

Aspects of Religion in Nahjul-Balaghah



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In this text the author explains several aspects of Shi'a Faith in the light of the words of Imam Ali (as) examining the Nahjul Balaghah.

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In the name of Allah

In this lecture, it is firstly quoted from Amir Al-Mo'meneen (Commander of the faithful) in Nahjul-Balagha that, Islam is the most supreme Religion and then in order to elaborate and justify this proposition extended reference is made to from Nahjul-Balagha and other Islamic sources.

After the period of childhood and playfulness, there comes a time for the human being when he is ready to deliberate and contemplate upon the phenomena of life through his power of reasoning and intellect. It is at this stage that he reflects upon the world around himself and its phenomena with a discerning outlook basically different from the previously superficial and crude view which he possessed during his years as a youngster.

At this level he begins to perceive different parts of his body, thinking about them and questioning the purpose of their creation while seeking his connection with them. He wants to know, for example, if it is better to have his hair and beard cut short, or grow them long, or have them shaved clean. He is equally eager to find out about his teeth, nails, saliva, nose and so many other things about himself.

He observes that peoples have each chosen varied means and concerns towards dealing with the above mentioned matters as well as other affairs such as cultural economic, political, ethical and social issues. Each group has selected different modes of life concerning their health, cleanliness, dressing manners, speaking, habits and social intercourses.

Yet, more important than the above factors is the question of their beliefs, opinions, religious thoughts and theologies which constitute the very foundation of difference in personal and social behaviors of human beings.

One believes in the Deity, the other does not. From among the believers, one calls himself a Buddhist, another a Jew, a third calls himself a Christian, the fourth a Muslim and a fifth uses some other label. Furthermore, each of these Religions dichotomize into branches, groups, sects and factions.

That is one side of the coin. The other side comprises of philosophical school of thought and the many newly emerged "isms", numbering no less than religious ideologies or divine faiths. The helpless and bewildered man finds himself perplexed and stupefied in the midst of the turbulent and raging ocean of contradictions.

It poses itself as a somewhat insurmountable task that he should choose and select one single faith from among so many in order to lead and organize a practical and coherent view of life, compatible with the programs of his to be selected religion.

Soon one day he steps into a big library where books are shelved on many topics. There he starts to study the books, experiencing a view of life much broader and more expansive than his previous thoughts of yesterday. Hence, many books about religions and different schools of thought which existed in the past and may be extinct now are also to be found.

There are also books making predictions about the fate of the future of the world and about political, economic, ethical and social situations of the generations to come. His amazement and uncertainty increases. In his astonishment and lack of understanding he search-fully reviews the pages of the books.

Sometimes he retires into deep ponder for hours and days on end. Sometimes he wishes to put aside all the books with their contents and chunk away all the thought amassed in his brain and thus lead a care-free life.

But upon a moments' reflection he recognizes the impracticality of such a notion, for he ought to eat, drink, walk, talk and think. All of these activities have a good and a bad aspect to it; may result in good or evil, may be true or false, may lead to salvation or bring about perdition and It must choose one way of life from among the many possibilities and at least try to define his standpoint for himself.

Finally, he concludes that the best way to a happy life is a thorough study of all the Divine Revelations and schools of thought and their programs. In this manner, he may compare and contrast them thereby choose the best one and attempt to organize one's way of life accordingly.

Among the multitude of topics he is one day confronted with a book under the title Nahjul-Balagha (eloquence of speech). Reading through the book his eyes are suddenly transfixed upon certain words and sentences. There he reads the following:

“This Islam is the religion which Allah has chosen for Himself, developed it before His eyes, preferred it as the best among His creation, and established its pillars on His love. He has disgraced other religions by giving honor to it. He has humiliated all communities before its sublimity; He has humbled its enemies with His kindness and made its opponents lonely by according it His support.

He has smashed the pillars of misguidance with its cisterns through those who draw its water. He made Islam wish that its constituent parts cannot break, its links cannot separate, its construction cannot fall, its columns cannot decay, its plant cannot be uprooted, its times does not end, its laws do not expire, its twigs cannot be cut, its parts do not become narrow, its ease do not change into difficulty, its clarity is not affected by gloom, its straightness does not acquire curvature, its wood has no crookedness, its vast paths have no narrowness, its lamps knows no puffing off and its sweetness has not bitterness.”

This religion is an integrated structure whose pillar have been laid upon the foundation of truth and it is truth that has solidified its elevation. It's a mainspring with many an illuminating brooks flowing from it. It is the very source of enlightening divine light. It is the beacon of knowledge for the "travelers" (seekers of truth, who seek the right path)

There are signs and guidelines along the way to prevent you from deviating from the path of God. There are springs of wisdom and knowledge to quench the thirst of the pilgrims of truth. God Almighty has adorned this religion with divine injunctions and His mercy for man. Islam enjoys everlasting firm

foundation exalted pillars of manifest and clear logic; gloriously comprehensive brightness; magnificent kingdom and wonderful eternal projection of the truth.

