

# Introduction to “The Peak of Eloquence”

BY THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST BENEFICENT, THE MOST MERCIFUL

*Nahj al-Balaghah* (literally meaning “Peak of Eloquence”) is a collection of the sermons, supplications, letters, advices, epistles, and aphorisms of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), the fourth caliph of Islam and the first Imam of the Muslims. As a man of intense spirituality, passion, and devotion to Allah, Ali’s letters and powerful orations earned him the respect of his contemporaries - friend and foe alike - and the veneration of Muslims for over 1400 years. Today, the *Nahj al-Balagha* is among the most read books in the world, and is second to only the Qur’an in terms of style and literary eloquence.

## The Compiler

*Nahj al-Balaghah* was compiled by al-Sayyid al-Sharif ar-Radi (359-406 H), an outstanding Islamic scholar of the 4th and 5th Islamic centuries. Sharif ar-Radi devoted twenty years of his lifetime to compiling *Nahj al-Balaghah*, and travelled to hundreds of libraries to collect texts that had recorded the lectures, letters, and sayings that ‘Ali had written or delivered on different occasions. While *Nahj al-Balaghah* does not contain all of ‘Ali’s speeches, it is the most complete of any book to date.

## The Format

Sharif ar-Radi divided *Nahj al-Balagha* into the following categories: (1) Sermons (2) Letters (3) Short Sayings. The first section deals with, among other things, the unity and knowledge of Allah, the mission of the Holy prophet of Islam and his lofty status, Islamic spirituality, government and social justice, social philosophy, ethics, worship, and eschatology.

The second section consists of the letters written by ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib to his friends, relatives, and enemies during the time of his caliphate. It also contains instructions that the Imam issued to governors and government officials in charge of the Muslims’ affairs. In each of these letters, the Imam laid down the principles of a just government, defining the best ways to serve the people and protect the rights of the oppressed.

The third section of *Nahjul Balagha* contains the wise aphorisms of the Imam. The deep and meaningful content of these sayings provide simple yet profound guidelines for living a pure and prosperous life.

## Excerpts From the “Peak of Eloquence” by Imam ‘Ali ibne Abi Talib (May Allah’s peace be upon him)

### On the Oneness of Allah:

“Praise is due to Allah, whose worth cannot be described by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators and whose claim (to obedience) cannot be satisfied by those who attempt to do so, whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate, and the divings of understanding cannot reach; He for whose description no limit has been laid down, no eulogy exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed...”

The foremost in religion is the acknowledgement of Him, the perfection of acknowledging Him is to testify Him, the perfection of testifying Him is to believe in His Oneness, the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to regard Him Pure, and the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute. Thus whoever attaches attributes to Allah recognises His like, and who recognises His like regards Him two; and who regards Him two recognises parts for Him; and who recognises parts for Him mistook Him; and who mistook Him pointed at Him; and who pointed at Him admitted limitations for Him; and who admitted limitations for Him numbered Him.

... He is a Being but not through the phenomenon of coming into being. He exists but not from non-existence. He is with everything but not in physical nearness. He is different from everything but not in physical separation. He acts but without connotation of movements and instruments. He sees even when there is none to be looked at from among His creation. He is only One, such that there is none with whom He may keep company or whom He may miss in his absence.” [Sermon One]

### On the Creation of Angels:

He created the openings between high skies and filled them with all classes of His angels. Some of them are in prostration and do not kneel up. Others are in a kneeling position and do not stand up. Some of them are in array and do not leave their position. Others are extolling Allah and do not get tired. The sleep of the eye or the slip of wit, or languor of the body or the effect of forgetfulness does not effect them... [Sermon One]

### Allah Chooses His Prophets:

“From his (Adam’s) progeny Allah chose prophets and took their pledge for his revelation and for carrying His message as their trust. In course of time many people perverted Allah’s trust with them and ignored His position and attributed asppcoates tp Him. Satan turned them away from knowing Him and kept them aloof from His worship. Then Allah sent His Messengers and series of His prophets towards them to fulfil the pledges of His creation, to recall to them His bounties, to exhort them by preaching, to unveil before them the hidden virtues of wisdom and show them the signs of His Omnipotence;...”

