣ* of Ghadīr-i

Khumm are too often cited by reputable historians to be denied or doubted by even the most conservative of Sunni authorities. Nevertheless, the real disagreement between the Sunnis and the Shias hinges on the interpretations of certain words.

In the famous declaration: ‘He of who I am the Mawlā, °Alī is his Mawlā’, the word which is interpreted differently is ‘Mawlā’. Arabic is a rich language, in which many words have numerous meanings, including totally opposing ones. The word ‘Mawlā’ has over twenty different meanings, including the opposite ones: ‘Master’ and ‘slave’.

The Sunnis interpret the word ‘Mawlā’ as meaning ‘a friend’ or ‘nearest kin’ and they assert that the whole event of Ghadīr-i Khumm was staged by the Prophet simply to exhort the Muslims to hold his cousin and son-in-law in esteem and additionally to silence the murmurs of protest and criticism of Ḥaẓrat °Alī, who on the recent successful expedition to Yaman had been extremely strict and scrupulous about the division of the gains.

The Shia maintain that it is irrelevant to enter into discussions about the semantic diversity of the word ‘Mawlā’. It is far more important to examine the context in which it was used. The Prophet first attributed the word to himself and then applied it to Ḥaẓrat °Alī. Therefore, it is absolutely clear that the Prophet did not wish to convey any of the other meanings of the word ‘Mawlā’, except the one which described his relationship with the Muslims, which, without the slightest dispute, was one of being their ‘Master’ as affirmed by the Qur’ānic verse 33:6, which states: “The Prophet has a greater right (*awlā*) over the souls of the believers than they themselves, ...” Therefore, according to the Shia, the Prophet addressed this, the largest gathering shortly before his death, for the single purpose of declaring Ḥaẓrat °Alī his successor. As is evident from the various *aḥādīs* about Ḥaẓrat °Alī, the Prophet had on numerous occasions, indicated that Ḥaẓrat °Alī was his ‘brother’, ‘executor’ ‘successor’, ‘as Aaron was to Moses’ etc., etc.

In the case of the *ḥadīs* al-Saqalayn, the word whose use is disputed

is *‘itrah* (progeny). The Sunnis claim that the Prophet used the phrase ‘my Sunnah (traditions)’. Even if this argument were accepted, it was widely known that the person who was best aware of the Prophet’s Sunnah was none other than Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī, who had been so close to the Prophet throughout his life. In the years immediately following the Prophet’s death, there was no written Sunnah. The Sunnah was best known to those closest to him, such as Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī.

The Shia believe that after the Prophet had declared Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī as his successor, the following verse of the Qur’ān was revealed: “This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you and have chosen for you as religion al-Islam (5:3).”¹⁶

Shias believe that the Imam of the age provides fresh guidance according to the requirements of the time. The above verse meant that no more obligatory commands would be revealed by Allah through a Prophet. In other words, the cycle of Nubuwwat or Prophethood was drawing to an end and Allah had ‘perfected’ the religion for the Muslims by commanding the appointment of the Imams, one after another, from the progeny of Prophet Muḥammad and Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī, to guide and teach the people according to the time and place. Prophet Muḥammad had completed the work of receiving the revelation of the *tanzil* or exoteric of the holy Qur’ān and with the appointment of Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī he ensured that the task of the *ta’wil* or esoteric meaning of the Qur’ān would be continued by him and the Imams from his progeny, thus making the Divine message dynamic, that is, extending and developing with science, knowledge, art and industry.

PART 3

Ḥazrat ʿAlī as the Foremost Defender of Islam

In the years after the Hijrah, the Muslims continued to face the opposition and enmity of the Makkans. This hostility forced the Prophet to defend Islam on the battlefield. In this aspect of his life, too, Ḥazrat ʿAlī was the Prophet’s foremost supporter. As Chirri says:

“The Messenger was the architect and the founder of the Islamic state. His minister Ali was eliminator of the obstructive forces which stood in the way of its establishment, for he was the hero and the bearer of the banner of the Messenger in every decisive battle”.¹⁷

It is reported that Ḥazrat ʿAlī fought in eighteen battles by the Prophet’s side. In addition, he led numerous expeditions. An important point to note is that Ḥazrat ʿAlī was never asked by the Prophet to participate in a military expedition under the leadership of any other person.

In this part, the most renowned battles of Islamic history will be discussed, to show the outstanding and heroic role of Ḥazrat ʿAlī. They are the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, Khaybar and Ḥunayn. Not only are they famous in Islamic history for various other reasons, but it is no exaggeration to say that defeat in each of them could have reversed the tide of Muslim history.

Battle of Badr

In 624 C.E, a small, ill-equipped band of Muslims (three hundred and thirteen, to be precise), had to face a Makkan army, three times as large, boasting all the paraphernalia of war, such as horses, camels and armour. The odds were so great against the tiny Muslim

army that the Prophet prayed to Allah for help, saying: ‘God, if this Muslim band will perish today, You shall not be worshipped’.¹⁸

The Prophet’s use of these words demonstrates how desperate the situation must have been on that day for the Muslims. As the two armies faced each other, the customary call for the individual combat came from the enemies of Islam. Warfare in Arabia was conducted in this way from ancient times. Before the general melée began, the best warriors, the pride of the clans would step out to engage in single combat. Their prowess and courage would then be enshrined in poetry, which was so dear to the Arab heart.

On the day of Badr, the three champions of Quraysh - ‘Utbah, Shaybah and al-Walid stepped out and challenged the Muslims of equal rank (i.e., in blood and family prestige), to fight them in single combat. The Prophet called on Ḥaẓrat Ḥamzah, ‘Ubaydah and Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī to meet the challenge. Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī was only in his early twenties at this time. Ḥamzah killed ‘Utbah and Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī killed al-Walid and then the two of them turned to Shaybah who had mortally wounded ‘Ubaydah, the first martyr of the battle.

The first round of the battle was clearly in the Muslims’ favour, but the odds continued to be against the small Muslim army. However, Divine help (in response to the Prophet’s prayer as recorded in the Qur’ān: 8:9-14) and Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī’s valour, routed the superior Makkan army, after inflicting fifty to seventy casualties on it. Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī alone, slew almost half of the Makkan dead.¹⁹

It was the battle of Badr which laid the foundation of the Muslim state. The decisive victory of the Muslims, despite the great odds against them, made them a force to be reckoned with in the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī’s role in it was doubly significant since it ensured the well-being and the future progress of the Muslim State and the religion of Islam.

Battle of Uḥud

The Battle of Uḥud was fought in 625 C.E. The proud Quraysh,

still smarting from the disgrace of their defeat at the hands of a much smaller, less-equipped army of the Muslims, gathered a large army to avenge the set-back of the previous year.

Prophet Muḥammad, fully aware of the great advantage of numbers and arms the Makkan army had over his, strategically placed his men on rising ground, with fifty archers protecting their backs, further up the mountain side. The archers were personally instructed by the Prophet not to leave their positions, regardless of the turn the battle took.

The battle opened with the usual challenges to single combat. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī answered the first call of the standard bearer of the Makkan troops, Ṭalḥah bin Abī Ṭalḥah. Swords were crossed and with a single stroke Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī severed the Makkan's head. Then followed more members of Ṭalḥah's family, who strove to defend their hereditary function of bearing the standard. None of them however, was a match for Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī. The Makkan army was demoralised by the swift despatch of its standard bearers, one after another. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Ḥaẓrat Ḥamzah, taking advantage of this, broke through the enemy lines and as they advanced, the enemy began to flee before them. Some of the Muslim soldiers became prematurely over-confident and abandoning the battle, began to accumulate the gains of war. Seeing this situation, the archers stationed on the mountain side, disobeyed the instructions given to them by the Prophet, left their positions to join the plunder. Khālid bin Walīd, the commander of the Makkan cavalry, was quick to seize this opening and he charged the Muslims from the rear.²⁰

The events which followed could have led to a resounding defeat for the Muslims: the Prophet suffered a minor injury and a rumour was deliberately spread by the Makkans that he had been killed; many of the companions of the Prophet fled in fear, abandoning him; and a valiant soldier like Ḥaẓrat Ḥamzah was martyred in this battle. However, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was immediately at the side of the Prophet. Not only did he push back attack after attack from Khālid's men, but he rallied some of the companions who had deserted by his courage, selflessness and example. The Prophet reported that Jibrīl

and the angels in heaven, in admiration of Ḥaẓrat °Alī's inimitable role during that critical time, recited:

'Lā fata illā °Alī, lā sayfa illā Zulfaqār' i.e., There is no ideal man except °Alī and no sword except Zulfaqār.²¹

The Battle of Badr laid the foundation of the Islamic State. The Battle of Uḥud was in danger of destroying that precious foundation, had it not been for the illustrious action and heroism of Ḥaẓrat °Alī and a few other Muslims who rallied to his call.

The Battle of Khandaq (or Trench, Ditch, Moat)

It is also known as the Battle of Aḥzāb (or Confederates). It took place in 627 A.D.

The Makkans had mustered an army of ten thousand strong consisting of the Quraysh, other Makkan tribes, several pagan Bedouin tribes and the Jewish tribes of Banū Naẓīr, all intent on annihilating the Prophet and his followers. Against such a mighty host, the Prophet could muster only three thousand fighters, he therefore decided that this would have to be a war of defence. On the advice of his Persian follower, Salmān-i Fārsī, who knew about siege warfare, the Prophet agreed that a deep trench should be dug around Madīnah, making it impregnable.

The Makkans and their allies were thoroughly taken aback by this unexpected strategy and were forced to camp some distance away from Madīnah. However, a small band of horsemen, led by °Amr ibn °Abd-i Wadd, whose fame and skill as a fighter, were recited in poetry and talked about around caravan fires, decided to jump their horses across the narrow point of the trench. The situation became tense. But Ḥaẓrat °Alī acted promptly. Together with a small group of Muslims, he sealed off the point of entry to prevent any more enemies from penetrating their defences.

°Amr ibn °Abd-i Wadd, in the meantime, was boisterously calling for single combat, but in vain, his reputation as a fighter was too

well known. Ḥaẓrat °Alī, satisfied that the weak point in the trench was well guarded, turned to °Amr and accepted his challenge. °Amr hesitated, since he had been a great friend of Ḥaẓrat Abū Ṭālib, Ḥaẓrat °Alī's father. However, Ḥaẓrat °Alī gave him two options – either to accept Islam or to fight him. °Amr, therefore, got off his horse and sword drawn, advanced towards Ḥaẓrat °Alī, a man much younger and less experienced than himself. Soon the two combatants were surrounded by a cloud of dust, while the onlookers held their breaths, uncertain of the outcome, when suddenly the cry of ‘*Allāhu Akbar*’ resounded over the trench and Ḥaẓrat °Alī emerged as the victor.

It is reported that when the news of °Amr's death was broken to his sister, a poetess of some renown, she replied: ‘If the killer of °Amr had been any other man, I would have wept forever. But the slayer of °Amr cannot be charged with any defect. He was a man who was called of old the foremost of the land’.²²

The defeat of °Amr, their star warrior, the failure of the Makkans to attack across the trench, the unsuccessful outcome of their intrigues with the Jews inside Madinah, combined with the inclement weather and shortage of provision for such a large army, forced the Makkans to retreat.

The Prophet pronounced two famous statements as the Battle of Khandaq ended. He said: “The duel of °Alī bin Abī Ṭālib against °Amr bin °Abd-i Wadd at the Battle of Moat outweighs the good deeds of my whole community until the Day of Judgement”.

He also said that Khandaq marked the last offensive of his enemies, the Makkans. From that time onwards, the Prophet would initiate any military action in order to secure the future of Islam.

The Battle of Khaybar

The Battle of Khaybar against the Jews, which took place in 628 C.E. was the most major military operation which the Prophet undertook. From the very beginning of his settlement in Madinah,

the Prophet had offered generous terms to the Jews. Their freedom of worship as the people of the Book (*ahlu'l-kitāb*) was respected in keeping with the teachings of the Qur'ān. However, the Jews of Madīnah and its surrounding areas responded to this tolerance with scheming and outright treachery. The Prophet, therefore, decided to eliminate the threat they posed to the Islamic State by attacking their most impregnable stronghold, Khaybar. With a large army he laid siege to the rocky fortress.

The siege was prolonged because Khaybar was not a single fort, rather a series of forts, of which one called al-Qamus was the most impregnable. During this siege, Ḥaẓrat °Alī was confined to his tent suffering from an inflammation of the eyes. Prophet Muhammed, therefore, asked Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr to lead the first attack, however, it was repelled and the Muslims turned back unsuccessful. The same situation prevailed on the following day, when the Prophet ordered Ḥaẓrat °Umar to lead the second onslaught. Disappointed and worried by the continued lack of success of the Muslims, the Prophet announced:

“Tomorrow I will definitely give the standard to a man who loves God and His Messenger and God and His Messenger love him and at his hand God will grant victory”.

The Muslim soldiers were agog with high hopes and excitement. Everyone was anxious to be in this privileged category. When the morning dawned, the Prophet summoned Ḥaẓrat °Alī and gave him the standard. Ḥaẓrat °Alī led the attack with his usual vigour and selfless dedication. He engaged in single combat with several renowned Jewish heroes and eliminated them one by one, including Marhab who was considered the supreme champion of the Jewish forces. During this duel, Ḥaẓrat °Alī lost his shield and with his bare hands tore out a door of the fortress to replace it. This very famous incident is variously reported that, when the battle was over, several men (ranging from seven to seventy) tried to pick the door up with great difficulty.

The Muslim soldiers surged through the breach made by Ḥaẓrat

°Alī and Khaybar was finally subjugated. This particular battle proved that Ḥaẓrat °Alī had no parallel for courage and valour in the history of Islam, which abounds with examples of his single handed, amazing feats of heroism. Ḥaẓrat °Alī was able to achieve singly, what a number of stalwart Muslims found hard to accomplish together. Ḥaẓrat °Alī was truly the supreme *mujāhid* (*jihād* maker or fighter in the cause of Islam).

The Conquest of Makkah and the Purification of the Ka°bah from idols

Peace between the Muslims and their old enemies, the Quraysh of Makkah was guaranteed by the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, according to which neither side would interfere in the affairs of the other. However, in 629 the Quraysh helped their ally, the Bani Kināna against the tribe of Bani Khuẓā°ah, who were the Prophet's allies and as such had his protection. Therefore the holy Prophet mustered an army of 12,000 strong and marched towards Makkah and camped just outside it. Abu Sufyān, the leader of the Makkan Quraysh was greatly perturbed and rode out to the Prophet's camp. Under the protection of Abbās, he spent the night there and in the morning he accepted the faith of Islam and was told by the Prophet that he and whoever took shelter in his house would therefore be protected. The holy Prophet and his mighty army marched into Makkah and made their way straight to the Ka°bah, where he broke all the lower idols with his stick. Those which were out of his reach, he commanded Ḥaẓrat °Alī to climb on his shoulders, in order to destroy them too. This event of Ḥaẓrat °Alī climbing on the holy Prophet's shoulders to break the idols is the subject of many poets' eulogy throughout history.

The conquest of Makkah was almost bloodless because the Prophet forgave his old enemies and accepted them into the fold of Islam. It also marked the end of paganism in the city.