Our young investigator or any other reader for that matter may be somewhat surprised that all this praise and grandeur attributed to this religion, (however righteous and rewarding) may be but overstatement. Is not this prolixity and over-excessiveness? Does it not contain a tint of verbosity and exaggeration?

But when the importance of the choice of a line of action and permanent way of life is realized one should confess that a program of life needs much more emphasis than this. In this regard we read Imam Ali sayings elsewhere in Nahjul-Balagha, addressing the truth-seekers of Islam as saying:

“Allah the Glorified, has distinguished you with Islam and has chosen you for it. This is because it is the name of safety and the collection of honor. Allah the Glorified, chose its way and disclosed its pleas through open knowledge and secret maxims. Its (Quran) wonders are not exhausted and its delicacies do not end. It contains blossoming bounties and lamps of darkness. (The doors of) virtues cannot be opened save with its keys, nor can gloom be dispelled save with its lamps.”¹

In another sermon he says: “Praise be to Allah who established Islam and made it easy for those who approach it and gave strength to its columns against anyone who tries to overpower it. So Allah made it (a source of) peace for him who clings to it, safety for him who enters it, argument for him who speaks about it, witness for him who fights its help, light for him who seeks light from it, understanding for him who provides it, sagacity for him who exerts, a sign (of guidance) for him who perceives, sight for him who resolves, lesson for him who seeks advice, salvation for him who testifies, confidence for him who trusts, pleasure for him who entrusts, and shield for him who endures.”²

Our young but sincerely devoted reader who is yet taking the preliminary steps, so to speak, toward choosing a program of life is in our view quite entitled to have uncertainties concerning these sayings.

We give him the benefit of the doubt to say that Ali's words are but mere claims because he understands that what Ali (the commander of the faithful) is saying boils down to this idea that he has in-depth knowledge about all the ideological, political, ethical, philosophical and other aspects of all the religions and yet analyzing them he has found Islam most comprehensive, reasonable and progressive which is indeed proclaimed by every unbiased seeker of the right path.

If our dear readers allocate a portion of their time to us with deliberation and attentiveness we will, with the assistance of God Almighty, present to them the rationale and logic inherent in the teachings of Islam. We stated that man is bound to have some kind of relations with the affairs of the world: the phenomena of nature; different parts of his body; friends and associates, his power of intellect etc.

Even if we assumed that he is able to do without the above-mentioned dependencies, he is, doubtless, not able to do without activities such as breathing, eating, drinking, walking and thinking. It is with respect to this outlook of discussion that we will explain only some examples of Islam's programs on

topics discussed in this book.

We will challenge you to find a better and most comprehensive a religion than Islam in explaining and clarifying these considerations. If you did so we will humbly acknowledge it. We note that Islam has taken into consideration man's connection with every phenomenon affecting him and believe that it has explicitly made clear the direction, and delineated the true path before him.

Those issues which play no important role in man's well-being in life have been quickly reviewed but those issues playing significant role in his life have been evaluated and discussed accordingly. If you question the degree of importance given to matters such as hygiene and cleanliness in Islam. We have this to say:

Islam has considered from the very hair, teeth and nail of human beings to their clothes, homes and living environment giving clear directions about the treatment of each of these. Only in the first two volumes or the commended book, Wasail Al-Shi'a, more than one thousand eight hundred verses and narrations have appeared on the subject of Hygiene.

On the application of the toothbrush and looking after one's teeth

On the application of the toothbrush and looking after one's teeth it says:

1. There is a way of tidiness for everything and the best way to clean your teeth is to use the toothbrush.³
2. Brush your teeth prior to each ablution to daily prayers therefore brush your teeth five times a day.⁴
3. Brushing one's teeth improves one's power of memory.⁵
4. Apply the toothbrush along your gum, vertically.⁶
5. He who does not clean his mouth through brushing his teeth is outside the sphere of human beings.⁷

On looking after one's hair and keeping it clean

On looking after one's hair and keeping it clean it says:

1. Well-groomed, beautiful hair is a sign of Godly garb; observe it properly.⁸
2. He who lets his hair grow long is obliged to keep it neat, otherwise it is better to have it short.⁹
3. Concerning the cleanliness of nails it is recommended that;

4. Trimming the fingernails regularly is one of Islamic customs. 10
5. Keeping ones nails trimmed removes diseases and maintains health. 11
6. Trim your nails, whether it be on Fridays¹² or any other day of the week. 13
7. Do not bite your nails. 14

Islam advises husbands to brush their nails and trim them short but recommends that women may grow them long for it is their adornment. 15

There are many directions given in detail concerning manners of taking a bath, sweeping combing, washing up, wearing perfumes, tooth picking, dying the hair and so on in Islamic customs. On the subject of ruling and government and the relationship between the ruler and his subjects Islam says: And we take excerpts from Nahjul-Balagha reflecting this title:

