

Principles of Professional Ethics in Imam Ali's (a) View

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Abstract

Reinforcement of ethics and perfection of its manifestations were among the main goals of divine prophets. This signifies the unrivaled role of ethics in man's individual and social life. Accordingly, its application in all areas of human life is necessary and inevitable. As a fundamental element in the process of human perfection, work bears fruit only when the associated moral obligations and their principles are observed. By studying the Quran and Hadith and in particular the precious words of Imam Ali (a), the present study aims to identify and analyze some of the principles of professional ethics, wishing to prepare the ground for their practical application.

Keywords: professional ethics, Imam Ali (a), *Nahj al-balagha*, applied ethics.

Preface

Reinforcement of ethics and developing virtues are among the main goals of divine prophets. A brief look at Islamic sources clearly shows the centrality of ethics, so much so that the holy Prophet of Islam declared the perfection of moral virtues as the most essential and significant goal of his mission. Accordingly, their application in all areas of human life is both necessary and inevitable.

As an area of ethics, applied ethics aims to explore and analyze ethical problems and investigate the ways to discern moral obligations and their fulfillment in certain areas of life. Professional ethics is a subject in applied ethics which means “manners, conduct and principles of human behavior.” Along with their emphasis on work and illustrating its role in the process of human perfection, Islamic teachings have explained its governing moral obligations.

Putting forth valuable teachings in this regard, Imam Ali (a) explains the ethics of work with a realistic insight. Collection and classification of these guidelines in Imam Ali’s sayings, defining his principles in ethics, and compiling a code of professional ethics are what this article seeks to accomplish.

I. Relation between Ethics and Work

The Quran’s high regard for ethics and the emphasis of prophets and religious leaders on its practical application signify its unparalleled role

in man's individual and social life. Among all the goals of the holy Prophet (s), perfecting high morals has been singled out in the following hadith: "I have been raised [as a prophet] only to complete high morals" (Muttaqi al-Hindi 1397 Sh, 3:16; Majlisi 1404 AH, 16:210). Stressing morality's significant role in human life, Imam Ali (a) says, "Should there be no escape from partiality, let your partiality be on the side of sublime traits, praised deeds, and righteous affairs" (Nahj al-balaghah, sermon 192). Also, in another hadith, he says, "If we did not have any hope for Paradise or a reward, or if we did not fear hellfire or punishment, it would still be worthy to quest ethical virtues, for they lead to success and triumph" (Nuri 1408 AH, 11:193).

These words clearly show not only that moral virtues are the means for eternal salvation but also that they are needed in this world for its organized establishment. Man's historical experience confirms the fact that any society that distances from ethical values and falls short of appreciating them either theoretically or practically will suffer losses and disasters and is doomed to destruction.

Ethics is not restricted to a certain area; rather, ethical principles must be observed in all areas and domains; it is only in this way that it yields its proper results and paves the way for human progress and perfection.

In the following hadith, Imam Ali (a) tacitly mentions an important fact: "These [moral virtues] are the ones which the Arab elite, heads of tribes, and noble warriors try to achieve" (Nahj al-balaghah, sermon 192). Therefore, if we want to compete, it must be for ethics. A healthy society is that which holds its most valuable competition for ethics, for ethics is the core capital of nations, the cornerstone of civilizations, and the backbone of a healthy social life. Ethics is the best means for

divine wayfaring; therefore, before solving moral problems, no other issues could be settled (Makarim Shirazi 1374 Sh, 1:7).

Due to the great emphasis of the Quran and Hadiths on its unparalleled role in individual and social life, work is no exception and moral codes must be observed in it as well. In other words, due to the close connection between work and ethics, work will not yield its proper result and bring man to happiness without ethics.

According to Imam Ali (a), the value of any deed depends on its moral nature, not its quantity or size: “With piety, no deed is insignificant, and how could it be insignificant when it will be accepted [by God]?” (Nahj al-balaghah, wisdom 95)

A moral deed remains in the world, for it is in conformity with the universe’s laws. The Quran states,

“A good land brings forth its vegetation with its Lord’s permission” (7:58).

Emphasis on perfection of works, accountability, commitment to quality, flawlessness, and so forth show the significant and fundamental role of ethics in the fruitfulness of work. Motahhari says in this regard:

“The difference between a moral and a natural act lies in the fact that a moral act is valuable in the consciousness of any human being; that is, it is a precious act, and man ascribes an independent value to it, which cannot be measured by money or material goods” (Motahhari 1381 Sh, 13).