The Battle of Ḥunayn

Outside the city of Makkah however, some pagan tribes felt

threatened by the change of situation in it. A tribe called the Hawāzin aware of the imminent danger, reacted by exerting force of arms. The holy Prophet marched out with his larger army of 12,000 soldiers towards them. The battle took place in a narrow valley, where a surprise attack from the enemy caused panic in the Prophet's army who began to scatter and flee. However, as usual bearing the Prophet's standard Ḥaẓrat °Alī stood his ground in front of the Prophet, whereas a handful of the Banū Hāshim (i.e., the Prophet's family) surrounded the Prophet on three sides, protecting him from the onslaught of the enemy. The battle of Ḥunayn is mentioned in Sūrah-yi Tawbah (9:25-26), how many fled from the scene and how Allah helped the Prophet through His invisible hosts and punished those who disbelieved. The defeat of the pagan Hawāzin marked the end of paganism throughout the Hijaz. In the distribution of the booty from this battle, preference was given to the newly converted Makkan Muslims, which caused some murmurs of dissent amongst the *Ansār* of Madinah. The holy Prophet said to his old friends: "Do you wish to have more of the worldly goods, such as sheep and goats or do you want me?" They all replied with one voice that they wanted him. In this way the delicate situation was averted to the Prophet's and his companions' satisfaction.

Summary

Ḥaẓrat °Alī's performance on the battlefield in the defence of Islam has become legendary. He was never defeated in single combat and whenever he led the Muslim armies in battle, God always granted victory to the Muslim cause at his hands. Ḥaẓrat °Alī's feats of heroism and chivalry have become a part of the history of Islam and Arabia and both his followers as well as his enemies acknowledge his superiority in this sphere.

There are many outstanding points to note about Ḥaẓrat °Alī's role as the supreme *mujāhid* of Islam. Both Ḥaẓrat °Alī's contemporaries as well as future generations of Muslims have been so overawed by Ḥaẓrat °Alī's bravery that a whole series of miraculous stories have been woven around his achievements, to the extent that people have attributed miraculous powers to his mount 'Duldul'

and his sword ‘Zulfaqār’. It has been claimed that the steed and the sword descended from heaven, for instance. The truth of the matter though, is that Zulfaqār was simply an ordinary sword captured during a battle, which the Prophet presented to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī. As for ‘Duldul’, far from being a heavenly horse, it was not even an ordinary horse, it was a mule! Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was once asked why he preferred a mule to a horse. He replied that since he neither intended to chase an enemy in flight nor intended himself to flee from the battlefield, a mule was quite adequate for him! Such were his ethics on the battlefield.

Another characteristic of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī which amazed and baffled people was his strict code of chivalry on the battlefield. This is best summed up in his advice to his son, Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafīyya:

“O son! Let the mountains move from their places, but your foot should not falter from that place that has been assigned to you in the battlefield. Install your feet firmly on the ground as though a nail had been driven into them. Let your one jaw of teeth rest firmly on the other jaw. Keep an eye on the rear of your enemy. Enter the battle with a firm determination that you have sold your head to God. With all this, always think that success lies in the hands of God. Above all never raise your hand against the sick, women, aged and children. Even if they abuse you, it behoves you to give them refuge. Never mutilate the limbs of the enemy or any other person. Give decent burial to the bodies of your enemies”.²³

More than one incident of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s demonstration of his code or ethic is recorded for posterity. A famous incident took place during the Battle of Khandaq. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, during a single combat, had thrown his opponent ʿUmar to the ground, when the enemy, as a last insult, spat in his face. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī turning away left his enemy alive. Surprised onlookers queried Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s behaviour towards this dangerous foe. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī replied that he would have killed ʿUmar for the sake of God and Islam but when he spat at him, he lost his temper and if in that state, he had completed the execution of ʿUmar it would have been done in anger and retaliation, rather than in the way of God and the spirit of Jihād!

A similar event took place at the Battle of Şifīn. Mu[°]āwiyah, fully aware that if he accepted the challenge of the customary single combat with Ḥaẓrat [°]Alī, would not come out of it alive, bribed [°]Amr ibn al-[°]Ās with the governorship of Egypt, to fight in his stead. Ibn al-[°]Ās had developed, to the fullest, his scheming powers to complement his cowardice. In the duel with Ḥaẓrat [°]Alī, Ibn al-[°]Ās was in no time lying on the ground with Ḥaẓrat [°]Alī's sword raised above him. Ibn al-[°]Ās, quick as a flash undid his loose one piece dress and exposed his buttocks (rear). Ḥaẓrat [°]Alī, at once dropped his sword, reluctant to kill even his arch-enemy in such a disgraceful condition and turning away from Ibn al-[°]Ās told him that he was welcome to his governorship of Egypt.²⁴

The historical period of Ḥaẓrat [°]Alī required from him participation in numerous battles and expeditions against the enemies of Islam. In all of them his extraordinary, superhuman qualities of extreme heroism, combined with his strict code of chivalry, have left a rich heritage of stories and anecdotes, which arouse in his enemies a reluctant admiration, tinged with envy and in his followers a deep yearning to follow his example.

PART 4

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān

In the first part of this paper, it has been made amply clear that there was a special relationship between Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Prophet Muḥammad. This relationship, as the various *aḥādīṣ* show was not an ordinary and physical relationship, rather it was ordained by God himself to continue the task of guidance after the Prophet. This special relationship is particularly emphasized in the *ḥadīṣ* known as *mumaṣalat-i Hārūni* (resemblance to Hārūn or Aaron), in which the Prophet compares himself to Ḥaẓrat Mūsā^(c) and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to Ḥaẓrat Hārūn^(c) (Aaron). It shows that Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī had all the virtues of the Prophet, except Prophethood.

Since here we are dealing with the knowledge of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, in order to understand the nature of his knowledge and his function to continue the Prophet's mission, it requires some elaboration of the very nature of knowledge and secondly, the Prophet's mission.

Pīr Nāṣir Khusraw in *Wajh-i Dīn*, discusses the nature of knowledge and classifies it into two types: given knowledge (*ʿilm-i ʿaṭāʾi*) and acquired knowledge (*ʿilm-i iktisābi*). The acquired knowledge is attained by man's own effort, but the given knowledge is directly granted by God without the intervention of the physical senses. As far as the knowledge of the Prophet is concerned, it is given knowledge, as it is not possible to guide humankind only on the basis of acquired knowledge. As the Qur'ān says about the Prophet: "And lo! It is a revelation of the Lord of the Worlds, which the Trustworthy Spirit has brought down upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners, in plain Arabic speech". (26:192-5)

Also the verse: "He does not speak out of desire. This is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by One Mighty in power".

(53:3-5)

This clearly shows that this given knowledge or spiritual knowledge, in the form of ‘revelation (*tanzil*)’ was brought down to the Prophet’s heart. In other words, Allah did not present the Prophet with an external book, rather it was revealed to his heart in the form of a light or spirit (see also the Qur’ān, 42:52). As for the task of the Prophet in conveying this knowledge, again the Qur’ān is quite explicit: “Allah verily has shown grace to the believers by sending unto them a messenger of their own who recites unto them His revelations, and purifies them and teaches them the Book and wisdom”. (3:164)

The same functions of the Prophet are also mentioned in the verses (2:129; 62:2). These verses show that the main task of the Prophet was to purify the *mu’mins* through teaching them the Book and wisdom according to their understanding. There is another important verse about the teaching of the Qur’ān: “And (it is) a Qur’ān that We have divided, that you may recite it unto humankind at intervals”. (17:106)

Therefore, one can ask a simple question at this point; were these essential tasks of reciting revelations to them, instructing them in the Book and in wisdom and purifying them, to come to an abrupt end with the demise of the Prophet? The obvious answer is ‘No’. Humankind is in need of continuous Divine guidance as witnessed by past history and present circumstances. The tasks set out by Allah in the Qur’ān for the Prophet are essential tasks. They were to be continued till the Day of Resurrection and since it was impossible for the Prophet to teach the people of every age personally, therefore, through the institution of Imamāt, God continued the Prophets’ mission.

The Complementary Roles of the Prophet and his Asās in the Holy Qur’ān

Prophet	Asās	Qur’ānic Verse
Mursal (Apostle)	Shahīd (Witness)	13:43
Rasūl (Messenger)	Wazīr (the one who carries the burden or helps)	20:29
Rasūl (Messenger)	Naşīr-i Rasūl (helper of the Messenger)	17:80
Rasūl (Messenger)	Walī (friend, Guardian)	5:5
Munẓir (Warner)	Hādi (Guide)	13:7
Rasūl (Messenger)	Nafs-i Rasūl (Soul of the Messenger)	3:61
Sirāj-i Munīr (luminous lamp) (33:46)	Nūr (Light)	62:28
Zikr (=Rasūl) (65:10-11)	Ahl-i Zikr (People of the Prophet)	16:43

Historically speaking, the special bond between Prophet Muḥammad and Ḥaẓrat °Alī has been shown time and time again. In the realm of religion, their complementary roles can be demonstrated by reference to the holy Qur’ān (see Table 1 above).

It is also evident that though their mission was the same, their functions differed. Prophet Muḥammad was the Enunciator of the Law and its propounder; Ḥaẓrat °Alī, was the expounder of the Law since there would be no new law or Shari’ah. Prophet Muḥammad brought the Book and gave its *tanzil* or exoteric meaning to the people. And the task of Ḥaẓrat °Alī and the Imams from his progeny was to teach the *ta’wil* or esoteric meaning of the Book, through the ages, according to the demands of the time and circumstances.²⁵

Pīr Nāṣir-i Khusraw in *Wajh-i Dīn* explains the complementary roles of the Prophet and Imam, in his inimitable way by using the analogy of physical creation. He says that just as a human being, physically cannot come into this world without the interaction of a man and a woman, in the same way a person cannot reach spiritual perfection without the intermingling of the *tanzīl* of the *Nāṭiq* and the *ta'wīl* of the *Asās*. In support of his argument, Pīr Nāṣir quotes another famous *ḥadīs* of the Prophet, which says ‘O ʿAlī, I and you are the father and mother of the faithful’.

In the light of the above discussion it is easy to understand the momentous nature of Ghadīr-i Khumm and the fact that it was only after declaration of the *Walāyat* of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, that the Prophet received the revelation: “This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour unto you and have chosen for you as religion, al-Islam”. (5:3)

This means that the greatest favour of God is in the form of religious and spiritual knowledge of the Prophets and Imams. This kind of knowledge, which gives the real spiritual life to the *mu'mins* called ‘the miracle of knowledge’ is regarded as the greatest miracle. Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Sultān Muḥammad Shāh^(c) has said: ‘Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s miraculous powers lay in his ability to help people to arrive at the Ḥaqīqat. That is the greatest miracle’.²⁶

Regarding the continuity of this given knowledge in the *ʿitrah* or progeny of the Prophet, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī says: “Verily, the knowledge which Adam brought and all that with which the Prophets were honoured, is in Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and in his pure progeny. Whither are you being led to wander? Nay, where are you going?”²⁷

In the context of the above discussion, some of the most famous *aḥādīs* of the Prophet and sayings of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī concerning knowledge can be discussed for a deeper understanding. An extremely well-known and oft-repeated *ḥadīs* of the Prophet Muḥammad about Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī is: ‘I am the city of knowledge, and Ali is its gate. Whoever wants knowledge should enter through the

gate.²⁸

This tradition in the Prophet's own words is a clear proof that there was nobody equal to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's erudition and his knowledge of the holy Qurʾān, since he was the gate to the Prophet's city of knowledge (or gate to the Prophet's House of wisdom). A related Qurʾānic ayat is: "It is not righteousness that you go to houses by the backs thereof, but the righteous man is he who wards off (evil). So go to houses by the gates thereof". (2:189)²⁹

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī is recorded as having said: 'Ask me regarding the Book of God for verily there is not a verse but I know whether it was revealed by night or day, in the plains or on the mountains'.³⁰ The holy Qurʾān affirms this in Sūrah-yi Raʿd (13:43): "And they who disbelieve say: You are no messenger of Allah. Say: Allah is sufficient witness between me and you and also he who possesses the knowledge of the Book." In Islam the condition of two witnesses is fulfilled in this verse that Allah and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī were the two witnesses of Prophet Muḥammad's prophethood. With such comprehensive knowledge of the Qurʾān, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī used to explain and elaborate the verses to the other Muslims, even during the time of the Prophet.

Indicating to this knowledge of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, it is further recorded in both Sunni³¹ and Shiʿah³² sources that the Prophet, on one occasion indicating Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī (who at the time was mending the broken strap of the Prophet's sandal) with his hand, said: 'Verily he will fight you for the sake of the *taʿwīl* of the Qurʾān, as I have fought you for its *tanzīl*'.

This particular *ḥadīṣ* is significant for the way it clearly delineates the different roles of the Prophet and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī. *Tanzīl* (which literally means 'bringing down' or 'to cause to descend') was the main function of the Prophet. Further, it was linked to the teaching of the *zāhir* (exoteric) of the *kitāb* or the Qurʾān. *Taʿwīl* (which literally means 'to take back to the origin'), is the main function of the Imams. It is related to the interpretation of the Qurʾān giving its esoteric meaning and wisdom to the faithful. It can be seen that

both the *tanzil* and *ta'wil* are only for those people who obey the Imams and the Prophets. As the Qur'ān says: “O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and those of you who are the bearers of (Divine) authority”. (4:59)

The *ḥadīṣ* under discussion here is also known as the *ḥadīṣ* of the *Khāsifū'n-Na'l* or the Tradition about ‘the mender of the shoe’. It is an extremely significant *ḥadīṣ* from other angles too. It states in straight forward terms that, just as the Prophet had to defend Islam (or its exoteric aspect – *tanzil/zāhir*) on the battlefield with the sword of iron, (and Ḥaẓrat °Alī was his greatest support in this), in the same way, Ḥaẓrat °Alī would have to struggle for the esoteric (*ta'wil* or *bāṭin*) aspect of Islam with the sword of knowledge. The dissemination of true knowledge is the major function of the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet and Ḥaẓrat °Alī, as the first Imam or *Asās* (the foundation Imam) is the archetypal embodiment of true knowledge. This is best understood by considering Ḥaẓrat °Alī's own description of the *ahlu'l-bayt* or the Imams:

“They are life of knowledge and death of ignorance. Their discernment (insight) will tell you about their knowledge, and their exterior about their interior and their silence about the wisdom of their speeches. They do not oppose the truth, nor do they differ in it. They are the pillars of Islam and intimate confidants of refuge. By them the truth returned to its origin and the falsehood left its place and its tongue was cut off from its root. They understood the religion with an understanding of remembering and preserving, not with an understanding of hearing and narration. Indeed the narrators of knowledge are many but its protectors are few”.³³

This discussion also helps to understand and appreciate the true meaning of the declaration of the angels on that critical day during the Battle of Uḥud: ‘*Lā fatā illā °Alī, lā sayfa illā Zulfaqār*’. The angels were singing the praises, not only of Ḥaẓrat °Alī's extraordinary dexterity with the external sword of iron, but they were overwhelmed by the perfection of all his qualities, including the fact that he was at the apex of all real knowledge.