1. "You should also keep an eye on the cultivation of the land more than on the collection of revenue because revenue cannot come without cultivation and whoever asks for revenue without cultivation, ruins the area and brings death to the people. His rule will not last." 16
2. "Certainly, Allah, the Sublime, has made it obligatory on the true leaders that they should maintain themselves at the level of low people so that the poor do not cry over their property." 17
3. "The people among whom the right of the weak is not secured from the strong without fear will never achieve purity and honor." 18
4. "Educate people, so that they should not praise you or please you by reason or an action you did not perform, because an excess of praise produces pride and drives you near haughtiness." 19
5. "You should also check their activities and have people who report on them, who should be truthful and faithful because you watching their actions sincerely will urge them to preserve trust with and also be kind to the people" 20
6. The ruler who suppress his own subjects has indeed boosted the enemies.
7. Your predecessors fell into perdition because they would set free embezzlers of high social standing while punishing the petty crimes of lowly people.
8. "Do not reject peace to which your enemy may call you and wherein there is the pleasure of Allah, because peace brings rest to your army and relief from your worries and safety for your country. But after peace there is great apprehension from the enemy because often the enemy offers peace to benefit by your negligence. Therefore, be cautious and do not act by wishfulness in this matter." 21
9. There are four major reasons which cause the overthrow of governments:

- Fabrication of principles (i. e. constitutional laws)
- Arrogance of leaders.
- Giving preference to the ignoble over decent and noble people.
- Degradation of Men of knowledge.

10. “Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to and kindness for them. Do not stand over them like they are of two kinds, either your brother in religion or one like you in creation. They will commit slips and encounter mistakes. They may act wrongly, willfully or by neglect. So, extend His forgiveness and pardon, in the same way as you would like Allah to extend His forgiveness and pardon to you.”²²

11. “Then, do not keep yourself secluded from the people for a long time, because the seclusion of those authority from the subjects is a kind of narrow-sightedness and causes ignorance about their affairs. Seclusion from them also prevents them from the knowledge of those things which they do not know and as a result they begin to regard big matters as small and small matters as big, good matters as bad and bad matters as good, while the truth becomes confused with falsehood.”²³

On Family Relations in Islam

On family relations Islam says:

From the point of view of Islam, husband is the breadwinner and guardian in the financial affairs of the family. Since the responsibility for providing the livelihood of the household and living expenses rests with him initially, therefore in matters such buying or selling of the house, carpets, clothing and household necessities, etc., the final decision and responsibility is with him.

About other affairs of matrimonial life it states:

1. He who marries must honor and pay deep respect to his wife.²⁴
2. When a man enters his house he should make known his presence by calling out his wife’s name or greeting her tenderly.²⁵
3. A woman (wife) who welcomes her husband warm-heartedly or sees him off to work or journey or stays with him in times of hardship has earned half the reward of a martyr that is promised by God.²⁶
4. A good husband eats the kind of food his wife likes.²⁷
5. The best of women is she who on going out of the house wears the armor of decency and chastity and when at home with her husband takes that armor off.²⁸

6. Husbands should give a helping hand to their wives in the housework, like Imam Ali (the commander of the faithful) who would bring firewood or sweep the house and Fatima (a.s.) who would prepare the dough or bake bread.²⁹

7. "A husband must never show any suspicion out of place towards his wife, because this leads a correct woman to evil and a chaste woman to deflection."³⁰

8. A father and a good husband on occasions, such as weekends or public celebrations should give gifts to the members of his household and give priority to girls over boys when handing out the presents.³¹

9. When a husband returns home from a journey he must make sure that he will arrive home at a good hour and take gifts with himself for the members of his family.³²

10. How can a husband raise his hands against his wife? (Tenderness and roughness are in evident contradiction)³³

11. If your wife gave birth to a girl do not be displeased for they have five advantages over boys:

- They are fonder of their parents and care of great help to their parents.
- They stay at home more often than boys and are of great help to their parents.
- Girls are fonder of their parents and lack toughness or coarseness.
- They are endowed with God's blessings and mercy.
- They are more concerned about tidiness and show more diligence in cleanliness

12. Do not take a woman into consultation unless her wisdom and prudence is known to you.

13. ***"But consort with your wife in kindness and if it happens that ye hate her it may be that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good. You do not know the mysteries of the world, even if you know some clear ones you know but little."*** (Holy Quran, Al-Nisa', 4: 19)

14. "The best traits of woman are those which are the worst traits of men, namely: vanity, cowardice and miserliness. Thus, since the woman is vain she will not allow anyone access to herself; since she is miserly, she will preserve her own property and the property of her husband; and since she is weak-hearted, she will be frightened with everything that befalls her."³⁴

15. A father is obliged to fulfil four things binding on him for his children:

- Choose a becoming name so that his children are content with it.
- Educate his children. If all Muslims do so, illiteracy will be uprooted.

- Give them in marriage as soon as they reach the age of puberty.
- Teach them courtesy in manners and guide them for a practical life. Imam Ali (a.s.) did so by leaving a letter for his son, which is still being used by people for reference.

It may come as a surprise to some of our dear readers to state that there are more than hundred verses and traditions concerning the courtship of husband and wife in Islam.