2. Professional Ethics

Professional ethics is a sub-field in applied ethics and management. According to one definition, professional ethics is “an area of culture that comprises the beliefs and values concerning work and is identifiable” (Mo'idfard 1380 Sh, 25). Considering its relatively new coinage, the term “professional ethics” is not found in Islamic sources, but one can find ethical regulations pertaining to work and profession. The great emphasis of the Quran and Hadith on earning lawful (*halal*) income and classifying it among the best acts of worship is expressive of the importance of observing divine laws in work. In religious sources, and particularly in *Nahj al-balagha*, one can find many teachings pertaining to professional ethics, some of which we will discuss in this article.

3. Principles of Professional Ethics

3.1 God-centeredness

Attitude and motivation are among the factors that differentiate work in Islamic teachings from that in capitalism. In capitalism, maximization of profit and increase of income are the sole goals of production (Ibadi 1370 Sh, 16-17). However, in the Islamic viewpoint, man's ultimate goal is achieving nearness to God (Quran 53:42; 89:27-30). Accordingly, the ultimate goal of the Islamic economic system is to prepare the needed grounds for attaining this goal.

One of the necessary principles and grounds for achieving such a goal is to keep sincere, godly intentions in all actions and words and to be theocentric in one's behavior and conduct and in all phases of life. The more this God-centeredness, the more the value of man's actions.

In Islam, God is introduced as the One (Quran 112:1), the Living One who never dies (25:58), the one who has power over all things (2:106), the best of providers (23:72), the only Provider (51:58), Most Kind with [His] servants (3:30); the nearest than anything else to man (50:16), the one who gives fast and positive responses to the needs and requests of His servants (2:186), and the one in whose hands are all affairs (36:83). God is also considered the real cause in the universe and also the One to whom all return (2:156).

Considering these divine characteristics causes man to depend and rely only on Him, for no one else can hear man's request (35:14), control his gain or loss (5:76), provide him with his livelihood (29:17), or help him in difficult conditions of life (6:63).

Imam Ali (a) would enjoin his executives and military commanders to remember God and have a theocentric life. In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, the Imam (a) writes:

“[Hereby] he [i.e., Malik] is commanded to maintain piety, and to prioritize God's obedience over everything else, and to follow whatever of obligatory and supererogatory tasks that have been commanded in His book—commandments without complying to which no one would reach happiness and without ignoring which no one would perish. And [he is commanded] to help God [’s cause] with his heart, hand, and tongue, for God—may His name be celebrated!—has guaranteed the triumph of the one who helps Him and the honor of the one who glorifies Him” (Nahj al-balaghah, letter 53).

In this letter, Imam Ali (a) advises his most competent governor to rule upon the basis of piety, worship, and obeying and remembering God

and to believe that God will not leave him alone in leading the society and facing the problems (Dashti 1380 Sh, 99).

God-centeredness is to consider creation and authority as belonging to God, to regard the world at God's presence, to believe in Him as the superior and observer of all affairs, and to obey Him. One who leads a theocentric life is free from material distress, only cares about God's satisfaction, devotes himself to obeying God, purifies both his intentions and his actions from hypocrisy, and only considers God in his deeds.

When such a perspective prevails one's life, he will succeed and will motivate and revive others. Not only such a person will be among the dearest servants to God but also God will place his love in the hearts of others and restore his relationships with them. Imam Ali (a) says in this regard:

“Whoever restores his relationship with God, God will restore his relationship with people” (Nahj al-balaghah, wisdom 89).

So, according to Imam Ali (a), the theocentric view must prevail in all areas of human life, including work, paving the way for happiness both in this world and in the hereafter.

3.2 Trustworthiness¹

Trustworthiness is among the most stressed virtues in Imam Ali's words. According to Imam Ali (a), without trustworthiness religion is baseless (Amidi 1366 Sh, 218, 215). The Imam (a) regards trustworthiness

¹ **Translator's note:** The Arabic word “*amanah*” denotes a multidimensional sense of trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity.

as the base, essence, and means of Islam's perfection: "The essence of Islam is trustworthiness" (Amidi 1366 Sh, 215); "Whoever abides by trustworthiness has surely perfected his piety" (Ibid.).