Another *ḥadis* of the Prophet, which leaves no room for doubt, is: “°Ali is with the Qur’ān and the Qur’ān is with °Ali”. Further light is thrown on Ḥaẓrat °Ali’s supremacy in the knowledge of the Qur’ān by referring to his own saying: “If I were (to write) about the meanings of al-Fātiḥah I would load seventy camels” (i.e., that the weight of these books would be equal to the load of seventy camels).³⁴ The Sūrah al-Fātiḥah or the opening chapter of the Qur’ān consists of just seven verses. Only someone with Ḥaẓrat °Ali’s sublime and deep knowledge could claim to write so much on its meanings.³⁵

Ḥaẓrat °Ali was the custodian of the knowledge of the Qur’ān, both exoteric and esoteric, as already mentioned. Not only is this evident from the Traditions of the Prophet and the sayings of Ḥaẓrat °Ali, but it is also substantiated by the Qur’ān, which says:

“He it is Who has revealed unto you (Muḥammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations – They are the substance of the Book – and others (which are) allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt, pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking its *ta’wil*. None knows its *ta’wil* save Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*rāsikhūn fi’l-ilm*)”. (3:7)³⁶

In *Da‘ā’im al-Islām* of Qāẓi Nu‘mān, Mawlānā Muḥammad al-Bāqir in a reply to a question who is referred to as ‘those who are firmly grounded in knowledge (*rāsikhūn fi’l-ilm*)’, said that the Messenger of Allah was the most excellent among the *rāsikhūn fi’l-ilm*, who was the master of *tanzil* and the *ta’wil*. Then the *awsiyā’* (his legatees) who came after him were the *rāsikhūn fi’l-ilm*, who know its (*tanzil*’s) *ta’wil* in its totality.

Jalāluddīn a’s-Suyūṭī, a historian, quotes Caliph °Umar as saying: ‘... none of the Companions (of the Prophet) used to say, ask you of me, except °Ali’.³⁷

In fact, the complete saying of Ḥaẓrat °Ali referred to above was:

‘*Ṣalūnī qabla an tafqidūnī salūnī ʿammā kana wa ʿammā yakūnu ilā yawmī’l-qiyāmah*’, i.e., ‘Ask me before you will lose me about what was and what will be till the Day of Resurrection’.

In *Nahju’l-Balāghah* the famous testimony to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s profound knowledge and wisdom, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī says to Kumayl:

“O Kumayl, knowledge is better than wealth. Knowledge guards you but you guard wealth. Expenditure decreases wealth but knowledge increases by expending it.

O Kumayl, recognition of knowledge is religion, which is to be followed. With it a human being attains obedience (to God) during his life and praise after his death. Knowledge is a ruler and wealth is a subject.

O Kumayl, the treasures of those who amass wealth perish while they are alive, and the possessers of knowledge survive for eternity (*dahr*). Their persons disappear, but their images exist in the hearts’.³⁸

How true are these words about Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī himself! Nearly fifteen hundred years later and scores of books having been written about him, the memory of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī is as fresh as ever in the hearts of all thinking people and will ‘last for eternity’.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī as a Worldly Caliph

Introduction

Before dealing with the worldly caliphate of Ḥaẓrat °Alī, it is first important to have a clear idea of the concept of Khilāfat from the Qur’ānic point of view. According to the holy Qur’an, Divine vicegerency or *Khilāfat-i illāhiyyah* is a permanent institution to guide humankind in their ever-emerging states and conditions.

In the Qur’an, there is no difference between Khilāfat and Imāmat, as can be seen clearly from the references to the position of Ḥaẓrat Adam and Ḥaẓrat Ibrahim; the former is called Khalīfah (viceroys, vicegerent) in Sūrah 2, verse 30 and the latter is referred to as Imam (leader) in Sūrah 2, verse 124. Thus, it can be said that only Imam can be the Khalīfatu’llāh (vicegerent of God) and vice versa. Thus, in this sense, according to Shi’ah Islam, Ḥaẓrat °Alī is regarded as the Khalīfah, succeeding the Prophet immediately after his demise. Ḥaẓrat °Alī is therefore called ‘*Khalīfātun bi-lā faṣl*’ (The Immediate Caliph)’ in order to distinguish it from his temporal or worldly Khilāfat, as the fourth Caliph, as he is regarded by Sunni Islam.

The above discussion can be best understood by reference to the Memoirs of Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Imam Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, where he says:

“The Shia school of thought maintains that although direct, Divine inspiration ceased at the Prophet’s death, the need for Divine guidance continued and this could not be left merely to millions of mortal men, subject to the whims and gusts of passion and material necessity, capable of being momentarily but tragically misled by greed, by oratory, or by the sudden desire for material advantage. These dangers were manifest in the period immediately following our holy

Prophet's death. Mohammed had been, as I have shown, both temporal and a spiritual sovereign. The Caliph or successor of the Prophet was to succeed him in both these capacities; he was to be both *Emir-al-Momenin* or "commander of the true believers" and *Imam-al-Muslimin* or "spiritual chief of the devout".

Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, the husband of his beloved and only surviving child, Fatima, his first convert, his bold champion in many a war, who the Prophet in his lifetime said would be unto him as Aaron was to Moses, his brother and right-hand man, in the vein of whose descendants the Prophet's own blood would flow, appeared destined to be that true successor; and such had been the general expectation of Islam. The Shias have therefore always held that after the Prophet's death, Divine power, guidance and leadership manifested themselves in Hazrat Ali as the first Imam or spiritual chief of the devout. The Sunnis, however, consider him the fourth in the succession of the Caliphs to temporal power".³⁹

The second point for clarification, before we deal with Ḥaẓrat °Alī's role during the caliphate of the three previous Caliphs and his own caliphate, is that this period of history has been much written about and commented upon, always from the perspective of the authors and historians. This paper, however, seeks to present mostly, Ḥaẓrat °Alī's own viewpoints and this will be done through his own quotations, as recorded in *Nahju'l-balāghah*.

Further, it must be pointed out that Ḥaẓrat °Alī's standards and ideals were so noble that it would be futile for any of his contemporaries or any future historians to attempt to judge his actions.

The Years Following the Death of Prophet Muḥammad

In 632 C.E, Prophet Muḥammad passed away in Madīnah, only a matter of three months after his declaration of Ḥaẓrat °Alī's succession at Ghadīr-i Khumm.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, who was by his side in his final moments, was occupied with the Prophet’s funeral arrangements. During this time, some of the Muslims both the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār* gathered at a place called Saqīfah-yi Banī Sāʿidah and in the ensuing arguments and discussions about who should lead the Muslim state, Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar took Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr’s hand and publicly declared his *bayʿah* or allegiance to him, despite the protests of a number of the Prophet’s companions. Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr became the Caliph in this curious manner, which some describe as an election. Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr’s caliphate lasted only a short period, for two years later in 634 C.E, he died. He designated Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar as his successor before his death, in other words there was no semblance of an ‘election’ similar to the one which brought him to the caliphate.

Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar’s caliphate lasted for ten years, during which time the frontiers of the Islamic State expanded eastwards and westwards, overwhelming the Sassanian and Byzantine empires. In 644 C.E, Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar was assassinated. However, before his death he had willed that a Shura of six of the remaining Companions of the Prophet should choose his successor. The conditions which he set for the working of this Shura and the obvious relationship of ʿAbd Raḥmān bin ʿAwf (who had the casting vote in the event of a tie) to Ḥaẓrat ʿUṣmān, ensured that Ḥaẓrat ʿUṣmān was chosen as the next Caliph. This method of naming a successor was again different from his appointment by the first Caliph.

Ḥaẓrat ʿUṣmān’s caliphate was marked by rampant nepotism and its concurrent corruption and it caused much unrest amongst the general populace. As a result, his caliphate, which lasted for twelve years came to a gory end in 656 C.E., when he, too, was assassinated.

The first controversy rages around the fact that Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī did not take up arms to fight for his inheritance, immediately after the event of Saqīfah-yi Banī Sāʿidah or at any time during the reign of the first three Caliphs. In *Nahju’l-balāghah*, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī says: “But by God! So and so⁴⁰ attired himself in it (*khilāfat*), while indeed he knows that my position with regard to it is as the position of a pivot

to a grinding mill; the flood (of excellence in knowledge) flows down from me and no bird can fly up to me (i.e., nobody can reach the height of my knowledge). I let a veil hang over it and I turned away from it”.⁴¹

In another *khutbā* or sermon, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī says:

“If I speak (about *Khilāfat*) they say: He covets power. And if I keep silent, they say: He is afraid of death. Alas! By God! After the great and small adversities, the son of Abū Ṭālib is more familiar with death than a suckling baby with its mother’s breast. Rather, I am silent due to a hidden knowledge, which if I divulge, then certainly you will tremble like the ropes tremble in a deep well”.⁴²

It is crystal clear from Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s own words that, although he was fully aware that his rights had been usurped, he was in every way more qualified to be the Caliph and thirdly that he was not afraid to fight for his rights, yet he did not press his inheritance, because as he says he had ‘hidden knowledge’.

Some insight can be gained into Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s lofty ideals, by considering one particular historical event which occurred after the episode of Saqīfah-yi Banī Sāʿidah and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s response to it. Immediately after Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar gave his *bayʿah* to Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr, Abū Sufyān and Abbās (Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s uncle) approached Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and not only offered their *bayʿah* to him but Abū Sufyān pledged armed support for Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī if he wanted to claim his rights. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s reply below shows that his purpose and aim were not those of an ordinary man. He said to Abū Sufyān, ʿAbbās and others:

“O people! Cross the billows of temptation on the ships of salvation and turn away from the path of discord (mutual aversion). And throw away the crowns of vainglory”.⁴³

Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh explained succinctly, the stance taken by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, as follows: “The political and worldly

Khalifat was accepted by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī in favour of the three first khalifs voluntarily and with goodwill for the protection of the interests of the Muslims throughout the world”.⁴⁴

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī is elected Caliph

The death of Ḥaẓrat ʿUṣmān was followed by several days of anarchy and general unrest. At the end of this period, the mass of the people of Madinah, forced Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to accept the Caliphate.

It should be noted that unlike his three predecessors, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s was the only true election as a Caliph, since the general masses urged him to accept their leadership. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī vividly records the episode as: “Nothing surprised me except the (coming of) the people like the hair on the neck of the hyena, flocking towards me from all sides, until Ḥaṣan and Ḥusayn were trampled and my cloak was torn from both sides (by the crowds of people) gathering around me like a flock of sheep”.⁴⁵

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī gave in to the insistence of the masses and accepted the Caliphate, as he explains: “But, by the One who has split the seed and created the soul! Had there not been the presence of the present (i.e., those who had gathered to give *bayʿah*) and establishment of proof (of rights) by the existence of the helpers and that God has taken a covenant from the ʿulamā’ that they should put a check on the gorging by the oppressor and the starvation of the oppressed, I would have given it free rein and I would have made the last of it to drink with the cup of the first of it (i.e., I would have left the Caliphate as I did in the beginning) and you would have found that for me this world of yours is less than the sneeze of a goat”.⁴⁶

On another occasion, when ʿAbdu’llāh ibn ʿAbbās went to see Imam ʿAlī in Zū Qar, he found Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī mending his sandals. He asked Abdu’llāh what the pair of sandals was worth. The answer was: ‘Nothing’. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī said: “By God, they are dearer to me than the leadership of you all, except that I establish truth and repel falsehood”.⁴⁷

It is evident from the above quotations that Ḥaẓrat °Alī accepted the caliphate for one reason only, namely to ‘establish the truth and repel falsehood’.

Battles of Jamal, Şifīn and Nahrawān

Ḥaẓrat °Alī was elected caliph in 656 C.E. The three battles which took place during Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s short caliphate of five years, namely, the Battles of Jamal, Şifīn and Nahrawān, are described in great detail in all history books. In this paper, however, these battles will be described briefly, in order to show how Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s lofty ideals were also manifested in his conduct of them.

It should have been quite clear from the earlier sections on Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s knowledge as well as his role as Khalīfah or Imam, that he never considered his temporal power of prime importance. As Imam or divinely appointed guide or *hādī*, there has never been any doubt that he attached greater importance to ‘establishing the truth and repelling falsehood’ or, in the words of Ḥaẓrat Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh: “Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s miraculous powers lay in his ability to help people to arrive at the Haqīqat”.⁴⁸

This insight, however, is confined to those who accept the principle of Imāmat and the role of the Imam. For those who are outside of this belief, it has been beyond their comprehension that Ḥaẓrat °Alī acted in the way he did. The best known example to quote to demonstrate this point is an episode from the Battle of Şifīn. Ḥaẓrat °Alī faced the superior (in numbers) army of Mu°āwiyah on the banks of the Euphrates river. Mu°āwiyah’s army had control of the river supplies and they denied access to Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s army with the intention of hastening their defeat through thirst.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī, in his usual way, tried through letters and personal envoys to get Mu°āwiyah to behave in a fair way, but to no avail. Only then did Ḥaẓrat °Alī resort to arms and having defeated Mu°āwiyah’s soldiers, secured the water supply for his men. Now the roles were reversed and Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s army was in control of the water supplies, his commanders advised him to give Mu°āwiyah

and his army the same treatment as had been meted out to them earlier. But Ḥaẓrat °Alī refused – even in war against his arch-enemy, his conduct was scrupulously fair. Mu°āwiyah’s men were given access to the water supply.

Only Ḥaẓrat °Alī could do what he did! Any other leader would have taken the utmost advantage of the situation to gain the upper hand, especially since they would have had the excuse that Mu°āwiyah had set them the precedent.

To return to a general description of these battles, Ḥaẓrat °Alī was forced to undertake them, because no sooner had he accepted the oath of allegiance (*bay°ah*) of the masses, when, in his words: “When I assumed power, a group broke the oath, the other renounced (the true faith) and the others transgressed”.⁴⁹ The holy Prophet Muḥammad had told Ḥaẓrat °Alī: “Indeed you will fight with the *nākiṣīn* (the breakers of *bay°ah*), the *qāsiṭīn* (the oppressors or the unjust ones) and the *māriqīn* (those who renounce the true faith)”.⁵⁰

The three groups mentioned above by Prophet Muḥammad were: Ṭalḥah, Zubayr and their main supporter Ḥaẓrat Ā’ishāh, who broke the oath. Therefore, Ḥaẓrat °Alī had to fight the battle of Jamal against them.

The Khārijites (literally ‘those who left’) renounced the true faith and after the Battle of Ṣiffīn, they created havoc and terrorised some areas of Iraq with their violence. Ḥaẓrat °Alī therefore took up arms against them in the Battle of Nahrawān and defeated them soundly.

The third group, who transgressed, refers to Mu°āwiyah, who was from the Umayyad family, the son of Abū Sufyān (who was compelled to accept Islam after the conquest of Makkah) and Hind (who is infamous in history for having mutilated the body of Ḥaẓrat Ḥamzah at the Battle of Uḥud). Ḥaẓrat °Alī fought the Battle of Ṣiffīn against him.

In all the three battles, Ḥaẓrat °Alī first used his conciliatory powers

to avoid the military confrontations. He was loathe to see Muslims shed Muslim blood therefore, he sent letter after letter and personal representatives, one after another, to persuade his enemies not to fight. Only when all these attempts failed, was he forced to enter the battlefield.

When the opposing armies faced each other, Ḥaẓrat °Alī held his men back. He issued strict orders that the battle should not be initiated by his soldiers. During the actual fighting, Ḥaẓrat °Alī's soldiers were instructed to fight within a stringent code of chivalry – no dismemberment of bodies or dead enemies, no pursuing of fleeing enemies, no ill-treatment of captives, no looting, no harm to women, children and old people – was allowed.

In defeat, the enemies, both dead and alive were treated with honour and respect. At the Battle of Jamal or Camel, so named because of the camel on which Ḥaẓrat Ā'ishāh rode, Ḥaẓrat °Alī personally supervised the burial of all the dead, both his own soldiers as well as his opponents, in mass graves and then he prayed over them. Further, Ā'ishāh who had used her influential position as *Ummu'l-mu'minīn* (mother of the believers) to incite and rally opposition against Ḥaẓrat °Alī, was treated with deference even in abject defeat. Ḥaẓrat °Alī ensured that she was escorted safely back to Madīnah.