Islam's point of view on War, Jihad, Retaliation and Defense

Islam's point of view on war, Jihad³⁵, retaliation and defense

Here, too, we will suffice to mentioning a few excerpts from Ali's (a.s.) maxims in Nahjul-Balagha:

1. "The primary (foremost) goal of the holy war should be to restore His religion, and to promote the victory of the right and the oppressed over the oppressors and for the punishment and correction of the wrong-doers for the ultimate purpose that they may be admonished to reflect upon the rightfulness of God's way. It must not be for the purpose of showing force or desires to open up a new frontier or satisfy one's instinct of avarice or a devilish wish to exploit the oppressed people."³⁶
2. "Do not fight the enemy unless they initiate the fighting, because, by the grace of Allah, you are in the right, and if you are called to fight do respond, because the caller to fighting is a rebel and the rebel deserves destruction."³⁷
3. Before starting the war admonish your enemy by writing messages. Warn him of the bitter consequence of oppressiveness and give hi, ultimatum.
4. ***"The army of Islam must be equipped with the most advanced armaments so that it would act as a deterrent for enemies."* (Holy Quran, Al-Anfal, 8:60)**
5. The commander of the army of Islam should know warfare tactics and train his soldiers to acquire them.
6. "The army of Islam should employ reconnaissance parties to learn of enemy's plans and unfold their conspiracies."³⁸
7. There should be a mutual feeling of friendship and sincerity between the commander of the army and his soldiers. No secrets should be left unsaid except, of course, much classified top secrets whose leakage may cause undue damage to the army.
8. The officers of the army must encourage and acclaim those who have fought well in the cause of Allah and punish those who have not executed their duties fully.

9. In the heat of the war–front a true Muslim pleads to God alone to make them victorious and asks Him not to engender pride in them but lead them steadfast in their quest. And if they should be defeated, he asks God to help him die a death of a martyr.

10. If, by the will of Allah, the enemy is defeated then do not kill those enemies who run away, do not strike a helpless person, do not finish off the wounded, do not inflict pain on women, and treat humanely the prisoners of war.

Islam's point of view about economy and financial affairs of people

Islam's point of view about economy and financial affairs of people:

1. ***“Allah (s.w.t.) has permitted trading and has forbidden usury so that it will check laziness and promotes transactions. It will also serve to prevent exploitation of some over others” (The Holy Quran, Al-Baqara, 2:275)***

2. ***“All that is in the earth of water, soil, forests, seas, creatures, etc., have been created for all man to use up. (The Holy Quran, Al-Baqara, 2:29)***

3. ***And eat not up your property among yourselves in vanity, nor seek by it, it gains the hearing of the judges that you may knowingly devour a portion of the property of others wrongfully.” (The Holy Quran, Al-Baqara, 2: 188)***

4. “Whoever stores the public consumer goods for more than three days in times of famine of forty days in ordinary circumstances is sentenced as hoarder. Then the warehouse of hoarded goods or foodstuff is legally and lawfully confiscated. Its goods sold to people at market prices and the money handed to its owner.”³⁹

5. “Practice merchandise so that you will not have to look to other people's hands for your livelihood. God beholds dear the truthful traders.”⁴⁰

6. “Allah (s.w.t.) has put the means of provisions of his prophets in the heart of the soil and in the breasts of milking cattle. So you too, pay for agriculture and farming. It is also good business to keep honeybee. Lest you sell your honey bees because the money you gain from selling them is soon finished.”⁴¹ “Also to sell your house or orchard and buy another piece of land with its money.”⁴²

7. “Any form of gambling is decreed unlawful. Bribery too, is unlawful. Adultery is forbidden. Stealing is forbidden. The money gained from selling alcoholic drinks is forbidden and worst of all is the accepting of bribery which misrepresents falsehood as true and the bonds among people will be based on wrongfulness instead of piety.”⁴³

8. "Transaction and trading expands one's experience and outlooks."44
9. "He who performs prayers but his expenses are paid by others, his worship is not accepted by Allah."45
10. "He who shows laziness in doing his earthly duties will be lazier in doing his religious duties."46
11. "Squandering brings about poverty whereas moderation free you from want."47
12. "He who strives not to provide the livelihood of his family is a mean person."48
13. Every Muslim is obliged to give a percentage of his income to the impoverished and the needy. Priority in this case rests with the people who are in dire need.
14. That much which God has made obligatory for the well-off to give to the poor has been appointed by Him so that it suffices them. If the affluent pay their rightful due to the needy, all will live in harmony and peace.
15. In an Islamic community there must be no sign of poverty, for poverty is the hardest of deaths and will bring about the weakening of the religion and cause distortion of thought. A poor person is a stranger in his own town and it will rob one from decency.