In Imam Ali's worldview, trustworthiness consists of a wide spectrum of moral traits, and whatever is at man's disposal is considered a divine trust; therefore, being an honest trustee of divine trusts by abiding by divine laws and regulations is emphasized. Warning against the negative consequences of betrayal, the Imam (a) says,

"One who disdains the divine trust and betrays it, and does not purify himself and his religion has surly opened the gates of humiliation [to himself] in this world, and, in the hereafter, there will be greater humiliation and embarrassment [awaiting him]" (Nahj al-balaghah, letter 26).

By classifying one's position as a kind of trust, Imam Ali (a) corrects the attitude of his governors, and in a letter to Ash'ath bin Qays, the Governor of Azerbaijan, he writes,

"The position of governorship is not a means for material gains; rather, it is a trust by which you are bound" (Nahj al-balagha, letter 5).

Accordingly, whatever at a person's disposal at work is something trusted to him, so he does not have the right to use it in whatever way he wishes (Faramarz Qaramaleki 1368 Sh, 123). In other words, if the principle of trustworthiness rules the workplace, honesty and truth will prevail, material gains will increase, and prosperity will follow. This is what Imam Ali (a) stresses as an ethical principle.

3.3 Work Discipline

The universe is a perfectly orderly system under the divine rule (Quran 2:164; 6:95-99; 51:20-21; 67:3-4). In his way to perfection, man needs to be in harmony with this orderly system. The Quran states in this regard, "He raised the sky and set up the balance ... so that you may not infringe the balance" (55:7-8). According to this verse, the purpose of setting the balance in the universe is that human beings, who are from this world, maintain order and balance. If balance and order is taken away from the world, it goes down the way of destruction; and, likewise, if man's life becomes void of order and balance, he too will go down the path of annihilation (Makarim Shirazi 1374 Sh, 23:108).

The order is so rooted and all-encompassing in the universe that theologians appeal to its design to argue for God's existence. Since religious affairs have an unbroken tie with order and discipline, the Quran has been defined as the organizer of both the material and spiritual aspects of human life:

"Know that the knowledge of the future lies in the Quran, so does the story of the past. It is the remedy for your pain, and the means for organizing your affairs" (Nahj al-balaghah, sermon 158).

Order and discipline in work is Imam Ali's repeated advice. This teaching is so considerable in his view that in the last moments of his life, where one expresses his most significant advice, Imam Ali (a) stressed on order and discipline:

"I advise you two [i.e., Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (a)] and all my children and family members and whomever receives my word to maintain God-wariness

and discipline in your affairs” (Nahj al-balaghah, letter 47).

In addition to enjoining discipline, Imam Ali (a) was practically committed to order and discipline and would carry out his duties in an organized manner. Imam al-Sadiq (a) reports that Imam Ali’s daily schedule was as follows:

“After the dawn prayer till sunrise, he was occupied with supplication and recommended acts of worship; after sunrise, he would open the door of his house to the poor and needy; before noon, he would teach religious laws to his companions; and, at night, he would walk in town to inspect and remove injustice” (Shushtari 1376 Sh, 4:132).

Through order and discipline, one can fulfill all his obligations on time and be the source of trust and peace of mind for those who deal with him.

Outlining the features of work discipline, Imam Ali (a) mentions some related traits, which will be explained in what follows.

3.3.1 Punctuality

A successful person is the one who determines the due time of every task based on its priority, and thus does not fall into an unreasonable hurry or a damaging delay. Imam Ali (a) stresses this essential principle by saying,

“Beware of rushing tasks before their due time, of laziness in accomplishing them at their proper settings ... so put every task at its proper position and fulfill

every task at its right setting” (Nahj al-balaghah, letter 53).

3.3.2 Division of Work

Division of work is another aspect of work discipline which is stressed in Imam Ali's words. In the modern management science, too, division of work is highly stressed. Division of work and defining the limits of everyone's responsibility in group activities and organizational tasks let every individual know his responsibility and avoid interference in the tasks of others and neglecting his own. Addressing one of his governors, Imam Ali (a) says,

“For each of your servants, specify a task for which you may later take him accountable; in this way, each of them accomplishes his own task and does not leave it to others” (Nahj al-balaghah, letter 31).

3.3.3 Planning

Another factor in work discipline is planning; that is, placing everything in its proper position and doing it by its due time. Planning is necessary for starting any task. Imam Ali (a) says in this regard,

“Measure and then cut, think and then speak, scrutinize and act after clarification of different dimensions of the task” (Amidi 1366 Sh, 120).

The necessity of pre-planning before any task is a rational principle; it is clear that launching any project without deliberating over its different dimensions and planning for it is a sign of imprudence. Imam Ali (a) says in this regard:

“The best sign of the perfection of reason is the [ability of] proper planning” (Amidi 1366 Sh, 354).