Of these three battles, Ṣiffīn has aroused the most controversy. It lasted for a hundred and ten days, during which there were sporadic skirmishes. Ḥaẓrat °Alī, in order to prevent unnecessary bloodshed, challenged Mu°āwiyah in the traditional manner, to single combat. Mu°āwiyah, who was well aware that no person had ever come out alive of a single combat encounter with Ḥaẓrat °Alī, bribed °Amr ibn al-°Ās to fight in his stead.

In the final days of the battle, Ḥaẓrat °Alī's forces, though numerically smaller, were winning. Therefore, Mu°āwiyah and °Amr ibn al-°Ās devised a scheme, which would bring the battle to a halt and save them from a resounding defeat. Pages of the Qur'ān were tied to the tops of the lances by Mu°āwiyah's men, who shouted that the Book

of God should decide between the two armies. The effect on Ḥaẓrat °Alī's army was more than what Mu°āwiyah could have wished for. Most of Ḥaẓrat °Alī's soldiers lay down their arms. Ḥaẓrat °Alī's advice to them to disregard this devious stratagem fell on deaf ears, as did the entreaties of such generals as Mālīk bin Ashtar. Mu°āwiyah had prepared his ground well. Throughout the long weeks and months of the battle, his men had planted propaganda in the ranks of Ḥaẓrat °Alī's armies and had bribed several key figures to betray Ḥaẓrat °Alī at the crucial moment. Ḥaẓrat °Alī was forced to accept arbitration and to acquiesce to the dubious choice of Abū Mūsā al-Ash°arī as the arbiter from his side.

Some historians have been unable to come to terms with certain aspects of the Battle of Şiffin. Firstly, they question how Ḥaẓrat °Alī's winning side could lose its advantage and secondly, many fail to understand why Ḥaẓrat °Alī did not use the same sort of underhand tactics (which sometimes are inappropriately described as diplomacy) as Mu°āwiyah. Thirdly, Ḥaẓrat °Alī's own views on the arbitration are not generally known or understood. For the answers to these three important and contentious points, we will look to Ḥaẓrat °Alī's own sayings. With regard to the first question of how the winning side could give up its advantage so easily, Ḥaẓrat °Alī once said to his men:

“Indeed you have filled my heart with pus and my chest with exasperation. And you made me to swallow the draught of sorrow breath by breath and you undermined my opinion by disobeying and deserting me, to the extent that the Quraysh said: The son of Abū Ṭālib is a brave man, but has no knowledge of warfare. How excellent is he! And is there anyone among them stronger and more experienced (than me) for it and more intrepid and long experienced in it than me. Indeed, I entered the battlefield when I was not yet twenty and I am now over sixty. But the one who is not obeyed has no opinion (i.e., there cannot be success if the leader is not obeyed)”⁵¹

On another occasion, when news reached Ḥaẓrat °Alī about

Mu^cāwiyah's hordes raiding border towns and looting and pillaging them, he delivered the following *khutbā*:

“I have been informed that Busr has reached Yaman. And by God! I indeed think that, they will rule it instead of you due to their unity in falsehood and your disunity in truth and due to your disobedience of your leader (leader in truth) and their obedience of their leader in falsehood and due to their fulfilling of the trust of their master and your treachery to yours and due to their being orderly in their country and your being disorderly”.⁵²

The second point about why Ḥazrat ^cAlī did not use Mu^cāwiyah's brand of political manoeuvring, propaganda and bribery too, is best answered by Ḥazrat ^cAlī's own words:

“O People! Indeed faithfulness is the twin of truthfulness. And I do not know a shield more protective than it. He who knows how the return (to God) is, he does not betray (i.e., one who keeps the Day of Judgement before him can never be faithless). And indeed, we are in a time in which most of the people have taken deception to be intelligence and the ignorant people consider it a good trick. What has happened to them! Indeed the experienced one knows the way of the trick, but between it and him, there is the command of God and His prohibition (which prevent him from using the trick), and so he leaves it, though he sees it and has power over it. But the one who is not wary of committing sin in religion, seizes its opportunity”.⁵³

On the third point about Ḥazrat ^cAlī's views on the arbitration, he says:

“Indeed we did not choose the people as arbitrator and indeed we chose the Qur'ān. And this Qur'ān is a writing hidden between two covers. It does not speak with a tongue and therefore, inevitably, it has to have an interpreter. And it is the people who speak of it. And when the community (*al-qawm*) invited us to choose the Qur'ān as

arbitrator between us, we were not the entrusted party of the Book of God, may He be exalted. And indeed God, may He be glorified, has said: ‘And if you have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger’ (4:59). Thus, referring to God means that we should judge according to His Book and referring to the Messenger means that we should follow his sunnat. When it is truthfully judged in the Book of God, then we are the most deserving of people (according) to it and if it is judged according to the sunnat of the Prophet, may God’s blessings be on him and his progeny, then we are the most worthy of them (according) to it’.⁵⁴

The so-called arbitration, which was supposed to resolve the cause of the Battle of Şiffin, managed only to maintain the status quo, despite all of Mu[°]āwiyah and ‘Amr ibn al-[°]Ās’ scheming and deviousness. Mu[°]āwiyah continued as the Governor of Syria, amassing power and money by oppressive and foul means.

Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī was the Caliph until 661 C.E, when the Khārijite, Ibn Muljam, struck him with a poisoned sword whilst he was in prostration in the mosque of Kūfah. Thus, Mawlānā ‘Alī is the only person in history who was born in the Ka‘bah and martyred in a mosque!

The unsatisfactory conclusion of the Battle of Şiffīn may be regarded by many as a defeat for Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī and in *zāhiri* terms, it was indeed a set-back. However, it is interesting to draw some comparisons between Mu[°]āwiyah and Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī. Mu[°]āwiyah and his successors are remembered and cursed for the way they oppressed and persecuted the people in their single-minded pursuit of worldly power and pleasures. Further, history books record their sorry end at the hands of the Abbāsids in great and gory detail.

Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī, on the other hand, lives on in the memories of generation after generation of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as the Caliph who did not sacrifice his ideals and his righteousness, piety and fear of God, for the sake of a temporary physical kingdom. In this sense too, Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī is the ideal ‘*fatā*’ of Islam.

As ʿAbdullāh, son of Malik ibn Hanbal (one of the four imams of the Sunnis) said that the caliphate did not bring any honour or glory to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, but was itself honoured and glorified by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī.⁵⁵

PART 6

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī restores a just society of the Islamic Vision

In 656 C.E., when Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī became the Caliph, he inherited an Islamic State, the boundaries of which incorporated vast numbers of non-Arab Muslims as well as substantial numbers of Christians, Jews and others. He further inherited an administration which was overrun by nepotism and its accompanying corruption. Therefore, apart from the wars which disrupted his caliphate (see chapter on Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī as a caliph), Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī was faced with the mammoth task of reforming the government of the state, so that it was once again based on true Islamic principles, as in the days of Prophet Muḥammad.

His first act on being elected Caliph was to replace the corrupt governors of the previous regime by upright and trustworthy men. A number of historians have criticised this action of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and have suggested that he should have waited for some time before dismissing them. This is a classic example of the futility of judging Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's actions on the standards of ordinary men. As already pointed out, the temporal power which the caliphate carried with it was 'less than the sneeze of a goat' to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, whose foremost concern was 'to establish truth and repel falsehood', irrespective of the consequences of such effort.

Some examples of the changes made by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī

As mentioned above, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī first replaced the existing corrupt governors of the various parts of the Islamic State, such as Kūfah, Baṣrah, Makkah, Egypt, Yaman, with honest, upright men. He did not stop at this – he further gave the new governors a comprehensive code of conduct or practices to be adopted by them.

This code of conduct, which was the foundation of a just and good

government was far in advance of anything which prevailed in any part of the world at that time. More than this, a thorough study of the advice given by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to his governors, proves that the sort of society and government which he envisaged and worked for, has been experienced only in some parts of the world and only in very recent times.

For instance, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī advised his governors as follows:

1. “Do not be like a ferocious lion among them, waiting for a chance to eat them up, because the people are of only two categories – either they are your brothers in Islam or they are human beings just like you”.
2. “Be just, for if you are not just, you are a tyrant and a tyrant is the enemy of God”.
3. “Remember that it is much better to rule over the people by love than by fear”.

The above selected quotations show how concise yet comprehensive was the counsel given by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to his governors as regards their own personal behaviour. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī also set out, for his governors, a set of criteria for the appointment of various officials under them. He said:

- a) “Select such ministers as may speak the truth, though it may be bitter”.
- b) “Select pious and holy persons for the post of Qāzis (Judges). They should not make frequent errors in their judgement. They must not be greedy. They must not go against truth deliberately. They must not become proud if they are praised”.
- c) “Your officials should be appointed on their merits. Select these officials from those families which embraced Islam earliest for they attach more importance to the next world than to this world”.

Equally all-inclusive were the recommendations of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī regarding the treatment of various categories of subjects. He said: “There are different grades of subjects. Some of them are soldiers

to fight for God. Some of them are business men. Some are artisans and craftsmen. A few of them are beggars. God has fixed a share for each of them”.

For the first group, the soldiers who protect religion and maintain peace and order, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī advised: ‘Take care of the soldiers just as you take care of your children. Love them and treat them kindly’.

For the next category, he said: ‘Give sound instructions to businessmen and industrialists. Tell them to be honest and kind. They increase and multiply the wealth of a nation. Their prices must be reasonable. They must not make huge profits. They must correctly weigh everything which they sell’.

For the few who are beggars, his advice was: ‘Treat the poor and destitute kindly. Fear God and help them. You must not neglect them because of your other activities. Take pity on the orphans and aged people who have no means of livelihood’.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s ideas about the use of land for agriculture and the collection of taxes were also far-reaching in their effects. He said: “Impose taxes upon the people according to their capacity to pay. Try to populate those areas which have no habitation. Remit taxes if famine breaks out, crops fail or any calamity befalls the people. Remission of taxes shall minimise the sufferings of the people and it shall improve their lot... Verily, if the farmers are destitute and poor, the cultivation of lands shall deteriorate. And the farmers and landlords are reduced to abject poverty when the ruler is avaricious”.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, it is obvious from the above discussion, hated greed and exploitation. He urged his governors to work towards achieving a just socio-economic government.

His statement: ‘I have never seen affluence and plenitude except there is a usurped right side by side’,⁵⁶ may be considered revolutionary by many, but how true it is to the personality and ideals of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī. Another example of his fearless implementation of his ideals

was when he granted, in the face of extreme opposition, equal rights to the *mawālīs* or non-Arab Muslims, who had hitherto been discriminated against, particularly in the matter of their share of the *Baytu'l-māl* or the State Treasury. As he says: “If it had been my personal property, I would have divided it equally amongst the people. These war spoils are the wealth of God. Why should I not make equal distribution of it?”⁵⁷

Most of the quotations used in this section are from the famous letter written by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to Mālīk bin Ashtar when appointing him governor of Egypt. The full text of this letter, considered by many as the blue print for a just and benevolent government, is given in the appendix. A contemporary Christian Arab writer, J. Jurdaq, writing about Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, compares the contents of this letter with the United Nations Charter and says:

“I think the reader may realise that between this Charter and the one laid down by Imam Ali, there is great relationship, except in the case of these points, which are connected with the passage of time and developments therein. Furthermore, in the Charter of Imam Ali, we find a deep and profound human compassion which is altogether lacking in the United Nations Charter”.⁵⁸

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s lasting impact on the Faith and Culture of Islam

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Ṣūfism (*Taṣawwuf*)

Taṣawwuf or Ṣūfism, as it is more popularly known, initially started within Sunni Islam, which did not accept the need for spiritual guidance through a living Imam after the Prophet (for the Sunni interpretation of the Prophetic *ḥadīs* al-Ṣaqalayn, see the section on Ghadir-i Khumm). In the course of time, however, in Sunni Islam, those who were interested in the deeper, spiritual understanding of Islam began to gather in small groups around a spiritual guide or master. These groups of Ṣūfis, as they came to be known, were based on the belief that the holy Prophet had two types of knowledge: the *zāhiri* or exoteric and the *bāṭini* or esoteric. This *bāṭini* knowledge was given to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, as Annemarie Schimmel says: “According to the tradition, esoteric wisdom was transmitted from Muḥammad to his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) ...”.⁵⁹

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, during his lifetime, had around him a close group of disciples, consisting of such outstanding Muslims as Salmān-i Fārsī, Abū Zarr Ghifārī, ʿAmmār bin Yāsir, Ḥuzayfah bin al-Yaman and al-Miqdād bin Aswad, amongst others, because as Martin Lings comments: “...and there can be little doubt that already before he became caliph, ʿAlī was the most remarkable of these spiritual centres”.⁶⁰

The Ṣūfī Masters, in order to validate their own teaching, tried to establish that it came from Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, either directly or indirectly, through one of his close disciples. For instance, during those periods of Islamic history, when extreme anti-Shiʿah feelings were whipped up, it is interesting to note that some Ṣūfī *silsilahs*, traced their spiritual pedigree back to Ḥaẓrat Abū Bakr through Salmān-i Fārsī and not even his own son, Muḥammad bin Abū Bakr (who had

been implicated in the murder of °Uṣmān).⁶¹ As already mentioned above, Salmān-i Fārsī was a dedicated disciple of Ḥaẓrat °Alī and this is an example of indirectly going back to Ḥaẓrat °Alī.

The vast majority of Ṣūfī *silsilahs*, however, look back to Ḥaẓrat °Alī as their model and exemplar for inner knowledge, austerity, sacrifice, love, bravery and all his other virtues. With this acceptance of Ḥaẓrat °Alī as their ideal, they also accepted certain teachings such as *Walāyat*, *bay°at*, *najwah* (*mehmāni*), spiritual hierarchy etc. Further, the Ṣūfis trace many of their own rites and rituals, emblems, *muraqqa°* (patched cloth), *suhbah* (companionship) back to Ḥaẓrat °Alī.

Shi°ah Islam did not feel the need for any master other than the Imam of the time, because for the Shi°ahs, the Prophet at Ghadir-i Khumm had clearly appointed Ḥaẓrat °Alī as his successor and had prayed to God to turn the truth (*haqq*) in the direction in which °Alī turns. Thus all knowledge, both exoteric and esoteric, is contained in the guidance of the Imam of the time. There have been some Ṣūfī movements in Ithna °ashari Shi°ism, but only after the concealment of their Imam.

The above description does not intend to give a detailed account of the rise and development of Ṣūfism, since the subject is extremely well documented. The purpose of this section was simply to show how Ḥaẓrat °Alī has been and is venerated by Ṣūfis.

One movement within Ṣūfism, which is of particular interest is called ‘*futuwwah*’, which to those with a knowledge of Arabic, is obviously linked with Ḥaẓrat °Alī. The word ‘*futuwwah*’ (which in Persian is called *Jawān-mardī*) is linked with *fatā* or *jawān-mard*. *Fatā* or *jawān-mard* means an ideal man, who possesses all the possible virtues of humanity. The ideal *fatā* in Islam is Ḥaẓrat °Alī, about whom ‘*Lā fata illā °Alī, lā sayfa illā Zulfāqār*’ was recited in the battle of Uḥud. In the article of ‘*Futuwwah*’ in the new edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, it is said “... the gradual growth of the figure of °Alī has resulted in his being regarded as the *fatā* par excellence as is expressed in the old saying ‘*Lā fatā illā °Alī*’”.⁶²

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*)

It has already been discussed in the section on Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s knowledge, that his knowledge was not acquired, rather it was given knowledge. In this section, it will be seen that this given knowledge of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī is manifest in the field of jurisprudence, as it is in other fields.