Islam's Point of View on the Value of Thought

Islam's point of view on the value of thought and how to use this invaluable gem

1. "Power of intellect is the icing of all the endowment given to human beings. Wisdom stands on the peak of the mountain of human values. Everything is measured with the balance of thought and he who lacks wisdom is considered disobliged."49

2. *'A wise person hears advice and follows the best thereof. Such are those whom Allah guide, and such are men of understanding.'* (The Holy Quran, Az-Zumar, 39: 18)

3. Do not be beguiled by the outward (external) appearances of people and put their wisdom into test; for judgement about people and the giving of reward of punishment to them should be gauged according to their level of wisdom and shrewdness.⁵⁰

4. Reflection and contemplation are the best and foremost acts of worship. God Almighty grants leadership to he who possesses the highest degree of wisdom, is embellished with seventy five laudable qualities, some of which are as follows:

- Is ever hopeful in life and never lets despair and hopelessness penetrate his thought.
- Is ever just and conscientious; far from injustice and acts of oppression.

- Is ever thankful for God's bounty and people's benevolence.
- Is ever kind and affectionate; never allowing hardship or cruelty towards God's creatures.
- Is ever virtuous avoiding indecencies at all times?
- Is ever humble never showing any sign of arrogance.
- Is taciturn when conditions demand so and avoids idle-talk.
- Is ever self-controlling and patient; never showing irritability (bad temper).
- Is ever forgiving when it is right to be so and never seeks revenge.
- Is considerate towards his relatives and tries not to break bonds with them.
- Is remorseful and repentant when committing a sin.
- Is faithful to the promises he makes.
- Is veracious and avoids telling lies.
- Is dignified and graceful not exhibiting any frivolity.
- Is full of life; and abhors laziness.

Islam's point of view about Social Relations of people

Islam's point of view about Social Relations of people; concerning their feasts and parties; their social interactions; their journeys and other Associations

1. There are three things which promote the love of man towards his fellow-brothers and these are to:
 - Keep cheerful when meeting his brother in faith.
 - Open up a room for his fellow in social gatherings.
 - Address his friend by the name he likes to be addressed.
2. He who pays you a visit, is entitled to a privilege that you take few steps towards him to welcome him; and when he bids you goodbye, it is proper that you see him off to the door.
3. When the friendship of someone is strewn on your heart, let him know of your heartfelt feeling toward him.
4. Whenever you decide to go on a trip inform your close friends of your intention, then it is their

obligation to come to your receiving when you return.

5. Do not whisper into one another's ears in social gatherings for it rouses dislike among others; one ought to avoid this lowly manner.
6. The best match of co-travelers is between four and seven people; if it exceeds this limit, disagreement will occur.
7. Keep the company of someone who is a boost to your character; not a hindrance for it.
8. Try to be cheerful and more jovial when on a trip with your friends; but a kind of joviality that does not hurt or injure your companions' feelings.
9. Should a fellow traveler of yours fall ill, it is incumbent upon you to stay with him for a minimal period of three whole days.
10. The bond of friendship between friends living near each other is solidified by regular visits; and if living far from each other, by writing letters, moreover, replying back a letter is a "Must" just like responding to a greeting of someone to you.
11. Make yourself the measure (for dealings) between you and others. Thus, you should desire for others what you desire for yourself and hate for others what you hate for yourself.⁵¹
12. Speak but good words so that you may hear words but good.
13. A considerate person chooses a proper place to dispense of his spit and feces.
14. He who has eaten onion or garlic, must not attend social gatherings.
15. He who invites a guest for the evening is obliged to accompany him to his house; and the responsibility of his safety rest with the host.
16. Return a note of compliment for the gifts you receive so that more gifts be presented to you.

Importance of Knowledge and Science in Islam

The degree of importance paid to knowledge and science from the point of view of Islam

1. The quest for knowledge is the duty of every Muslim: knowledge-seeking is more necessary than wealth-seeking.
2. Be a scholar or a researcher or an admirer of both groups. Any fourth inclination leads but into perdition.
3. He who doth anything without forethought resembles a person who is going astray. The more he

goes, the more he drifts away from the true path just like the blindfolded mule of the Mill.

4. The scholar who doesn't act according to his teachings is not taken seriously. His admonition and advice will not leave any imprint or effect in the heart and minds of people.

5. Acquire (learn) whatever discipline you would like to but remember that you will only benefit from these learnings which you put into practice. The main concern of men of knowledge is to endeavor to enforce their learnings while the only ambition of an ignorant person is to boast about his little knowledge.

6. Keep a written record of your learnings and hand them on to your off-springs so that they are kept abreast of new findings.

7. The most learned of people is he who includes other people's findings to his own.

8. There are four major considerations incumbent upon every man of knowledge as follows:

- Acquiring knowledge.
- Keeping the acquired knowledge.
- Dissemination and propagation of knowledge by way of publications and lectures.
- Practicing the acquired knowledge.

9. The worth of every person is measured according to the volume of his knowledge. Therefore try to learn more for it is a blessing.

10. A man without knowledge is judged young however old he may be and a young man with knowledge is regarded great however young he may be.

11. Acquire knowledge from whoever you can and take wise points from whoever they may be.

12. There are a great number of fields and disciplines. Your lifespan does not suffice to acquire every one of them, so learn that which suit you the best.