Neglecting this important principle can lead to horrible consequences and irreversible damages. Conversely, being orderly and organized in work yields numerous benefits, leading to social and individual progress and preventing the waste of time, energy, and other resources.

3.4 Commitment

Commitment and keeping promises are among the principal foundations of professional ethics. Every human being, based on his God-given nature, values promise-keeping, even those who do not keep their word (Nasri 1379 Sh, 443). In the holy Quran and hadiths, different forms of emphasis have been laid on promise-keeping. The holy Quran counts keeping promises as the trait of the righteous (2:177) and the faithful (23:8; 70:32). Also in hadiths, it has been stated that promise-keeping is a sign of a true religious (Nuri 1408 AH, 16:96), pious (Majlisi 1408 AH, 64:290), and faithful person (Kulayni 1365 Sh, 2:226), a sign of a true Shiite (Majlisi 1404 AH, 64:290), and a sign of generosity (Tamimi Amidi 1366 sh, 259). Keeping promises is also one of the main means to acquire admission to paradise and nearness to the Prophet (s) (Majlisi 1404 AH, 72:94). In contrast, breaking promises leads to being disliked by God and by people and is a sign of hypocrisy (Ibid.).

According to Islamic teachings, keeping promises and fulfilling contracts are among the highest human virtues. The Quran and hadiths count promise-keeping as one of the essential conditions of faith and equate breaking promises with disbelief (Fadel-Lankarani 1377 Sh, 190).

In Imam Ali's viewpoint, keeping promise and fulfilling contracts are of special importance. According to him, this principle is not restricted to inter-Muslim relations; rather, Muslims are obligated to maintain this principle even in their relations with non-Muslims. In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali (a) counts promise-keeping as one of the most important divine obligations and considers promise-breaking impermissible even in dealing with the enemy. He advises the governor of Egypt to beware of promise-breaking:

“And should you make a treaty with your enemy or give him a pledge of immunity, fulfill your commitment ... for none of divine obligations is like promise-keeping, on which all men, with all their differences in desires and views, strongly agree; and even pagans [in the Age of Ignorance] would respect it, for they had experienced the negative consequences of promise-breaking. Therefore, never break your promise, betray your commitment, or deceive your enemy” (Nahj al-balagha, letter 53).

Under pressure from some of his companions, Imam Ali (a) was forced to accept a ceasefire agreement. When those companions were proved to be mistaken, they demanded the Imam (a) to break the treaty and resume the war. In response, Imam Ali (a) said,

“Woe to you! Should we return [to war] after the treaty and our promise? Has not God, the exalted, said ‘Keep your promises’? Isn't it that He said, ‘Fulfill the covenant of God when you pledge, and never break the oaths that have been affirmed, and you have made God a surety over yourselves’” (Ibn Abi al-Hadid 1337 Sh, 2:113).

Even here, when Mu'awiyah's wickedness was manifested to all, Imam Ali (a) did not allow, at any cost, the breach of his treaty with him. He abided by the treaty until Mu'awiyah breached it (Mufid 1399 AH, 145). This reveals the remarkable importance of promise-keeping in the Imam's view.

The task that one undertakes is in fact a kind of promise that must be kept. Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari says in this regard:

One who makes a pledge to another person is in fact mortgaging his own personality for his pledge, and if such a person is conscientious and his sense of commitment has not died, he always feels a deep sense of obligation of which he will not be free until he completely fulfills his commitment. (Ja'fari 1379 Sh, 531)

Promise-keeping causes the committed person to be known as reliable and trustworthy; he will enjoy other people's trust and fellowship (Amidi 1366 Sh, 252), which will bring him material and spiritual blessings.

However, if promise-keeping fades away, the relationship between people deteriorates, and mutual sympathy, trust, and cooperation among them goes away. Such a society will lose the most fundamental means for its survival, because the most fundamental asset of a society is mutual trust among its members. Basically, what makes separate individuals a society is the very principle of mutual trust, which is the basis for social activities and cooperation. Promise-keeping preserves this integrity and mutual trust (Makarim Shirazi 1374 Sh, 11:382).

3.5. Meritocracy

Every work requires a particular ability, skill, or expertise, and therefore not everyone qualifies for all positions. Choosing qualified individuals for each position has been emphasized in Islamic teachings, and in particular by Imam Ali (a). According to him, the abilities and merits of each individual can contribute to the development of society. In the Imam's opinion, taking any position in society must be based on merits; if this principle is ignored, no task will be properly accomplished.