Prophet Muḥammad once said to his companions: ‘The best of judges among you is Ali’.⁶³ History books are full of the most complicated of cases which were resolved by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī gave judgements during the lifetime of the Prophet as well as during the Caliphate of the first three Caliphs. It is recorded that they used to refer all complex and intricate cases to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī. For this reason, Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar, used to pray to God to preserve him from a perplexing case which Abu’l Ḥasan (i.e., Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī) was not present to decide.⁶⁴ His other famous statement about Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī is: ‘If ʿAlī were not there ʿUmar would have perished’.

A representative sample of cases and the decisions given by Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī are discussed below, to give the reader an idea of the social context in which they took place. They will further reveal the surprising complexity of some of the cases which Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī had to deal with.

During the time of Ḥaẓrat ʿUṣmān a case was brought to him, in which a man had a child by his female slave. The master then separated from her and married her to one of his other slaves. Soon after, the master died. The female slave was freed by virtue of being the mother of the master’s son. This son inherited everything, including his mother’s husband, the slave. The next episode in the story is that the son died therefore, the mother inherited everything, including the slave to whom she was married. The dispute centred on the fact that the slave-husband claimed that the woman was his wife and he would not release her from the marriage, whereas the woman insisted that he was her slave.

Ḥaẓrat ʿUṣmān was much puzzled by this case, but Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī who was present, resolved the case by asking if the slave-husband had conjugal relations with the woman after her inheritance. The reply was ‘No’, thereupon Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī judged that the man was indeed her slave and she could keep him, free him or sell him as she wished.

A second example happened earlier in the time of Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar and demonstrates Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s insight and perfect impartiality, irrespective of the status of the parties concerned. It is reported that Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar summoned a woman, who was suspected of immoral behaviour. When the Caliph’s messengers arrived at her home, the woman was so frightened by the summons that she miscarried her baby.

Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar sought the counsel of the other Companions of the Prophet, all of whom said that no blame was attached to him since he had been acting correctly in summoning the woman. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, who was also present, remained silent. Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar pressed him for his opinion. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī replied that since the loss of the baby was directly as a result of Ḥaẓrat ʿUmar’s action, he was liable to pay the blood money to the woman’s family.

Another example is from Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s own Caliphate. In this particular case, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī reversed the verdict already passed by a local Qāẓi.

One day, he found a young man, weeping bitterly in the mosque. It emerged from questioning him that his father had gone on a journey with a group of four other men. When they returned, the boy’s father and his belongings were missing. He was told that his father had died and had been buried on the way and that he had left no belongings. The youth had accused the men of murdering his father and of appropriating his belongings, but the local Qāẓi had dismissed his case.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī told his servant Qanbar to gather the people in order to hear this case again. First, he separated the four accused and sent them to each corner of the mosque. Then he called a scribe and

after that, he summoned the first of the four men and questioned him minutely about the journey in question. All the answers were recorded. In the same manner, the other three were also interrogated one at a time. The last man, when it was his turn to answer, stuttered and confessed that his colleagues had killed the youth's father and taken his belongings. When confronted with the facts of the real story, the first three men also recanted their versions. Thus was justice done. The youth did not wish them to be punished for murder nevertheless Ḥaẓrat °Alī punished them severely.

In the field of judgements on the law of inheritance, Ḥaẓrat °Alī's extraordinary and phenomenal power is well known and documented. Once a woman came to him and protested that her brother had left an inheritance of six hundred dinars, but her share was only one dinar. Ḥaẓrat °Alī promptly answered: 'Did he leave a wife, two daughters, a mother, twelve brothers and you!' The woman was speechless with amazement because her brother's family consisted of exactly that number!

Ḥaẓrat °Alī was also an expert in the laws of the Jews and the Christians, and many a time he had to conduct the cases of members of these communities who lived within the Islamic State. Ḥaẓrat °Alī has himself remarked as follows:

“If I sit (literally – if a cushion was placed for me) to give judgement, then I would judge the people of the Tawrat (Old Testament) according to their Tawrat and the people of Injil (Gospel) according to their Injil and the people of Furqān (i.e., Qur'ān) according to their Furqān, till everyone would confess that °Alī has decided according to what God has revealed. The opponents, like the supporters, will confess that he is the supreme judge of the community'.⁶⁵

Ḥaẓrat °Alī as a Calligrapher

The art of calligraphy is unanimously recognised as the unique contribution of Islam to world culture. Its initial development and later flowering are closely linked to the fact that it was necessary to

record and hand down to succeeding generations the Divine word revealed to Prophet Muḥammad in the form of the holy Qurʾān. Further, the emphasis laid on the acquisition of knowledge by our Holy Prophet⁶⁶ and the repeated use of words such as ‘pen’, ‘tablet’, ‘ink’, ‘read’, ‘book’ etc. in the Qurʾān itself gave a tremendous impetus to the evolution of calligraphy.⁶⁷ Some writers suggest that, in fact, it was a revolution, since the art of calligraphy came into being from almost nothing.

Pre-Islamic Arabic culture was almost wholly an oral one, which relied on the prodigious memories of its poets and folk historians. However, with the revelation of the Qurʾān, the situation changed dramatically and calligraphy came into such prominence that Martin Lings comments:

“It might even be said not only that the Arabs (and he includes all those who use Arabic as a liturgical language, such as the Turks and Persians) have never been surpassed as calligraphers, but also that they have only been equalled by one other people, namely the Chinese, whose art has, however, developed along very different lines”.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī played the pivotal role of outstanding significance in the emergence of Arabic calligraphy ‘from almost nothing to almost everything’. It is said that he developed the Kūfic script out of an inherited script, known as maqīli. The name ‘Kūfic’ is attributed to the city of Kūfah which was both a centre of support for Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and an important centre for the art of writing.

Mohamed Zakariya, in his book *‘The Calligraphy of Islam’* says: “Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth Caliph, is considered the first real calligrapher primarily because of his interest in the secrets of the art. From him is usually traced the ‘tree’ or ‘chain’ of calligraphers, which is a list, in one of a number of forms, of all the calligraphers – or at least the outstanding ones – up to the present”. This ‘tree’ of famous calligraphers, tracing their origin back to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, can be seen in an Arabic book, called *Muṣawwar al-Khaṭṭ al-Arabi* by Nāji Zayn al-Dīn, published in 1968 in Baghdad.

Annemarie Schimmel considers another important aspect of Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s role in her book: “*Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*”. She says: “Since Calligraphy thus was regarded as a sacred art, connections between calligraphers and Sufis were natural. In both traditions, the Silsila (chain) goes back to Ali, the first calligrapher in the Kufic style”.

Thus it is evident from the standard texts on Islamic Calligraphy, that the art of writing owes its origins to the example and efforts of Ḥaẓrat °Alī. The powerful influence exercised by Ḥaẓrat °Alī in the domain of calligraphy, lasted beyond his own lifetime. Hundreds of years later, renowned calligraphers attributed their success and fame to him. There is a delightful legend about Mīr °Alī of Tabrīz, whose calligraphic ability is reflected in his title ‘*Qudwatu’l-Kuttāb* (the exemplary calligrapher)’. It is said that Mīr °Alī perfected the style known as ‘Nasta°liq’ after Ḥaẓrat °Alī in a dream, interpreted for him another dream of flying geese.



Bismi’Ilāh in the Nasta°liq script

It can further be added that it is no accident that a number of the most outstanding master calligraphers include °Alī’ in their names, for instance, Sulṭān °Alī Mashhadī, Mīr °Alī of Tabrīz and °Alī Ibn Hilāl (the real name of Ibn al-Bawwāb). Thus do the master calligraphers of Islamic history acknowledge their ‘spiritual pedigree’ from Ḥaẓrat °Alī both in their names and in their sublime art and preserve the memory of Ḥaẓrat °Alī through the ages.

A number of the calligraphers used poetry, particularly to get certain messages across to their students and apprentices. Even if the poetry did not meet the rigorous demands of metre and rhyme etc., their prime purpose was to teach their students. In one such example of verse, the famous calligrapher Sulṭān °Alī remarks: “The aim of Murtaẓā °Alī in writing was (to reproduce) not merely

speech, letters and dots, but fundamentals, purity and virtue; for this reason he deigned to point to good writing”.

The above quotation of a master calligrapher of the late fifteenth century is an apt reminder of the prime function of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī. In fact, any study of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s life makes it clear very quickly, that he excelled in everything he did and the fundamental reason for this is that his knowledge and action were based on the Truth (*Ḥaḳīqat*).

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī as an Orator

The role of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī vis-à-vis the classical Arabic language is widely acknowledged by scholars of the language. In this section, the marvellous command of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī over the oral Arabic language will be discussed first.

History records offer a perfect example of the power of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī as an orator. During the lifetime of the Prophet, Islam was gradually accepted by tribe after tribe and area after area of the Arabian Peninsula. As part of his plan to propagate Islam, Prophet Muḥammad sent Khālīd bin Walīd to the people of Yaman to call them to Islam. Yaman, as part of Southern Arabia, boasted a long-standing, highly developed civilisation. Its people were learned, scholarly and held strongly to their ancient traditions. Further, the previously revealed religions – Judaism and Christianity – were well established there and their rabbis and priests were well-versed in their scriptures. It is reported that Khālīd bin Walīd laboured in vain for six months to convert the Yamanites, but not one of them responded. Eventually, Prophet Muḥammad recalled him and in 632 C.E., sent Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī to Yaman.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī so impressed the Yamanites by the eloquence of his *khuṭbāhs* (sermons) and the example of his personal piety and the faithfulness of his judgements, that within a short time, the famous Jewish tribe of Hamdan converted to Islam. This signalled the turning of the tide in Yaman, since many more tribes followed suit and came within the fold of Islam. By his successful mission

to Yaman, Ḥaẓrat °Alī has left for posterity an example of his unparalleled skill in oratory.

More evidence of his unique mastery of Arabic rhetoric and eloquence is found in the *Najhu'l-Balāghah*, which is a collection of some of his *khuṭbāhs*, letters and aphorisms, compiled by Shaykh Sharīf ar-Raẓī in the tenth century C.E. Ḥaẓrat °Alī delivered moving and inspiring sermons on a range of subjects: from mystical expositions on *Tawḥīd* (unity of God) to stirring exhortations on *Jihād* to his soldiers. He also delivered learned and detailed discourses on natural history (see his *khuṭbāhs* on the peacock and the bat in *Najhu'l-Balāghah*) as well as pithy and succinct maxims, which contain perennial truths. Ḥaẓrat °Alī's *khuṭbāhs* were memorised by his listeners who, in the oral tradition of Arabia, passed down these precious words from generation to generation.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī says in *Najhu'l-Balāghah*: “We the *Ahl al-Bayt* are the kings of discourse. Its roots are within us and its branches hang over us”.

A truly amazing feat of oratory was once performed by Ḥaẓrat °Alī, when several of the Prophet's companions were discussing the Arabic language and the impossibility of speaking without using the letter '*Alif*', which like the letter 'A' in English, is the most used letter of the Arabic language. It is said that without any hesitation, Ḥaẓrat °Alī rose and delivered a remarkable speech without once using the letter '*Alif*'. This speech is appropriately known as the '*Speech without the Alif*'.⁶⁸ All Arabic philologists agree that it was a *tour de force* and it is still considered a model of Arabic oratory today.

An equally well-known episode to demonstrate Ḥaẓrat °Alī's power of discourse is when he delivered to Ibn °Abbās, for the better part of the night, an oration on '*al-ḥamd*', which is the first word of the first verse of the first Sūrah of the holy Qur'ān (see also the section on Ḥaẓrat °Alī's knowledge). These examples portray not only Ḥaẓrat °Alī's extraordinary erudition and command over Arabic,

but show also his oratory was so outstandingly powerful that it has often been likened to a river in full torrent, descending from a mountain. Not surprisingly then, many historians report that no antagonist was ever able to defeat Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī either in the combat of the tongue or the sword. In both these arenas, Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī reigned supreme.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī and Arabic Grammar

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, by his eloquence, introduced a unique variety of imagery, expressive phrases and beautiful metaphors into a language which was already rich in vocabulary and poetic imagery. However, he is particularly remembered for the introduction of the fundamental principles of the grammar of the Arabic language. Prior to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's time, Arabic had no grammatical rules. With the expansion of the Islamic State, the Arabs inevitably came into contact with other linguistic groups and there was a real danger that not only would the classical language of the holy Qurʿān lose its purity, but the meaning of the Divine Word would be distorted.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, therefore laid down the principles of the language for Abu'l Aswad ad-Duwalī, who then wrote a complete treatise on it. Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's principle was simple – i.e., the parts of speech are three – the noun, the verb and the particle. Abu'l Aswad ad-Duwalī was asked where he had acquired the science of grammar, answered that he had learned the first points of it from Amīru'l-mu'minīn ʿAlī Ibn Abi Talib.⁶⁹ By encouraging Abu'l Aswad to lay down the foundation of An-Nahw (syntax), Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī ensured that Arabic would retain its classical purity through the ages and that the meaning of the Divine Word would not be distorted.

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī's *Khuṭbāhs*, Letters and Maxims

Masʿūdī, the famous Muslim historian records that Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī during his lifetime, delivered nearly five hundred *khuṭbāhs* (sermons), which were memorised by some of the listeners and gradually began to be quoted in a number of books and histories

of Arabia. These sermons, always delivered extempore covered a multitude of subjects: awe inspiring discourses on the attributes of God; moving eulogies of the holy Prophet and the Qur'ān; stirring exhortations to *Jihād* only in the path of God, truth and justice; convincing comparisons between the temporality of this world and the lasting happiness of the next and persuasive sermons to teach high values of morality and ethics. These *khuṭbāhs* are not only sources of moral guidance and noble ethics, they are also considered masterpieces of Arabic literature and models of the art of rhetoric.

In addition, Ḥaẓrat °Alī wrote a large number of letters, many to his governors to train them to be just, benevolent and God-fearing rulers and some to Mu°āwiyah which serve as a source of first hand historical information. He has also left behind a great number of concise sayings and aphorisms which abound in wisdom and truth.

In the tenth century C.E, Sharīf ar-Raẓī, a Shī°ah theologian of great reputation, carried out a systematic task of collating Ḥaẓrat °Alī's sermons, letters and maxims. From already recorded sources, as well as oral sources, he was able to gather together only 245 sermons, 75 letters and 200 maxims. These he compiled as a book, called *Nahju'l-balāghah* or the *Way of Eloquence*. Since the tenth century, the valuable work of Sharīf ar-Raẓī has attracted much attention. A large number of commentaries have been written on it. A work of such importance was also bound to draw some controversy. Some people have argued that the work is a forgery, however, it is now accepted by most that the major part of *Nahju'l-balāghah* is from either the tongue or the pen of Ḥaẓrat °Alī.

It will not be possible in a paper of this size to give a complete survey of the laudatory comments written about *Nahju'l-balāghah* through the ages, nor even a representative sample of such praise. However, two personalities will be quoted – first, because neither of them is Shī°ah, secondly, they are both learned and renowned scholars and finally, Arabic is their mother tongue.

