

ADVICE FOR SUCCESSFUL LIFE TO HIS SON

Imam Ali bin Abu Talib (p)

Introduction: The following excerpts are from the profound advice given by Imam Ali (p) to his son. This advice covers many aspects of life, the relationship with God, the method of supplicating to God, behavior with other people (emphasizing family, neighbors, friends, even foes), and preparing for the life in the Hereafter. The impeccable character of Imam Ali, his spiritual excellence, his relationship with God, his struggle for justice, and his hard-earned lessons of life are evident from this advice. He practiced every bit of what he preached. This document is bound to leave a deep impression on the reader.

Importance of God-Consciousness:

My first and foremost advice to you, My Son, is to be God-conscious. Be His obedient servant. Keep the thought of Him always fresh in your mind. Be attached to and carefully guard the principles of Islam (submission to God) that connect you with God. Can any other connection be stronger, more durable, and more lasting than this, so that you may command greater respect and consideration from God?

Accept good exhortations (advice) and refresh your mind with them. Adopt God-consciousness and overcome your excessive desires with its help. Build your character with the help of true faith in religion and God.

The Creator is also the Annihilator. The One who annihilates has the power to bring everything back again into existence. The One who sends calamities also has the power to protect you from the calamities.

Remember, My Son, had there been any other god besides the One True God, he (the other) would have also sent his (own) prophets, and they would have pointed out to humankind the domain and glory of the other god. Nothing like that has occurred. He is the One True God, Whom all should acknowledge and worship. He has explained this Himself (in the Qur'an). Nobody is a partner with Him in His Domain, Might, and Glory. He is Eternal, He has always been that way, and He shall always remain as such.

He existed before the universe came into being. His Existence is without a beginning. He shall remain when every other thing (in His creation) shall perish. His Existence is without end. God's Glory and His Existence are preeminent, transcendent, and incomparable. He is beyond the grasp of (human) intellect. No one has the ability to understand or visualize God.

When you have accepted these facts, then your behavior should be like that of a person who realizes that his own status, power, and position are nothing compared to that of the Lord.

Remember, My Son, the best of my advices to you is to be God-conscious, to perform the duties made incumbent upon you by God, and to follow in the footsteps of your (noble and pious) ancestors and relatives. Verily, they carefully evaluated their thoughts and deeds, and they carefully evaluated before saying anything, or before taking an action. I advise you to follow their example.

How to Pray to God for Your Needs:

Do not seek help or protection from anybody but God. Reserve your prayers, your requests, and your solicitations for God only, because to withhold, to deprive, and to deny lies in His Power alone.

Therefore, the best thing for you is to seek guidance from the One who has created you, Who maintains and nourishes you, Who has given you a balanced mind and a normally working body. Your invocations should be reserved for Him alone, your requests and solicitations should be to Him alone, and you should only fear Him.

Realize this truth, my son, that the Lord, who owns and holds the treasures of heaven and the earth, has given you permission to ask and to beg (Him) for them, and He has promised to grant your prayers.¹ He has told you to pray for His favors, that He may grant them to you, and to ask for His Blessings, that He may bestow them upon you. God has not appointed guards to prevent your prayers from reaching Him, nor is there any need for anybody to intercede with Him on your behalf.

He hears you whenever you call Him and accepts your prayer whenever you pray to Him. Invoke God to grant you your heart's desire, lay before Him the secrets of your heart, tell Him about all the calamities that have befallen you, the misfortunes that face you, and beseech His help to overcome them. Invoke God's help and support in all difficulties and distresses.

Remember that the little that is granted to you by God will be more useful, honorable, and respectable for you than what is granted by a human (even if it is) in abundance. What can a human give you, but only that which is from God?

You may implore Him to grant you long life and sound health; you may pray to Him for prosperity; you may request Him for such favors and grants that none but He (alone) can bestow.