Imam Ali (a) took over a system of government in which favoritism and tribalism had replaced piety and meritocracy (Shahidi 1362 Sh, 118), and he vigorously strived to reform the system. In order to enforce this principle in his administration and society, he starts from himself and asks the question whether he is qualified to lead the Islamic society, or there are other individuals more competent for this position? Before assuming the caliphate position, Imam Ali (a) presents several rational arguments to prove that he is the most competent for this position. (Mahmudi 1379-1385; 1:50&100) The principle of meritocracy stemmed from justice and was not to be violated at any cost. Imam Ali's commitment to and persistence on meritocracy was such that he preferred it to preserving the unity of Muslims, for which he had made great sacrifices (Mashayekh Firidani 1378 Sh, 100). He refused to see unqualified people in important administrative positions even for a moment at the cost of three civil wars: Jamal, Siffin and Nahrawan. According to Imam Ali (a), keeping such unqualified individuals like Mu'awiyah in their positions would lead to the destruction of Islam. He says in this regard,

“May God not see me while I take the deviants as assistants” (Minqari 1374 Sh, 52).

Imam Ali (a) regarded assignment of professional positions and responsibilities to unqualified people as injustice and betrayal:

“Do not assign them to governmental positions based on favoritism or selfish decisions, for these two are branches of injustice and betrayal” (Nahj al-balaghah, letter 53).

Accordingly, in several letters to his governors, he urged them to consider this principle in assigning administrative positions.

Piety, commitment, expertise, and moral integrity are among the criteria and standards Imam Ali (a) sets for selection and assignment of individuals to administrative positions. He counts public trust, removal of corruption, and the organization of affairs as the results of observing these criteria.

3.6 Rule of Law

In a just system of government, observing divine laws—including the rights and duties of both the people and the leaders—is considered a religious duty. Imam Ali (a) considered himself equal to other people before the law. He carefully observed the rule of law in his life and relations with his close relatives. The Imam’s reaction to his brother ‘Aqil, who requested a greater share of governmental payment, illustrates his commitment to the divine law.

During his caliphate, Imam Ali (a) made extensive efforts to reinforce the rule of law. By issuing administrative commands and instructions, Imam Ali (a) taught his governors to take the rule of law seriously and

to confront outlaws regardless of their position, and to eradicate the means of misusing power. In his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, the Imam (a) says,

“Execute the law upon whomever the law is applicable to, whether he be close to you or distant; and be patient in this regard” (Nahj al-balaghah Letter 53).

Reproaching one of his governors because of the latter's misuse of the treasury and breaking the law, Imam Ali (a) says:

“By God, if al-Hasan or al-Husayn did what you have done, they would not see a kind face from me, nor would they succeed to make me change my decision, until I took it back from them” (Nahj al-balagha, letter 41).

Even in dealing with religious minorities, Imam Ali (a) regarded himself equally accountable before the law. It is reported that when he spotted his armor in the hands of a Jewish old man who claimed its ownership, Imam Ali (a) went to the court without trying to use his power as the caliph to take back his armor. The judge required the Imam (a) to present witnesses for his claim. The Imam (a) presented Imam al-Hasan (a), Imam al-Husayn (a), and Qanbar (his servant) as witnesses. Due to their relationship to the Imam, the judge refused to accept their testimonies and passed judgment in favor of the Jew. Witnessing the process of the court and the Imam's submission to the law, the Jew confessed that the armor belonged to the Imam (Majlisi 1404 AH, 56:41).

What remains worthy of notice is the fact that Imam Ali (a) emphasized the necessity of abiding by the law that was based on truth and justice,

derived from the teachings of the divine religion, not the imperfect laws legislated by human beings.

3.7 Emphasis on Quality

In the conduct and teachings of Imam Ali (a), there is much attention given to quality, depth, and expertise in work. For instance, he says,

“The value of everyone is that which he masters” (Nahj al-balaghah, wisdom 81).

In his comment on this Hadith, Hakimi writes:

This remark by Imam Ali (a) is an emphasis on the importance of the quality of every work, vocation, and craft; that is, the real value depends on the quality of the work, not its quantity. (Hakimi 1380 Sh, 331)

Imam al-Sadiq (a) says:

“At a young age, I used worship a lot. One day, my father told me: ‘My son! Do not endeavor this much to worship, and worship less, for when God is pleased with a person and likes him, He will be pleased with even a little worship by that person’” (‘Amili 1409 AH, 1:82).