Ibn-i Abi'l-Ḥadīd (d. 655 A.H) has written a great commentary on

Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s sermons, in which he says:

“His (Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s) speeches, letters and sayings are so supremely eminent that they are above the sayings of man and below only to the word of God. None can surpass it but the holy Qur’ān”.⁷⁰

In the present century, Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh, described as ‘the greatest Muslim savant of the modern age’ has also edited and printed *Nahju’l-balāghah* in Egypt. Shaykh ʿAbduh was the Muftī of Egypt and a rector of Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He says:

“Every one of those whose mother tongue is Arabic is of the opinion that the talk and speeches of ʿAlī are better, more eloquent, loftier and fuller in meaning than those of anyone except, of course, the Prophet and the holy Qur’ān”.⁷¹

Ḥazrat ʿAlī’s *Kunya*hs and Titles

In Arabic, it is considered respectful to address a person by referring to him as the father (Abu) of one of his sons. Ḥazrat ʿAlī was popularly known as Abu’l-Ḥasan – Father of Ḥasan.

Prophet Muḥammad used three *kunya*hs for Ḥazrat ʿAlī: Abu’l-Ḥasanayn – Father of the two Ḥasans; Abu’s-Sibṭayn – Father of the two grandsons; Abu’r-Rayḥānatayn – Father of the two fragrant flowers.

The above *kunya*hs are an indication of the love and respect which the members of the *Panḡ-tan-yi pāk* or *ahlu’l-bayt* felt for each other.

Ḥazrat ʿAlī’s Titles

Mawlā: means ‘master’. This title of Ḥazrat ʿAlī is a direct reference to the event of Ghadīr-i Khumm, where the Prophet, after inviting the Muslims present to testify to his own position as their ‘*Mawlā*’ then declared Ḥazrat ʿAlī to be their ‘*mawlā*’ too, (see chapter on Ghadīr-i Khumm and the Qur’ān 33:6).

Murtazā: means ‘the pleased’, ‘the accepted’. It is from the word ‘*irtaza*’, which is traditionally believed was used by Ḥazrat Jibrīl when he brought the message to Prophet Muḥammad, that Allah had chosen Ḥazrat ʿAlī to marry Ḥazrat Fāṭimah. As shown in the first chapter, Ḥazrat ʿAlī was chosen by Prophet Muḥammad again and again for a number of roles, relationships and special tasks. Additionally, this title is an indicator that Ḥazrat ʿAlī was also chosen by Allah to succeed Prophet Muḥammad, as witnessed by the momentous event of Ghadīr-i Khumm.

Asās: literally means ‘foundation’. Ḥazrat ʿAlī was the first Imam of

the cycle of Prophet Muḥammad and as such, was the ‘foundation’ Imam. With every *Nāṭiq* there has to be an *Asās* and that of Prophet Muḥammad was Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī.

Shāh-i Mardān: means the ‘King of Men’. It is a Persian title and is of later origin. Its equivalent in Arabic can be *ʿfatā* i.e., the ideal man.

Waliyyu’llāh: means ‘Friend of Allah’ and refers to the *Ayat-i Walāyat*, Sūrah 5:55.

This particular title is used on Fatimid and Alamut coins as *ʿAliyyun Waliyyu’llāh*.



“An example of a Fatimid coin from the time of Mawlanā Imam al-Muʿizz”

Nafs-i Rasūl: means ‘Soul of the Prophet’, which is referred to in the *āyat-i Mubāhalah*, Sūrah 3, verse 61 (see Chapter One). This title also reminds us of the number of *aḥādīs*, in which the Prophet declared the special bond between himself and Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī.

Note: The word ‘soul’ (*anfus*, sing. *nafs*) in the Arabic in the Qurʾān is simply translated into English as ‘yourselves’ and ‘ourselves’.

Shāhib-i Salūni: This title originates from a very famous statement of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī quoted in full in the section on “Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī’s knowledge of the Holy Qurʾān”. It refers to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī as the only companion of the Prophet, who said ‘ask me...’

Amiru’l-Muʾminīn: or ‘Commander of the faithful’ is a well-known

title of Ḥaẓrat °Alī. It is based on the Prophetic Tradition: ‘God has not sent a verse, in which is addressed ‘O you who believe (*Yā ayyuha’l-lazīna āmanū ...*), but the chief and commander (*amīr*) of the verse, is °Alī’.

Amīru’n-Naḥl or **Ya’sūbu’d-Dīn**: The title ‘Amīru’n-Naḥl’ literally means ‘Prince of the Bees’. ‘Ya’sūb’ also means ‘Prince of the Bees’, therefore the second title literally means ‘Prince of the Bees of religion’.

Ḥaẓrat °Alī used to refer to himself as Amīru’n-Naḥl, a practice which echoed a Prophetic Tradition, in which Prophet Muḥammad had likened mu’mins to bees. Therefore, the Commander of the mu’mins or believers is compared to the Queen of Bees (in Arabic, however, the word ‘Prince’ is used instead of ‘Queen’).

Further, Pīr Nāṣir Khusraw giving the *ta’wīl* of the four streams of the Qur’ānic description of paradise,⁷² says that the stream of honey symbolises the *ta’wīl* of the *Asās*. Just as honey is sweet and has medicinal qualities, in a similar way, the *ta’wīl* of the *Asās* has spiritual healing. Moreover, just as the bees work collectively under the guidance of a sole leader, similarly, *mu’mins* should be united under the guidance of the Imam of the time.

Khāṣifu’n-Na’l: means ‘Mender of the shoe’. This title was given to Ḥaẓrat °Alī by the Prophet on the occasion when he declared that Ḥaẓrat °Alī would fight for the *ta’wīl* of the Qur’ān as he has fought for its *tanzīl* (See the section on ‘Ḥaẓrat °Alī’s knowledge of the Qur’ān).

Abū Turāb: literally means Father of dust or earth. It was a title given by Prophet Muḥammad to Ḥaẓrat °Alī.

This unusual title has been the subject of many and varied interpretations: it has been suggested that Ḥaẓrat °Alī was given this title because he used to prostrate (*sajadah*) a lot i.e., his forehead touched the earth often in prostration; some others try to link the title with the origin of Ḥaẓrat Adam from clay; yet others have

taken the view that Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī possessed the miraculous powers of conversing with the earth.

The great Ismaili *hujjat* of Khurāsān, Pīr Nāṣir-i Khusraw, however, gives a *taʿwīl* explanation in his book *Wajh-i Dīn*.⁷³ He refers to the Qurʾān – Sūrah 78, verse 40 which says: “Lo! We warn you of a doom at hand, a day whereon a man will look on that which his own hands have sent before, and the disbelievers will cry: ‘Would that we were dust (*turāban*)’”.

Pīr Nāṣir focuses on the last line of the above verse and questions why the disbelievers would yearn to be dust on the Day of Judgement. It is because the *taʿwīl* of dust is ‘*muʿmin*’. Pīr Nāṣir further explains this *taʿwīl* by stating that just as dust or earth can be mixed with water to form clay, in the same way, a *muʿmin* can be transformed by the addition of the water of knowledge or *ʿilm*. It is for this profound reason that Prophet Muḥammad gave Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī the title of Abū Turab or the father of the *muʿmins*.

The lack of knowledge coupled with bias is much evident in the article on Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, page 385, where it is stated ‘... and Abū Turāb, ‘dustman’, a name probably given to him contemptuously by his enemies, but which was afterwards interpreted as an honorific by invented episodes’. Not only is the factual historical content incorrect, since it was given by Prophet Muḥammad, but an inexcusable error is the mistranslation of Abū Turāb as ‘dustman’. This example of bias and misrepresentation is a salutary warning against relying on secondary sources for a study of Ismaili history.

An interesting point to note is that in the above list of titles, of the last two, i.e., Khāṣifūʿn-Naʿl and Abū Turāb, both of which were given to Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī by Prophet Muḥammad, the literal or exoteric meanings are humble and lowly. It is important to note that humility is a key characteristic of our Prophets and Imams.

Note: There are many other perhaps more commonly known titles of Ḥaẓrat ʿAlī, but only those were chosen which have special esoteric significance regarding the position of the Imam.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, a very humble attempt has been made to write a short, balanced account of Ḥaẓrat °Alī, which would be particularly useful to the teachers in our religious education system.

The subject ‘Ḥaẓrat °Alī’ was approached with both joy and trepidation and the paper is finished with the full realisation that it is impossible for anyone to do due justice to Ḥaẓrat °Alī, as a poem quoted in ‘*Kalām-i Pīr*’, says:

“If the seas become ink, and trees pens,
The seven heavens like paper, and Jibr’īl praises him,
If all the jinns and men were to write his praise,
Not even a single of a hundred thousand points would it be
possible to record”.⁷⁴

Finally, for us as Ismailis, there is a strong awareness and certainty that though the period of history changes, the embodied light (*nūr-i mujassam*) of Ḥaẓrat °Alī is ever present in the personality of the Imam of the Time.

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Endnotes

- ¹ ‘*Darwish*’ is a Persian word, for which there is no exact equivalent in English. It can be translated to mean someone who is unaffected by worldly things. During the early years of Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh’s Imamāt, it used to be the highest title given to mu’mins.
- ² Note: There were within the wider family of Prophet Muḥammad some idol worshippers, e.g., Abū Lahab, hence they are not included in the description ‘house of the Prophet’.
- ³ F.M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* in the Unity Program, Chapter 3, An Introduction to Islam: “Forms of monotheism did exist in Arabia alongside pre-Islamic tribal polytheism. Both Jewish and Christian Arab communities had been present in Arabia before Muhammad. Jewish communities in Khaybar, Tyma, and Yathrib (later called Medina) were successful in agriculture and trade. While some Christians were settled in Mecca, most of the Christian communities were on the periphery of central Arabia (the Hijaz), along caravan routes in North and South Arabia. Particular contact with monotheism resulted from the caravan trade that brought Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian merchants to Mecca, a thriving commercial center, as well as from the travels of Meccan traders far and wide throughout the Middle East. Finally, in addition to biblical monotheism, native or pre-Islamic Arab monotheists, called *hanifs*, seem to have existed. The Quran (3:95) and Muslim tradition portray them as descendants of Abraham and his son Ismail.”
- ⁴ M.J. Chirri: ‘*The Brother of the Prophet Muhammad*’, *The Imam Ali*, Vol. 1.
- ⁵ For more information on Imam ‘Alī’s faith or *iman*, see “*Hundred Questions*” by ‘Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr Hunzai (Karachi, 2010), p. 146.
- ⁶ ‘*Da‘ā’im al-Islām*’ of al-Qāzī al-Nu‘mān (Arabic) pp. 15-16.
- ⁷ See Ja‘frī, p. 16 for the explanation of Sūrah 33, verse 33.
- ⁸ This victory of the Byzantines over the Persians was predicted in the revelation to the Prophet – see Sūrah 30, verses 1-4.
- ⁹ Ḥaẓrat Mūsā had appointed Ḥaẓrat Hārūn, his brother, as a Vazier/Wazīr or deputy to oversee the Israelites during his forty day absence on Mt. Sinai. See also holy Qur‘ān, Sūrah 7, verse 142.

- ¹⁰ See verses 24 to 33 of Sūrah Ṭā Hā, which specifically mention that H. Aaron was the brother (*akh*) and minister (*wazīr*) of H. Mūsā who had prayed for him to share his task of facing the Pharaoh.
- ¹¹ See Farmān of Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, regarding this episode. Farmān made at Bombay on 12th April, 1893.
- ¹² For more unanimous *aḥādīṣ* about Ḥaẓrat °Alī, please see “*The Holy Ahl al-Bayt in the Prophetic Traditions*” by F. M. Hunzai & R. Noormohamed-Hunzai, Karachi, 2020.
- ¹³ ‘The Book of Faith’ from the *Da‘ā’im al-Islām* by al-Qāzī al-Nu‘mān – tr. by A.A.A Fyzee, page 20.
Note: The underlined phrase has been wrongly translated by Fyzee. See S. Makarem.
- ¹⁴ S.H.M Ja‘frī: ‘*Origins and Early Development of Shi‘a Islām*’, London, 1979.
- ¹⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 993.
- ¹⁶ ‘The Book of Faith’ from the *Da‘ā’im al-Islām* by al-Qāzī al-Nu‘mān – tr. by A.A.A Fyzee, page 18.
- ¹⁷ ‘*The Brother of the Prophet Muhammad*’, *The Imam Ali*, Vol. 1 by M.J. Chirri, Detroit, 1979.
- ¹⁸ Ibn Hishām, ‘*Biography of the Prophet*’, Part 2, p. 621 quoted in ‘*The Brother of Prophet Muhammad*’, *The Imam Ali*, Vol. 1 by J.M. Chirri.
- ¹⁹ See the list of enemies killed by Ḥaẓrat °Alī in ‘*Kitāb al-Irshād*’ by Shaykh al-Mufid – trans. by I.K.A. Howard, pp 46-48.
- ²⁰ See reference to this in the holy Qur‘ān Sūrah 3, verses 152-153.
- ²¹ Most historians/writers who report this, translate the recitation of the angels as: ‘There is no hero/youth/young man except °Alī’. However, the actual meaning of ‘*Fatā*’ (Persian equivalent = *Jawānmard*) is someone who has reached perfection in all his qualities’ (cf. ‘*Pir Pandiyate Jawānmardi*’).
- ²² ‘*Kitāb al-Irshād*’ by Shaykh al-Mufid, p. 72.
- ²³ Quoted in ‘*Ali the Superman*’ by Dr. °Aṭā Mohy-ud-Dīn, Lahore, 1980.
- ²⁴ This particular incident is immortalised by Pīr Naṣīr-i Khusraw in his *Diwān*, where in a poem, he uses the phrase ‘*bī izārī*’ in the refrain, meaning shameless, naked.
- ²⁵ See the Prophetic *Ḥadīṣ*: ‘Are you not content, °Alī, that you should be unto me as Aaron was unto Moses, except that there will be no Prophet after me?’
- ²⁶ Farmān of Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Dar-es-Salaam 29th September, 1899.