Think over it, that by simply granting you the privilege of praying to Him for His

¹ "Your Lord says: "Call unto Me, I will answer you" (Qur'an 40: 60).

favors and mercies, He has handed over the keys of His treasures to you. Whenever you are in need, you should pray, and He will confer His bounties and blessings (on you). Sometimes you will find that your requests are not immediately granted, but you need not be disappointed, because the granting of prayers often rests with the true purpose and intention of the seeker. Sometimes the prayers are delayed because the Merciful Lord wants you to receive further rewards for patiently bearing calamities and sufferings, to continue to believe sincerely in (receiving) His help. Thus, you may be awarded better favors than you had requested.

Sometimes your prayers are turned down; this may be to your benefit, because you often unknowingly ask for things that are harmful to you. If your requests are granted, then they will do you more harm than good, and many of your requests may be such that, if they are answered, they will result in your eternal damnation. Thus, the refusal to answer your solicitations is a blessing in disguise. Therefore, you should be very careful in asking God for His favors. Pray for such things that are beneficial to you. Remember, my dear Son, that wealth and power (if you pray for them) are such things that they will not always remain with you and they may bring you harm in the life Hereafter.

Know, My Son, that you cannot have every wish of yours granted. You cannot expect to escape from death. Therefore, be realistic in your expectations, desires, and cravings. Be reasonable (and realistic) in making requests.

Life of This World:

Those who have carefully studied the life of this world, they spend their days as if they know that they are travelers here who have to leave a place that is famine-stricken, unwholesome, and (often) unfriendly. They know that they have to proceed towards lands (of the next world) which are fertile, congenial, where there are abundant provisions, comforts, and pleasures. They have eagerly embarked on the journey. They feel happy, cherishing the hope of future blessings and (eternal) peace. They have willingly accepted the sufferings, troubles, and the hazards of the way (in this world), the parting with friends, scarcity of food, and lack of comfort during the journey (in this world), so that they may reach the destination (Paradise), a happy place. They do not resent bearing hardships, and they do not begrudge giving charity and assistance to the poor and the needy.

Each step they take towards their goal, tiring and exhausting as it may be, is a happy event in their lives.

On the contrary, the people who are attached to this world are sadly engulfed in its short-lived, fast-fading, and depraved pleasures. They are like travelers who are in a fertile and happy region and they know that the journey they have to undertake will lead them to an arid and infertile land. Could anything be more loathsome and abhorrent than the journey of theirs?

Nothing in this world is (truly) useful to you, unless it has some utility and value in the next world. If you lament over things that you have lost in this world, then worry much more about the loss of things of eternal benefit (in the Hereafter). Your past, and with it most of what was in your possession, has departed from you. All that is in your possession at present will also leave you (upon your death).

Your Dealings with Others:

Whatever you like for yourself, the same you like for others; whatever you dislike to happen to you, spare others from such happenings. Do not oppress and tyrannize anyone, because you surely do not like to be oppressed and tyrannized. Be kind and sympathetic to others, as you desire others to treat you. If you notice objectionable and loathsome habits in others, abstain from developing those habits in yourself. If you feel happy and satisfied in receiving a certain kind of treatment from others, then treat others in the same way. Do not speak about others in a way that you do not like others to speak about you. Avoid scandal, libel, and defamation, as you do not like yourself to be scandalized.

Give While You Can:

Remember that your charity and your good deeds are like loans (to God), which He will pay back to you, much in this world, and much more in the Hereafter. Therefore, when you are affluent and have power, make use of your wealth and power in such a way that you will get that returned to you on the Day of Judgment, when you will be needy and helpless.

Importance of Self-Respect:

Earn your livelihood through scrupulously honest means and be content with such earnings. Do not let your desires drive you such that you encounter disappointment and loss. Remember that everyone who prays (to God) for a thing will not always get it. One who controls his/her desires safeguards self-respect. At times, you may secure your heart's desires by means that make you lose your self-respect, but nothing in this world can compensate for the loss of self-respect, nobility, and honor.