Islam's point of view on mannerism and code of conduct in social relation

1. If it happens that you that you are seated in a social gathering and a person enters, then as a sign of respect greet him and open up a room for him if there is not any.

2. The person who likes other people to bow down before him is lodged in but the fire of hell.

3. When entering a place of gathering, take the nearest vacant seat from you for Muhammad the Prophet (S) did so.
4. When seated in a social gathering, do not pry with your eyes. Always return a salutation with a salutation. If a blind person enters the room guide him to a seat and do not forget to bid unto good-doing and forbid wrong doing.
5. Do not sit with your leg crossed at a dinning-spread.
6. He who does not work and asks Allah to provide his provision is at a loss. Surely Allah says unto him; Have I not shown you the way to provide for your living?
7. Do not sit in front of the direct rays of the sun for it will darken your countenance and it will wear out your clothes.
8. When the table spread is laid, all the members of the house should gather round it.
9. Do not sit at a table-spread wherein there is wine.
10. The prophet of Islam (S) in order to display humbleness would sit on the floor.
11. Comb your hair in seated position not when you are stood up.
12. Do not mix with the arrogantly rich for it will engender in you ungratefulness of God's bounties.

Islam's point of view on Ethics and Psychology

From the point of view of Islam, the recognition of one's soul and the honor God has attributed to it is the highest and most praiseworthy of recognitions. Ali (a.s.) says:

1. "For your human status there is no reward but heavens. Do not give it away cheaply. (The heaven is indeed the safe lodging of the people who are righteous, trustworthy, benevolent and harmless.)"⁵²
2. "Do not belittle yourself by giving your soul to serfdom of others because you are born free. (Do not make a fool of yourself by flattery and prostration before people.)"⁵³
3. "Value your soul above everything. Do not degrade yourself by resorting to every kind of lowly deed just because it will apparently bring about success. If you sell your soul, you will never find an amend for it. (If, for example, you are given the rule-ship of a country for the lowly services done, you are yet in a great loss for you have traded your dear, noble soul worth the heavens for the transient earthly pleasure)."⁵⁴
4. "How bad and debasing is the transition that you allow, (enjoyment of) this world to be a price for yourself as an alternative for what there is with Allah for you."⁵⁵ (even if you gain all the pleasure of this

world you have still made a bad bargain; for you have lost the heaven).

5. "He who realizes the greatness of self-respect, will success in harnessing his carnal soul. (Those who have gained insight into the value of human soul have little regard for earthly pleasures)."56

6. "How good it is that the rich show meekness towards the poor and still more praiseworthy is the indifference of the poor toward the rich for the trust they have put in their Lord."57 (If the poor person recognizes the value of self-respect he will never degrade himself by trying to gain wealth through foul ways but keeps his honor and human status).

The aforementioned excerpts are but a few samples out of ten of thousands of Qur'anic verses, traditions and tidings sent down for the guidance of human beings. Even if we were to write a concise book on such manners as: eating, drinking, walking, laughing, crying, the way of speaking and so on it would require many books.

Speaking about such manners of more importance which have been greatly emphasized in Islam requires extensive in-depth discussion. Those aspects of human life discussed here do not necessarily assume preference and we would like to ask our dear readers to go to a learned scholar of Islam and ask if clarifications of ideas are felt.

Regrettably, Islamic scholars have not so far produced a comprehensive, referential A to Z encyclopedia of Islamic sciences for the use of students and researchers.

It is, of course, very gratifying to see that Muslims have nearly kept all principles for such and encyclopedia intact for over fourteen centuries. They have succeeded in safeguarding every tradition, narration and the Book (The Holy Qur'an) in its full authenticity. The holy verses of the Qur'an and authorized narrations of the Holy Prophet of Islam (S) comprise the main text of such and encyclopedia. Especially the written records of Shiites who believe in the viceregency of the Twelve Imams and have jealously kept the instructions of the Imams are proper enlightening of such encyclopedia.

At this stage we would encourage any inspired reader, who unbiasedly seeks the truth and wishes to choose the true religion of God, thus organizing his programs of life according to his chosen religion, to study critically all the schools of thought and compare them to the teachings of Islam.

We will here assure you that you will find no other religion more comprehensive and more progressive than Islam. But should you have queries unsolved, we ask you to confer with a learned scholar of Islam for clarification of concepts. No other religion has discussed in such details all the aspects of private and social life of human beings.

We, on the other hand, have nothing to say to those who do not even bother to reflect on such matters as choosing a program of life based on a true religion of Allah or seeking truth in Allah's way, etc.

We are not addressing those who do not understand the importance of Allah's way. Nor those who are

still preoccupied in their childish games, not those who couldn't care for their salvation or perdition.

Our word is with the wise and the prudent: with the learned and the concerned. Not with those who are still playing childish games and have not broken off with the bond of prejudice and ignorance. Yes, indeed, our word is with the thinkers, the reformers, the pious, the sagacious and those who have studied different religions and schools of thought and witnessed the millions of seemingly knowledgeable people following these ideologies with little or no true understanding, and feel sorrow for them.