- ²⁷ *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām* by al-Qāzī al-Nu‘mān, p. 98, trans. by F.M. Hunzai.
- ²⁸ Another similar *Ḥadīs* about Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī is ‘I am the House of wisdom (*Dār al-Ḥikmah*) and ‘Alī is its gate’. Note: During the Fāṭimid times, our Imams had established a *Dār al-Ḥikmah* in Cairo.
- ²⁹ For an interpretation of this verse see: ‘*Tafseer al-Qur’an*’ by Ẓafar Ḥasan Amrūhwī, Karachi, 1977 page 153 and ‘*Qur’ān-i Majīd*’ by Farmān ‘Alī, Karachi, 1974, pg 50.
- ³⁰ Quoted in ‘*History of the Caliphs*’, by J. Suyūṭī, trans by H.S. Jarrett.
- ³¹ ‘*Ta’rikh al-Khulafā’*’ by J. Suyūṭī, pg 173. The Arabic version is being referred to because the English translation by H.S. Jarrett is incorrect.
- ³² ‘*Kitāb al-Irshād*’ by Shaykh Mufid, trans. by I.K.A Howard pg 83. See also *Jāmi‘al-Ḥikmatayn* of Pīr Nāṣir-i Khusraw pg 61 and *Wajh-i Dīn* pg 234.
- ³³ ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’ of Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī – *Khuṭbah* 234 – trans. by F. M. Hunzai.
- ³⁴ Quoted in ‘*Tafseer al-Qur’ān*’ by Ẓafar Ḥasan Amrūhwī, Karachi, 1977 pg 58.
- ³⁵ Another saying of Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī is: ‘All that is in the Qur’an is contained in the first (opening) chapter or the Fāṭīḥah and all that is in the Fāṭīḥah is contained in the formula of the Basmalah, ‘in the name of God’, and all that is found in this formula is contained in its first letter *bā* (ب), and ultimately in the dot under that letter. I am that dot’. Some writers regard this as a weak saying on the grounds that there were no diacritical marks in the Arabic language at the time of Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī. However, this is a rather pedantic view. Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī was referring to the dot (or *nuqṭah*) which is the mark or point made by a pen first touching the paper, the mark which contains all. Secondly, the letter *bā* in Arabic derives from the picture language depicting a house or *bayt*: (□). Gradually, the letter *bā* evolved as: (ب → ب). See the *Ḥadīs* referring to Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī as the gate or door of the City of Knowledge and the House of Wisdom.
- ³⁶ Sunnī ‘*ulamā’*’ or scholars differ regarding the knowledge of *ta’wīl*. Those who confine the *ta’wīl* of the Qur’an to Allah, put a full-stop after the word ‘Allah’, which means that even Prophet Muḥammad who received the Qur’an did not know its meanings!
- ³⁷ ‘*History of the Caliphs*’ by J. Suyūṭī, trans. by H.S. Jarrett, p. 174.
- ³⁸ ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’ of Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī – quotation trans. by F. M. Hunzai.
- ³⁹ ‘The Memoirs of the Aga Khan’, Cassell and Co. Ltd., London, 1954, p. 178.
- ⁴⁰ Ḥaẓrat ‘Alī does not use any names in his *khuṭbah*. The Arabic word for ‘so and so’ is *fulan*.

- 41 ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’ ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Miṣr, pp. 25-26, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 36, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 35-36, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 44 A speech made by Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh on the ‘Final Reconciliation between Sunni and Shiah Doctrines’.
- 45 ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’ ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Miṣr, pp. 115, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 46 Ibid., pp. 31-32, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 76-78, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 48 See note 25.
- 49 ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’ ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Miṣr, pp. 31-32, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 50 al-Qāzī al-Nu‘mān, *Sharhu’l-akhbār*, I, 337-339.
- 51 ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’ ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Miṣr, pp. 63, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 63, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 53 Ibid., pp. 88, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 54 Ibid., part II, pg 8, trans. F.M Hunzai.
- 55 Intro to ‘*Nahju’l-Balāghah*’, trans. M. A. Jafery.
- 56 From the article ‘Ali and socio-economic organisation’ by Dr M. Maḥbūba in the *Islamic Shi‘ite Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, ed. Ḥ. al-Ameene, Beirut, 1970.
- 57 *Khuṭbah* 128, Al-Ḥāj Salmin.
- 58 An article: ‘A Charter of Human Rights’ by Jurgy Jurdāq in the *Islamic Shi‘ite Encyclopedia*, Vol. III. Ed. Ḥassān al-Ameene, Beirut, 1970.
- 59 Annemarie Schimmel: ‘*Mystical Dimensions of Islam*’ – Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1975, p. 27.
- 60 Martin Lings, ‘*What is Sufism?*’ Univ. of California Press, 1975, p. 104.
- 61 For a fuller explanation of this phenomena see: ‘*Al-ṣilat al-taṣawwuf wa al-tashayyū*’ by al-Shaybī, Miṣr, 1969. Pg 29-30.
- 62 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition.
- 63 ‘*Book of faith*’ by al-Qāzī al-Nu‘mān, trans. by A.A.A. Fyzee, p. 104.
- 64 ‘*History of the Caliphs*’ by J. Suyūṭī, trans. by H.S Jarrett, p. 174.
- 65 ‘*Qadā’ Amir al-Mu‘minin, ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib*’, by M.T Tustari, Najaf (Arabic) trans. by F.M. Hunzai.
- 66 See, for instance, the numerous *aḥadīṣ* of the Prophet for eg. ‘The search for knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim man or woman’, or ‘People are either possessors of knowledge or seekers of knowledge, and only these two groups are of any use to humanity’.

- ⁶⁷ Pen = *qalam*, tablet = *lawḥ*, ink = *midād*, read = *iqrā'*, book = *kitāb*.
- ⁶⁸ The full text of this speech is included in '*Nahju 'l-Balāghah*', trans by Dr. M. al-Ḥāj Salmin, Bombay. It can also be accessed at al-Islam.org website.
- ⁶⁹ '*Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary*', p. 663.
- ⁷⁰ '*Nahju 'l-Balāghah*', trans. M.A. Jafery, p. 4.
- ⁷¹ '*Nahju 'l-Balāghah*', ed, trans. by M. al-Ḥāj Salmin, p. XVIII.
- ⁷² '*Wahj-i Dīn*' by Pīr Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Persian, pp. 79-80.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, Persian p. 124.
- ⁷⁴ *Kalām-i Pīr* ed. in original Persian and translated into English by W. Ivanow, Bombay, 1935.

Appendix A

Caliph Ali's Letter to Malik Ashtar

Edited by Paul S Armstrong

Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam and the first Imam of the Ahlul Bayt, is well known for his abiding contribution to spiritual thought. In the Arabic world he's just as famous for being a great jurist and man of letters.

The historian Masudi (Murooj-uz-Zahab Masudi Vol. II, p. 33. Egypt), recognised Imam Ali as being the source of no less than 480 treaties, lectures and epistles on a variety of subjects dealing with philosophy, religion, law and politics, as collected by Zaid Ibn Wahab in the Imam's own life time. These contributions are held in such high regard, both for their contents as well as intrinsic literary worth, that some of his masterpieces stimulated into being many subjects of study in Muslim colleges and universities. Imam Ali's reputation was such that it seems to have even reached Europe by the time of the Renaissance, as we find that Edward Powcock (1604-91) a professor at the University of Oxford, in 1639 delivered a series of lectures on his "Rhetoric", and was responsible for publishing the first translation of his "Sayings" into English.

Here we present Imam Ali's famous letter of advice while Caliph, to the Governor of Egypt, Malik Ashtar, which is based on the translation by Rasheed Turabi. The letter, according to Fehrist-i-Tusi (p.33) was first copied during the time of Imam Ali himself by Asbagh bin Nabata and then later on reproduced or referred to in their writings by various Muslim scholars, chief of them being Nasr ibn Mazahim (148 A.H.), Jahiz Basari (255 A.H.) Syed Razi (404 A.H.) Ibn-i-Abil Hidaid and Allama Mustafa Bek Najib, the great living scholar of Egypt. The latter scholar, regarded this letter "*as*

a basic guide in Islamic administration.”

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 anyone. 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.

The Common Man

Maintain justice in administration and impose it on your own self and seek the consent of the people, for, the discontent of the masses sterilises the contentment of the privileged few and the discontent of the few loses itself in the contentment of the many. Remember the privileged few will not rally round you in moments of difficulty: they will try to side-track justice, they will ask for more than what they deserve and will show no gratitude for favours done to them. They will feel restive in the face of trials and will offer no regret for their shortcomings. It is the common man who is the strength of the State and Religion. It is he who fights the enemy. So live in close contact with the masses and be mindful of their welfare.

Keep at a distance one who peers into the weaknesses of others. After all, the masses are not free from weaknesses. It is the duty of

the ruler to shield them. Do not bring to light that which is hidden, but try to remove those weaknesses which have been brought to light. God is watchful of everything that is hidden from you, and He alone will deal with it. To the best of your ability cover the weaknesses of the public, and God will cover the weaknesses in you which you are anxious to keep away from their eye. Unloose the tangle of mutual hatred between the public and the administration and remove all those causes which may give rise to strained relations between them. Protect yourself from every such act as may not be quite correct for you. Do not make haste in seeking confirmation of tale-telling, for the tale-teller is a deceitful person appearing in the garb of a friend.

The Counsellors

Never take counsel of a miser, for he will vitiate your magnanimity and frighten you of poverty. Do not take the advice of a coward either, for he will weaken your resolve. Do not take counsel of the greedy: for he will instill greed in you and turn you into a tyrant. Miserliness, cowardice and greed deprive man of his trust in God. The worst of counsellors is he who has served as a counsellor to unjust rulers and shared in their crimes. So, never let men who have been companions of tyrants or shared their crimes be your counsellors. You can get better men than these, men gifted with intelligence and foresight, but unpolluted by sin, men who have never aided a tyrant in his tyranny or a criminal in his crime.

Such men will never be a burden on you. On the other hand, they will be a source of help and strength to you at all times. They will be friends to you and strangers to your enemies. Choose such men alone for companionship both in privacy and in the public. Even among these, show preference to them who have a habitual regard for truth, however trying to you at times their truth may prove to be, and who offer you no encouragement in the display of tendencies which God does not like His friends to develop.

Keep close to you the upright, and the God fearing, and make clear to them that they are never to flatter you and never to give you

credit for any good that you may not have done: for, the tolerance of flattery and unhealthy praise stimulates pride in man and makes him arrogant.

Do not treat the good and the bad alike. That will deter the good from doing good, and encourage the bad in their bad pursuits. Recompense everyone according to their deserts. Remember that mutual trust and goodwill between the ruler and the ruled are bred only through benevolence, justice and service. So, cultivate goodwill among the people; for their goodwill alone will save you from troubles. Your benevolence to them will be repaid by their trust in you, and your ill-treatment by their ill-will.

Do not disregard the noble traditions established by our forbears, which have promoted harmony and progress among the people; and do not initiate anything which might minimize their usefulness. The men who had established these noble traditions have had their reward; but responsibility will be yours if they are disturbed. Try always to learn something from the experience of the learned and wise, and frequently consult them in state matters so that you might maintain the peace and goodwill which your predecessors had established in the land.

The Different Classes of People

Remember that the people are composed of different classes. The progress of one is dependent on the progress of every other, and none can afford to be independent of the other. We have the Army formed of the soldiers of God. We have our civil officers and their establishments, our judiciary, our revenue collectors and our public relations officers. The general public itself consists of Muslims and other subjects and among them of merchants and craftsmen, the unemployed and the indigent. God has prescribed for them their rights, duties and obligations. They are all defined and preserved in the Holy Quran and in the traditions of his Prophet.

The army, by the grace of God, is like a fortress to the people and lends dignity to the state. It upholds the prestige of the faith and

maintains the peace of the country. Without it the state cannot stand. In its turn, it cannot stand without the support of the state. Our soldiers have proved strong before the enemy because of the privilege God has given them to fight for Him; but they have their material needs to fulfil and have therefore to depend upon the income provided for them from the state revenue. The military and civil population who pay revenue, both need the co-operation of others – the judiciary, civil officers and their establishment. The judge administers civil and criminal law; the civil officers collect revenue and attend to civil administration with the assistance of their establishment. And then there are the tradesmen and the merchants who add to the revenue of the state. It is they who run the markets and are in a better position than others to discharge social obligations. Then there is the class of the poor and the needy, whose maintenance is an obligation on the other classes. God has given appropriate opportunity of service to one and all; then there are the rights of all these classes over the administration which the administrator has to meet with an eye on the good of the entire population – a duty which he cannot fulfill properly unless he takes personal interest in its execution and seeks help from God. Indeed, it is obligatory on him to impose this duty on himself and to bear with patience the inconveniences and difficulties incidental to his task.

The Army

Be particularly mindful of the welfare of those in the army who in your opinion, are staunchly faithful to their God and the prophet and loyal to their chief, and who in the hour of passion can restrain themselves and listen coolly to sensible remonstrance, and who can succour the weak and smite the strong, whom violent provocation will not throw into violent temper and who will not falter at any stage.

Keep yourself in close contact with the families of established reputation and integrity with a glorious past, and draw to yourself men brave and upright in character, generous and benevolent in disposition; for such are the salt of society.

Care for them with the tenderness with which you care for your children, and do not talk before them of any good that you might have done to them, nor disregard any expression of affection which they show in return, for such conduct inspires loyalty, devotion and goodwill. Attend to every little of their wants not resting content with what general help that you might have given to them, for sometimes, timely attention to a little want of theirs brings them immense relief. Surely these people will not forget you in your own hour of need.

It behoves you to select for your Commander-in-Chief one who imposes on himself as a duty, the task of rendering help to his men, and who can excel in kindness every other officer who has to attend to the needs of the men under him, and look after their families when they are away from their homes; so much so, that the entire army should feel united in their joys and in their sorrows. The unity of purpose will give them added strength against the enemy. Continue to maintain a kindly attitude towards them so that they might feel attached to you. The fact is that the real happiness of the administrators and their most pleasant comfort lies in establishing justice in the state and maintaining affectionate relations with the people. Their sincerity of feeling is expressed in the love and regard they show to you, on which alone depends the safety of the administrators.

Your advice to the army will be of no avail, unless and until you show affection to both men and officers, in order that they might not regard the Government as an oppressive burden or contribute to its downfall.

Continue to satisfy their needs and praise them over and over again for what services they have rendered. Such an attitude, God willing will inspire the brave to braver actions and induce the timid to deeds of bravery.

Try to enter into the feelings of others and do not foist the mistake of one over another and do not grudge dispensing appropriate rewards. See to it, you do not show favours to one who has done nothing but

merely counts on his family position; and do not withhold proper rewards from one who has done great deeds simply because he holds a low position in life.

The Real Guidance

Turn to God and to His prophet for guidance whenever you feel uncertain as to what you have to do. There is the commandment of God delivered to those people who He wishes to guide aright: *“O people of the Faith! Obey God and obey His prophet and those from among you who hold authority over you. And refer to God and His prophet whenever there is difference of opinion among you.”* To turn to God is in reality to consult the Book of God; and to turn to the prophet is to follow his universally accepted traditions.

Chief Justice

Select as your Chief Justice from the people, one who is by far the best among them – one who is not obsessed with domestic worries, one who cannot be intimidated, one who does not err to often, one who does not turn back from a right path once he finds it, one who is not self-centred or avaricious, one who will not decide before knowing full facts, one who will weigh with care every attendant doubt and pronounce a clear verdict after taking everything into full consideration, one who will not grow restive over the arguments of advocates and who will examine with patience every new disclosure of fact and who will be strictly impartial in his decision, one who flattery cannot mislead or one who does not exult over his position. But it is not easy to find such men.

Once you have selected the right man for the office, pay him handsomely enough, to let him live in comfort and in keeping with his position, enough to keep him above temptations. Give him a position in your court so high none can even dream of coveting it and so high that neither back-biting nor intrigue can touch him.

Subordinate Judiciary

Beware! The utmost carefulness is to be exercised in its selection: for it is this high office which adventurous self-seekers aspire to secure and exploit in their selfish interests. After the selection of your chief judge, give careful consideration to the selection of other officers. Confirm them in their appointments after approved apprenticeship and probation. Never select men for responsible posts either out of any regard for personal connections or under any influence, for that might lead to injustice and corruption.

Of these, select for higher posts, men of experience, men firm in faith and belonging to good families. Such men will not fall an easy prey to temptations and will discharge their duties with an eye on the abiding good of others. Increase their salaries to give them a contented life. A contented living is a help to self-purification. They will not feel the urge to tax the earnings of their subordinates for their own upkeep. They will then have no excuse either to go against your instructions or misappropriate state funds. Keep a watch over them without their knowledge. Perchance they may develop true honesty and true concern for the public welfare. But whenever any of them is accused of dishonesty and the guilt is confirmed by the report of your secret service, then regard this as a sufficient to convict him. Let the punishment be corporal and let that be dealt in the public at an appointed place of degradation.