“Allah never allowed His creation to remain without a Prophet deputised by Him, or a book sent down from Him or a binding argument or a standing plea. These Messengers were such that they did not feel little because of smallness of their number or of largeness of the number of their falsifiers. Among them was either a predecessor who would name the one to follow or the follower who had been introduced by the predecessor. [Sermon One]

### On Allah’s Sublimity

Praise be to Allah, Who lies inside all hidden things, and towards Whom all open things guide. He cannot be seen by the eye of an onlooker, but the eye which does not see Him cannot deny Him, while the mind that proves His existence cannot perceive Him. He is so high in sublimity that nothing can be more sublime than He, while in nearness, He is so near that no one can be nearer than He. But his sublimity does not put Him at a distance from anything of His creation, nor does His nearness bring them on equal level to Him. He has not informed (human) wit about the limits of His qualities. Nevertheless, He has not prevented it from securing essential knowledge of Him... [Sermon 49]

### On the Progeny of Muhammad (peace be upon them)

Look at the people of the Prophet’s family. Adhere to their direction. Follow their footsteps because they would never let you out of guidance, and never throw you into destruction... They began the day with dust on the hair and face (in hardship of life) and passed the night in prostration and standing in prayers. Sometimes they put down their foreheads and sometimes their cheeks. With the recollection of their resurrection it seemed as though

they stood on live coal. It seemed that in between their eyes there were signs like knees of goats, resulting from long prostrations. When Allah was mentioned their eyes flowed freely till their shirt collars were drenched. They trembled for fear of punishment and hope of reward as the tree trembles on the day of stormy wind [*Sermon 96*]

### Some Aphorisms:

*It is wiser to abstain than to repent.* [#169]

*Greed is permanent slavery.* [#179]

*One who takes account of his shortcomings will always gain by it; one who is unmindful of them will always suffer. One who is afraid of the Day of Judgment, is safe from the Wrath of Allah. One who takes lessons from the events of life, gets vision, one who acquires vision becomes wise and one who attains wisdom achieves knowledge.* [#196]

*Unfortunate is he who cannot gain a few sincere friends during his life; more unfortunate is the one who gained them and then lost them (through his deeds).* [#11]

*Patience is of two kinds: patience over what pains you, and patience against what you covet.* [#55]

*Do not feel ashamed if the amount of charity is small because to refuse the needy is an act of greater shame.* [#67]

*Time wears out bodies, renews hopes, brings death nearer and takes away aspirations. Whoever gets anything from the world lives in anxiety for holding it and whoever loses anything passes his days grieving over the loss.* [#72]

*Whoever wants to be a leader should educate himself before educating others. Before preaching to others he should first practice himself. Whoever educates himself and improves his own morals is superior to the man who tries to teach and train others.* [#73]

*I wonder at the arrogance of a haughty and vain person. Yesterday he was only a drop of semen and tomorrow he will turn into a corpse. I wonder at the man who observes the Universe created by Allah and doubts His Being and Existence. I wonder at the man who sees people dying around him and yet he has forgotten his end. I wonder at the man who understands the marvel of genesis of creation and refuses to accept that he will be brought back to life again. I wonder at the man who takes great pains to decorate and to make comfortable this mortal habitat and totally forgets his permanent abode.* [#125]

### Criterion for Truth

In light of the wisdom of Islam that has just been presented, take some time to consider the following:

- Are the teachings of your belief system rationally tenable?
- Is your belief system universally applicable?
- Does your belief system enhance your progress towards spiritual perfection?
- Who is the creator of your belief system? Is he a creation or is he the Creator?
- Has your belief system been corrupted by superstitions, myths, or man-made philosophies?
- Does your belief system concur with the discoveries of modern science?
- Could a human being have invented your belief system?

If a belief system fails any of these simple qualifications, then it cannot be divine. If this is the case, then you can either live your life knowing that your belief system is imperfect, or you can open the door to inner peace and true guidance. The choice is yours.

For your **free copy** of the Qur'an, Nahj al-Balagha, and other Islamic literature, please write to:

**Thaqalayn Muslim Association**  
info@thaqalayn.org

Or visit the nearest Islamic Centre in your area:

### Other Books Available from TMA:

The Choice: Islam and Christianity  
Jesus -- Prophet of Islam  
The Bible, the Qur'an, and Science  
Towards Understanding Islam  
The Peak of Eloquence, by Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib  
Muhammad - Man of Allah  
Inquiries about Islam  
The ABC's of Prayer

# The Peak of Eloquence

*At a Glance*



**THAQALAYN  
MUSLIM ASSOCIATION**