Take care, My Son, and beware that you do not make yourself a slave (subservient) to another person. God has created you a free man. Do not barter away your freedom in return for anything (of this world). There is no goodness in wealth and power acquired dishonorably.

Treat Your Family Well:

Do not ill-treat members of your family, and do not behave with them as if you are "the cruelest person alive." Do not run after a person who tries to avoid you.

The greatest achievement of your character is that, despite the hostility of your brother, you continue to show friendship to him. Do good to your brother, even when he is bent upon doing harm to you. When he ignores or declines to recognize the kinship (with you), attempt to befriend him, help him when he is needy, and try to maintain a relationship. If he acts miserly with you and refuses to help you, be generous with him and support him financially (in his need). If he causes you grief or hurt, be kind and considerate to him in return. If he harms you, accept his excuses. Behave with him as if he is the benefactor and you are the beneficiary.

Be mindful that do not do it inappropriately and when dealing with those who do not deserve.

Treat members of your family with love and respect, because "they are the wings with which you fly and the hands that support and defend you." They are people towards whom you turn when you are in trouble and need help.

Deal with Your Enemy with Consideration:

Be considerate to your enemy, because it will allow you to rise (morally) above him/ her, and/or it will reduce the intensity of his/ her hostility.

If you want to sever relations with your friend, then do not break them off completely, in case you may want to make up with him/ her later.

Pearls of Wisdom and Guidance to His Son:

- A sensible person pays heed to advice and draws benefit from it. Do not be like a person on whom advice has no effect.
- Beasts are the ones that require coercion for compliance.
- Overcome sorrows, worries, and misfortunes with patience, and with faith in the merciful Lord.
- One who gives up the straight path (forgoes virtue) thereby loses honesty and rational thinking and, as a result, harms himself.
- A true friend is one who speaks well of you behind your back.
- Excessive desires lead to misfortunes.
- Whoever forsakes the truth makes his/her life constrictive and distressed.
- Honesty and contentment are assets that bring prestige and safeguard the status.

- The strongest relationship is the one that is cultivated between God and His subject.
- The person who does not care about you is (akin to) your enemy.
- If there is likelihood of death or harm in pursuing a goal, then safety lies in not pursuing it.
- Do not talk about weaknesses and shortcomings (of others).
- Opportunities do not repeat themselves.
- At times, the wise fail to achieve their goal, whereas the unwise are able to.
- Avoiding ignorant persons is akin to connecting with the wise ones.
- Whoever trusts this world is betrayed, and whoever gives importance to it is disgraced.
- Not every arrow of yours will hit the bull's eye.
- Before buying a house, inquire about the neighbors you will have.
- Avoid ridiculous topics in your conversation, even if you are quoting others.
- Do not let down a person who has a good opinion about you; do not let him change his opinion.
- Do not jeopardize your well-being through irrational, unreasonable, and extravagant hopes.
- Vain hopes are assets of fools.
- Do not be fooled by flattery.
- There are two kinds of livelihood: the one you are pursuing and the other that pursues you. God has the latter destined for you, and it will reach you, even if you do not pursue it.
- Do not befriend the enemy of your friend, lest your friend becomes your enemy.
- Wisdom lies in remembering past experiences and drawing benefit from them.

- The best experience is the one that offers the best advice and teaches caution.
- Take advantage of opportunities before you lose them.
- Not everyone who tries, succeeds.
- No one will return after departing from this world.
- The worst folly is to waste opportunities (to do good) in this life and thereby lose salvation.
- To be submissive and to beg when in need, and to be arrogant and oppressive when affluent and powerful, are two of the ugliest traits of human character.
- Never ill-treat a person who has done you some good.
- Remember, do not overburden yourself with obligations (i.e., do not commit yourself to too many responsibilities), so that you may not be able to fulfil them honorably.

Excerpts from the book “What is True Success?”
Section; God consciousness, page 36