Regarding such narrations, Majlisi writes: “In most of the narrations, it has been reminded that trying to improve the content of an act of worship is better than trying to increase its quantity; and striving to improve the beliefs, manners, and behaviors is more important than striving to multiply the number of the deeds” (Majlisi 1404 AH, 68:213).

When one undertakes a task, he must carry it out carefully and in the best possible manner. Fulfilling tasks in a perfect way is by itself a principal value that has been emphasized in the Quran and Hadith. Human reason can also independently understand the importance of this principle (Makirm Shirazi 1380 Sh, 108).

We read in a hadith that people told the Prophet (s) that Sa'd bin Mu'adh had passed away. When they placed his corpse near the grave, the Prophet (s) himself went inside the grave and placed the bricks and asked for little stones and mud to cover the gaps between the bricks. When he finished and leveled the grave with the ground, he (a) turned to his companions and said:

“I know that it will decay, but God likes [His] servant who accomplishes flawlessly whatever task he undertakes” (Amili 1409 AH, 3:230).

It is reported, also, that in the funeral of his own son, Ibrahim, when the Prophet (s) covered the grave, there appeared a hole, which the Prophet filled and then said,

“Whenever one of you does something, let him do it flawlessly” (Qummi n.d., 2:287).

Following the example of the Prophet (s), Imam Ali (a) tried to fulfill his tasks in a perfect manner. When he was assigned to proclaim the message of dissociation (*bara'á*) to the pagans, he tried to do it flawlessly. Motahhari writes in this regard: “Again and again and in different situations, the Commander of the Faithful informed people about the message. They [historians] have written that he repeated delivering it so many times that his voice weakened, because in different

situations, wherever there was a gathering, he recited the verses [of dissociation] so that no one would remain uninformed” (Motahhari 1383 Sh, 3:216).

Imam Ali (a) says,

“The beauty of a good work is to be perfectly accomplished and finished” (Amidi 1366 Sh, 383).

He considered a fruitful and beneficial work to be the one that has high quality (Delshad Tehrani 1385 Sh, 103). Doing a work in an imperfect way and with low quality does not yield the desired results and leads to waste of resources.

3.8 Perseverance

Among major principles in professional ethics is perseverance in finishing the job. It is obvious that a high quality work that remains unfinished does not yield the expected results. Evidently, to finish a job, one must persevere through the difficulties. In the Quran, we read

“If they [people] remain steadfast on the path [of the faith and the establishment of righteousness], we shall provide them with plenty of water [abundant blessings]” (72:9).

In this regard, Imam Ali (a) says,

“A minor work that you do continually is more promising than a major work which you quit because of boredom” (Nahj al-balaghah, wisdom 287).

It has been beautifully said that “there’s no benefit in an abrupt flash that lights up everything for a second and immediately goes away” (Hakimi 1380 Sh, 1:281).

Perseverance and consistency must be maintained until the task is perfectly finished. It is the successful completion of a task that is the criterion of its good execution. The holy Prophet (s) says in this regard, “Success and fruitfulness of works depend on their completion and end” (Majlisi 1404 AH, 77:165). Jesus (a) is also reported to have said: “Everyone says, [the quality of] a building depends on its cornerstone, but truly I say to you, it is the capstone which the architect places and finishes the building that is the basis” (Hakimi 1380 Sh, 1:281).

Imam Ali (a) would complete any task he undertook with perseverance. When he planned to bore a well to farm a land for the poor, he started the work and did not stop until he finished the work. Abu Nayzar reports: “Ali came to the land, grabbed a pickaxe and went down the well and kept working for a long time, when he came up, his whole blessed body was dripping with sweat, and he asked for something to eat” (Motahhari 1381 Sh, 1:290).

Imam Ali (a) regarded perseverance as leading to enthusiasm and energy and procrastination as a cause of disappointment. He said in this respect,

“Whoever works and has perseverance, his energy and enthusiasm for its completion will increase, and whoever quits, this very failure results in further laziness, boredom, and incompleteness of the job” (Leithi Wasiti 1376 sh, 1:454).

Conclusion

Work yields its proper results only when the ethical principles and standards related to it are observed. These principles include God-centeredness, trustworthiness, work discipline, commitment, meritocracy, rule of law, quality, flawlessness, and perseverance. Without observing and maintaining these principles, we cannot expect any work to yield its expected results.

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