We would like to ask those who have chosen a way other than Islam or have not chosen a way at all, if they consider themselves free from want of sleep or eating? Have they not social or family ties? And they not in need of hygiene or government for that matter? Have they been able to find a better or eternal or more progressive a religion than the dear Islam anywhere in the world. Not indeed not, Allah-o-Akbar.⁵⁸

They will not ever find a better religion than Islam to guide man in his quest to reach perfection. Islam has taken into consideration all the spiritual, material and moral needs of man and does not linger on trivial and unimportant issues which play little or no role in man's course or destiny towards salvation.

For example, it has stated briefly all the required information about Jinn's and angels on the creation of the world. But in contrast it has gone into great detail to talk about hygiene, which forms one of the principal aspects of man's life. Meticulous in instructions about each and every one of these aspects indicate the practicality of Islam as a line of action in the life of man.

At this stance a format of some basic outcome and answers are to be discussed without which this book will remain incomplete. The questions posed here are of the kind that will undoubtedly cross the minds of those readers informed of the current affairs of the world and may have some confusion which needs to be clarified.

The Question raised by them may be; you said that Islam and its programs embody the most perfect, progressive and pronounced religion of the world but we are witnessing that there are peoples and nations in the world today who have not accepted Islam but enjoy a higher standard of living and are politically and socially in a better condition of living.

To answer this query we must analyze this question and organize it into five sections. I will present to you discussions that will hopefully clarify these points. All we ask for is an unbiased, objective, and justified attitude towards our discussion.

Section one

If those who raise this question regard debauchery, wine-bibbing, indecency and voracity of non-Islamic countries an indication of their improvement, welfare and felicity it is much to be regretted because this means that they have not understood the true goal of life. I leave a more detailed and rational discussion

to another opportune moment.

Section two

Although some European countries have so far outrun some Islamic countries in some of the aspects already mentioned, such as, keeping to cleanliness, observance of order and regulations as well as being seriously industrious in their work. But similarly Europeans have been immensely unable to realize the value of lofty human characteristics such as generosity, bravery, benevolence, high-mindedness and so on in the true sense of the words. In materialistic schools of thought such characteristics are of their ideology.

But the Muslim declares that the execution of Justice and putting right a wrong is worth so much that it pleases God Almighty even if it ends up that he (the Muslim) should lose his possession, relatives and above all, his dear life.

Whereas the non-Muslim prefers to have a healthy economic standing, a house, a car and a bank account securing his future! So, it is in this respect that we feel non-Muslims will find it hard to understand the humane values of justice, freedom, and decency.

It should be noted here however that as soon as a Muslim finds out that his religion has highly recommended these issues, he will immediately accept it and tries his best to follow them. Finally, it must be said that Muslims have at their disposal endless flow of goodness but tend to underestimate their potentials but we hope that by living up to the regulations of Islam they will soon attain the greatness that their religion has promised.

Section three

This part is concerned with the courtesy, cleanliness and cooperation of people observed only in some European and Asian countries, generally speaking of course. It is seen that non-Muslims in general observe the above mentioned issues better than Muslims do. Whereas, these characteristics form the very basis of personal and social values which has indeed, as it went before, been stressed emphatically by Islam.

No prudent and sagacious person will doubt the validity and distinction of their values. So, why is it that non-Muslims are ahead of Muslims in such matters? The answer to this question is really very clear. We are talking about the program of life put forward by Islam not the actions of some unorthodox Muslims, who are a disgrace to their religion as well their society.

Imam Ali (a.s.) the commander of the faithful, addressed these group of people by saying, “Lest others (i.e. non-Muslims) outrun you in adhering to the instructions of Qur’an while you yourselves abandon them.”

But despite admonitions such as this they did not all observe it properly: Consequently non-Muslims are benefitting from the progressive and civilized teachings of Islam while Muslims themselves seem to have ignored them.

If non-Muslims observe the rules of civility and etiquette without even having a specific program of life, then Muslims ought to adhere more to these rules which are established in their religion and objectified in their goal of life. One can see the projection of this idea in the flawless ordered rows of Muslims standing to perform the, for example, Friday prayers.

Section four

It may be argued that why Islam has not taken measures in the organization of its programs of life so that Muslims would automatically act their obligations. And why is it that Muslim communities tend to lag behind others in the issues discussed earlier?

It must be noted here, once and for all that, this matter has nothing to do with the sublime teachings and programs of life, explicitly outlined by Islam and presented to mankind in order to guide him toward realization of the purpose of his creation.

This truth has been acknowledged by Muslim and non-Muslims alike. Rather, it is a question of Man's nature. For example, a hungry person would cherish delicious food but as soon as he is full he tends to forget the importance of that food or the role it played in answering his need. He tends to apply such a feeling for religion too, wrongly of course.

Some fourteen centuries ago, a very concerned and leaned leader by the name of Muhammad Ibn Abdullah, may Allah's peace be upon him and his household, emerged among the desert Bedouins. They were ignorant, lowly, disunited and barbaric. The Prophet of Islam in an age of credulity and amidst such an effete and chaotic society stood up and called people to knowledge, freedom and refined human values.