Revenue Administration

Great care is to be exercised in revenue administration, to ensure the prosperity of those who pay the revenue to the state, for on their prosperity depends the prosperity of others, particularly of the masses. Indeed, the state exists on its revenue. You should regard the proper upkeep of the land in cultivation as of greater importance than the collection of revenue, for revenue cannot be derived except by making the land productive. He who demands revenue without helping the cultivator to improve his land, inflicts unmerited hardship on the cultivator and ruins the state. The rule of such a person does not last long. If the cultivators ask for a

reduction in their land tax for having suffered from epidemics, drought, excessive rainfall, soil infertility, floods impairing the fertility of the land or the cause of crop damage, then reduce the tax accordingly, so that their condition may improve. Do not mind the loss of revenue on that account, for that will return to you one day manifold in the hour of greater prosperity of the land and enable you to improve the condition of your towns and to raise the prestige of your state. You will be the object of universal praise. The people will believe in your sense of justice. The confidence which they will place in you in consequence will prove your strength, as they will be found ready to share your burdens.

You may settle down on the land any number of people, but discontent will overtake them if the land is not improved. The cause of the cultivator's ruin is the rulers who are bent feverishly on accumulating wealth at all costs, out of the fear that their rule might not last long. Such are the people who do not learn from examples or precedents.

Clerical Establishment

Keep an eye on your establishment and on your scribes, select the best among them for your confidential correspondence such among these, as possess high character and deserve your full confidence, men who may not exploit their privileged position to go against you, who may not grow neglectful of their duties, who in the drafting of treaties may not succumb to external temptation and harm your interests, or fail to render you proper assistance and to save you from trouble, who in carrying out their duties can realize their serious responsibilities, for he who does not realise his own responsibilities can hardly appraise the responsibilities of others. Do not select men for such work merely on the strength of your first impressions of your affection or good faith, for as a matter of fact, the pretensions of a good many who are really devoid of honesty and good breeding, may cheat even the intelligence of rulers. Selection should be made after due probation, which should be the test of righteousness. In making direct appointments from people, see to it that those selected possess influence with

the people and who enjoy the reputation of being honest, for such selection is agreeable to God and the ruler. For every department of administration, let there be a head, whom no trying task might cause worry and no pressure of work annoy.

Remember, every weakness of any one among your establishment and scribes, which you may overlook, will be written down against you in your scroll of deeds.

Trade and Industry

Treat businessmen and artisans well, and advise others to do likewise. Some of them live in towns, while some move from place to place with their wares and tools earning their living by manual labour. Trade and industry are the real sources of profit to the state and the suppliers of consumer goods. While the general public is not inclined to bear the strain, those engaged in these professions take the trouble to collect commodities from far and near, from land and across the sea, from mountains and forests and naturally derive benefits.

It is this class of peace loving people from whom no disturbance need be feared. They love peace and order, indeed they are incapable of creating disorder. Visit every part of the country and establish personal contact with this class, and inquire into their condition. But bear in mind that a good many of them are intensely greedy and are inured to bad dealings. They hoard grain and try to sell it at a high price and this is most harmful to the public. It is a blot on the name of the ruler not to fight this evil. Prevent them from hoarding, for the prophet of God had prohibited it. See to it, that trade is carried on with the utmost ease, that the scales are evenly held and that prices are so fixed that neither the seller nor the buyer is put to a loss. If in spite of your warning, anyone should go against your commands and commit the crime of hoarding, then deal him appropriately with a severe punishment.

The Poor

Beware! Fear God when dealing with the problem of the poor who have none to patronise them, who are forlorn, indigent, helpless and are greatly torn in mind – victims of the vicissitudes of time. Among them are some who do not question their lot in life and who, notwithstanding their misery, do not go about seeing alms. For God's sake, safeguard their rights, for on you rests the responsibility of protecting their interests. Assign for their uplift a portion of the state exchequer (*Bayt al-Mal*), wherever they may be, whether close at hand or far away from you. The rights of the two should be equal in your eye. Do not let any preoccupation slip them from your mind, for no excuse whatsoever for the disregard of their rights will be acceptable to God. Do not treat their interests as of less importance than your own, and never keep them outside the purview of your important considerations, and mark the persons who look down upon them and of whose conditions they keep you in ignorance.

Select from among your officers such men as are meek and God fearing who can keep you properly informed of the condition of the poor. Make such provision for these poor people as shall not oblige you to offer an excuse before God on the Day of Judgement for, it is this section of the people which, more than any other, deserves benevolent treatment. Seek your reward from God by giving to each of them what is due to him and enjoin on yourself as a sacred duty the task of meeting the needs of such aged among them as have no independent means of livelihood and are averse to seek alms. The discharge of this duty is what usually proves very trying to rulers, but is very welcome to societies which are gifted with foresight. It is only such societies or nations who truly carry out with equanimity their covenant with God to discharge their duty to the poor.

Open Conferences

Meet the oppressed and the lowly periodically in an open conference and conscious of the divine presence there, have a heart-to-heart

talk with them, and let none from your armed guard or civil officers or members of the Police or the Intelligence Department be by your side, so that the representatives of the poor might state their grievances fearlessly and without reserve. For I have heard the prophet of God say that no nation or society, in which the strong do not discharge their duty to the weak, will occupy a high position. Bear with composure any strong language which they may use, and do not get annoyed if they cannot state their case lucidly. Even so, God will open for you his door of blessings and rewards. Whatever you can give to them, give it ungrudgingly and whatever you cannot afford to give, make that clear to them in utmost sincerity.

There are certain things which call for prompt action. One of them is correspondence regarding the redress of grievances, which your heedless staff have been unable to tackle. See to it that petitions or applications that are submitted for your consideration are brought to your notice without any delay, however much your officers might try to intercede them. Dispose of the day's work that very day, for the coming day will bring with it its own tasks.

Communion with God

Do not forget to set apart the best of your time for communion with God, although every moment of yours is for Him only, provided it is spent sincerely in the service of your people. The special time that you give to prayer, is to be devoted to the performances of the prescribed daily prayers. Keep yourself engaged in these prayers both in the day and in the night, and to gain perfect communion, do not as far as possible, let your prayers grow tiresome.

When you lead in congregational prayer, do not let your prayer be so lengthy as to cause discomfort to the congregation or raise in them the feeling of dislike for it or liquidate its effect, for in the congregation there may be invalids and also those who have to attend pressing affairs of their own.

When, on receiving an order to proceed to Yemen, I asked of the prophet of God, how I should lead the people there in prayer, he

said *“Perform your prayers even as the weakest among you would do, and set an example of consideration to the faithful”*.

Aloofness not desirable

Alongside the observance of all that I have said, bear one thing in mind. Never, for any length of time, keep yourself aloof from the people, for to do so is to keep oneself ignorant of their affairs. It develops in the ruler a wrong perspective and renders him unable to distinguish between what is important and what is not, between right and wrong, and between truth and falsehood. The ruler is after all human, and he cannot form a correct view of anything which is out of sight.

There is no distinctive sign attached to truth which may enable one to distinguish between the different varieties of truth and falsehood. The fact is that you must be one of two things. Either you are just or unjust. If you are just, then you will not keep yourself away from the people, but will listen to them and meet their requirements. But, if you are unjust, the people themselves will keep way from you. What virtue is there in your keeping aloof? At all events aloofness is not desirable, especially when it is your duty to attend to the needs of the people. Complaints of oppression by your officers or petitions for justice should not prove irksome to you.

Make this clear to yourself that those immediately about and around you, will like to exploit their position to covet what belongs to others and commit acts of injustice. Suppress such a tendency in them. Make a rule of your conduct never to give even a small piece of land to any of your relations. That will prevent them from causing harm to the interests of others and save you from courting the disapprobation of both God and man.

Deal justice squarely, regardless of whether one is a relation or not. If any of your relations or companions violates the law, mete out the punishment prescribed by law, however painful it might be to you personally, for it will be all to the good of the state. If at any time people suspect, that you have been unjust to them in any

respect, disclose your mind to them and remove their suspicions. In this way, your mind will get attuned to the sense of justice and people will begin to love you. It will also fulfil your wish that you should enjoy their confidence.

Peace and Treaties

Bear in mind that you do not throw away the offer of peace which your enemy may himself make. Accept it, for that will please God. Peace is a source of comfort to the army, it reduces your worries and promotes order in the state. But Beware! Be on your guard when the peace is signed for, certain types of enemies propose terms of peace just to lull you into a sense of security only to attack you again when you are off your guard. So you should exercise the utmost vigilance on your part, and place no undue faith in their protestations. But, if under the peace treaty you have accepted any obligations, discharge those obligations scrupulously. It is a trust and must be faithfully upheld and whenever you have promised anything, keep it with all the strength that you command, for whatever differences of opinion might exist on other matters, there is nothing so noble as the fulfilment of a promise. This is recognized even among non-Muslims, for they know the dire consequences which follow from the breaking of covenants. So never make excuses in discharging your responsibilities and never break a promise, nor cheat your enemy. For breach of promise is an act against God, and none except the positively wicked acts against God.

Indeed Divine promises are a blessing spread over all mankind. The promise of God is a refuge sought after, even by the most powerful on earth, for there is no risk of being cheated. So, do not make any promise from which you may afterwards offer excuses to retract, nor go back upon what you have confirmed to abide by, nor break it, however galling it may at first prove to be. For it is far better to wait in patience for wholesome results to follow, than to break it out of any apprehensions.

Beware! Abstain from shedding blood without a valid cause. There

is nothing more harmful than this which brings about one's ruin. The blood that is wilfully shed shortens the life of a state. On the Day of Judgement it is this crime for which one will have to answer first. So, beware! Do not wish to build the strength of your state on blood for, it is this blood which ultimately weakens the state and passes it into other hands. Before me and my God no excuse for wilful killing can be entertained.

Murder is a crime which is punishable by death. If on any account the corporal punishment dealt by the state for any lesser crime results in the death of the guilty, let not the prestige of the state stand in any way of the deceased relations claiming compensation.

Last Instructions

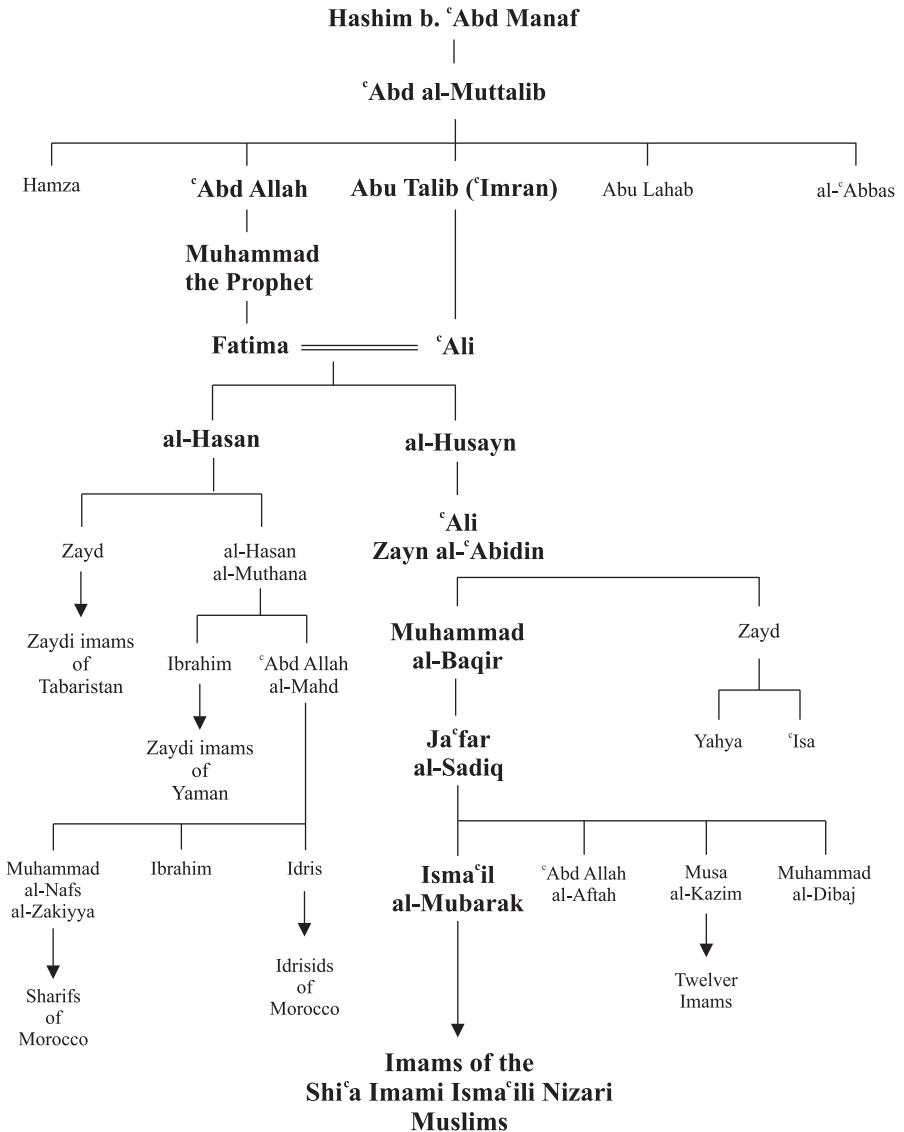
Do not make haste to do a thing before its time, nor put it off when the right moment arrives. Do not insist on doing a wrong thing, nor show slackness in rectifying a wrong thing. Perform everything in its proper time, and let everything occupy its proper place. When the people as a whole agree upon a thing, do not impose your own will on them and do not neglect to discharge the responsibility that rests on you in consequence. For, the eyes of the people will be on you and you are answerable for whatever you do to them. The slightest dereliction of duty will bring its own retribution. Keep your anger under control and keep your hands and tongue in check. Whenever you fall into anger, try to restrain yourself or else you will simply increase your worries.

It is imperative on you to study carefully the principles which have inspired just and good rulers who have gone before you. Give close thought to the example of our prophet, his traditions, and the commandments of the Holy Qur'an and whatever you might have assimilated from my own way of dealing with things. Endeavour to the best of your ability to carry out the instructions which I have given you here and which you have solemnly undertaken to follow. By means of this order, I enjoin on you not to succumb to the prompting of your own heart or to turn away from the discharge of duties entrusted to you.

I seek the refuge of the might of the Almighty and of His limitless sphere of blessings, and invite you to pray with me that He may give us together the grace willingly to surrender our will to His will, and to enable us to acquit ourselves before Him and His creation, so that mankind might cherish our memory and our work survive. I seek of God the culmination of His blessings and pray that He may grant you and me His grace and the honour of martyrdom in His cause. Verily, we have to return to Him. I invoke His blessings on the prophet of God and his pure progeny.

Appendix B

The Family of Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat ʿAli



Al-wā'izah Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai, the author of this article has spent her entire professional career in education. She has a B.A. Hons. (Hull University, England) and a P.G.C.E. (Bristol University) and a M.Ed. (McGill University, Canada).

Her publications include the Chapter on Islam in “*Faiths for a Future*” published by the Religious Education and Environment Programme (1998, Norwich), co-author of “*The Holy Ahl al-Bayt in the Prophetic Traditions*” (Karachi, 2020) and “*A Bridge between Two Epochs*” on Mawlānā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh. She has helped her husband, Dr. Faqīr Muhammad Hunzai to translate into English some 60 works on the esoteric dimension of Islam written by °Allāmah Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr Hunzai.