This divine proclamation resembled the very delicious food pleasure in it. It was like the lover, the soother they had been waiting for years. Then there it was and they truly kept it abreast of them doing their utmost to safeguard and protect it from ills. In this regard they have been very successful because despite plots and conspiracies directed at Islam.

Muslims have managed to keep intact the authentic teachings and injunctions of the holy Qur'an as well as the traditions and informal narrations (sayings) of the Prophet by passing them generations to generation through words or written record so much so that today we can exactly quote the Prophet of Islam (S) as saying such and such about a particular issue.

They stood up to Islam and lived up to its teachings and Islam in turn gave them honor. Islam spread rapidly and was taken to the four corners of the globe because as the poet says:

*“The fair one in dark will not remain,
for its glow will reach each and every domain”*

Muslims advanced so far as ruling over half the earth. Their mosques, holy shrines. Libraries, and books around the world bears witness to this fact. But gradually Muslims, tended to lax in the execution of their obligations and as the holy Qur'an puts it, the hearts were hardened. The importance of Islam was underestimated and the direct relationship between its explicit obligations and honor of the Muslim community soon forgotten.

- They recited the verses of the holy Qur'an with perfect and beautiful articulation but did not pay full attention to the meaning of its concepts.
- They did not provide for armaments (as a defensive deterrent or to put right a wrong).
- Nor did they harken to the admonition of their Prophet who said: “He who puts his head to bed knowing that a fellow Muslim is in need, is not a Muslim.”
- Nor did they feel obligated to perform Friday prayers as it has been recommended.
- Nor did they bid unto good doing and forbid dishonor.
- Nor did they defend the oppressed and fight the oppressor.
- Nor... nor and yet more nor.

But others who were declining, degrading or on the verge of destruction and would even pay land tax to Muslims to benefit from the prosperity of Muslim community learned from their mistakes of some Muslims and observed only a slice of the life-giving injunctions of Islam and heaved themselves up. Injunctions such as: effort, hard-work, politeness, cleanliness and so on.

Section five

The question raised here which I have not yet found a convincing answer to is: when are Muslims going to eventually wake up and endeavor to assuage their lost Majesty and grandeur? Were not they to once much respected and acclaimed master of their own and grand all over the world? And had they not truly gained that mastership and grandeur from the blessed and divinely teachings of Islam?

Did not their road to degradation and suppression begin from the moment they forgot the teachings of their religion? And is this not because of the fact that peoples other than Muslims act is according to the teachings of Islam, whereas the Muslims themselves have ignored their obligations towards Islam.

Surely the Islam which urges Muslims to learn from a crow in getting up early or cooperate like the honeybee or be shameful like a cow and faithful like a dog will not be hesitant in saying that: Muslims

today must learn these qualities from those people who practice them. This is in fact the very same qualities that the holy Qur'an and traditions present but have been forgotten.

Now is the time to start all over again and learn their own lessons being executed from others who practice them unreservedly.

1. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 151, Pg 305, vol 2.
2. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 105, Pg 221, vol 2.
3. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 349
4. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 353
5. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 349
6. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 358
7. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 353
8. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 432
9. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 432
10. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 433
11. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 433
12. On this day Muslims normally allot a portion of their free time for washing up and general cleaning, especially getting ready for Friday prayers.
13. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 434
14. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 435
15. Wasail, vol 1; Pg 435
16. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53, vol 3, Pg 610 & 611
17. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 208; Pg 449
18. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53; Pg 616
19. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53; Pg 616
20. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53; Pg 610, vol 3
21. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53; Pg 616, vol 3
22. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53; Pg 603, vol 3
23. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 53; Pg 615, vol 3
24. Bihar, 103/224
25. Bihar, 76 Pg 11&12
26. Wasail 14/17
27. Wasail 27/13
28. Wasail 14/15
29. Bihar vol 43; Pg 50
30. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 31, Pg 564, vol 3
31. Wasail 9692
32. Wasail 25220
33. Wasail 25323
34. Nahjul Balagha, Pg 618
35. Jihad means great struggle, often used to mean holy war in Islam.
36. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 33, 129
37. Nahjul Balagha, Instruction 234, Pg 618 (E.I.C.C.)
38. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 11
39. Wasail 22898
40. Wasail 21845
41. Wasail 24081

42. Wasail 22010
43. Wasail 22054
44. Wasail 21865
45. Wasail 21887
46. Wasail 21970
47. Wasail 21989
48. Wasail 22004
49. Usul al-Kafi, Pg 10
50. Usul al-Kafi, Pg 12&26, vol 10
51. WOFIS Commandment 31, Pg 557, vol 3; 1980
52. Nahjul Balagha, Instruction 456
53. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 31
54. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 31
55. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 32, Pg 164 (E.I.C.C.)
56. Nahjul Balagha, Instruction 449
57. Nahjul Balagha, Instruction 406
58. It means: God is Great (The Glorious Quran, Pg 603, S:LVII Vol 16, M. M. Pickthall)

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