

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Administrative Instructions of Ali

Instructions to Malik Ashtar

When Malik Ashtar was appointed as the Governor of Egypt, Ali instructed him as follows:

"O Malik, let it be known to you that you have been appointed to the governorship of Egypt. All of your actions as the Governor will be open to the criticism of the people. You should do good deeds. Keep your passions under control. Your dealings with your subjects should be just and fair. Treat them affectionately and love them.

There are two kinds of subjects to be governed, firstly your brethren in Islam, and secondly the minorities whose protection has been guaranteed. Intentionally or unintentionally the people are apt to make mistakes. It will behoove you to excuse them, as you expect that God will forgive your sins. Do not be ashamed if you pardon them. Never find pleasure in punishing them. Do not be short tempered. Never say that you are Governor above them, for it breeds a feeling of inferiority in them. Should you ever take pride in your exalted office then think of the power and grandeur of God, for that is the only means to check your arrogance. Remember that God hates the cruel and the arrogant.

Be fair and just, for if you fail in it, you are a tyrant and tyrant is the enemy of God. God hearkens to the weak and the afflicted. Follow the path of moderation in your doings, and try to please your subjects.

It is the common masses who are a power in the eyes of Islam. Freely mix with the masses, and refrain from the company of the backbiters and the wicked. Be broad-minded, overlook the faults of others, and forgive them. Do not bear malice against anyone, and do not do anything which is below your dignity. The backbiters and the wicked are very cunning, never lend an ear to what they say. Do not seek the advice of a coward who will make you faint hearted. Do not take the greedy persons as your advisers, for they will make you cruel. Above all bear in mind that miserliness, cowardice, and greed ruin a person. In the selection of Ministers see that you appoint those persons who speak the truth, howsoever unpalatable it may be. Do not seek the advice of those who may flatter you to your face, for flattery breeds arrogance. Do not give an equal status to a bad and a good person. Treat a good person kindly and a bad person curtly. Remember that it is better to rule over the people by love than by fear. Always try to satisfy and please your subjects.

Try to maintain the traditions of those early Muslims who brought amity and love amongst the believers in faith and tried to reform. In no way should you depart from these traditions. Should you try to introduce innovations, you will come to grief. Always seek advice from the learned and wise concerning the reformation of the people. Your subjects are divided into different classes; some of them are soldiers who fight for God, some are Qadis, some are non-Muslims who pay Jizya, some of them are businessmen, some are craftsmen and artisans, while a few are beggars. Remember that God has fixed a share for each of them.

The soldiers serve as a fort for the subjects. They are the ornaments of the rulers, protecting religion, and maintaining peace. Take good care of them as you take care of your children. Love them and treat them kindly.

When appointing Qadis, select holy and pious persons for the post. They should neither be greedy nor make errors in their judgements. In no way should they deviate from the truth deliberately. They should not become arrogant when flattered. But alas, such persons are few. Supervise your officials who should be appointed on merit and merit alone. Appoint the officials from those families who accepted Islam the earliest for those are the people who attach more importance to the next world than to this. Give them

handsome pay so that they may not be beguiled into monetary temptations. Have a good system of spies to observe their activities. And should any of these officials be found guilty of bribery, misappropriation of government funds, or any similar offense, punish him immediately. Such officials should be suspended, disgraced and dismissed. In the imposition of taxes you should see that the people are taxed according to their capacity. Try to populate those towns and places which are thinly populated. In the case of famine, failure of crops or the incidence of any other such calamity, you should remit taxes. Remission of taxes at such junctures mitigates the sufferings of the people. Such philanthropic measures will endear you to the people who will stand by you through thick and thin. Should the condition of farmers be poor, the cultivation of the land is bound to deteriorate. Should the ruler be greedy, the farmers are bound to be reduced to poverty.

Strictly supervise the work of your record keepers, who should be appointed from amongst those who are scrupulously honest, and are humble. In no case should they be negligent in the discharge of their duty, and they should carry out your orders implicitly. Enjoin the businessmen and the industrialists to be honest and kind. They are the men who increase the wealth of a nation. Of peaceful nature, they are great benefactors of the people. Extend your protection to them and encourage them to develop trade and commerce. The prices must be reasonable, and they should not be allowed to make exorbitant profits. Their weight must be correct, and the accounts kept by them should not be false. Defaulters who set such orders at naught should be punished.

Be kind towards the poor and the destitute. Fear God and help them. They need your attention and you should not neglect them because of your other official duties and activities. Show mercy to the aged and the orphans, who have no means of subsistence. Show them your generosity. Above all be humble and benevolent. When you give anything to them give it cheerfully with a smiling face. Address them kindly and do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today. Fear God and observe prayers, which should be perfect and not defective in any way. Do not be isolated from your subjects, and do not stay away from them for a long time, for if you do so, your officials will oppress the subjects. Sometimes an official may adopt unscrupulous and crooked means for self-aggrandizement. Avoid such men and do not show any favors to them. Do not show any nepotism to your relatives, and do not bestow any land on them. Be just in your dealings with everyone. If any relation of yours commits an offense, you should punish him according to the laws of God. Under no circumstances you should spare him and show him any mercy.

Should your subjects rebel against you because of your strict disciplinary measures, you should explain to them fully the critical situation, which has necessitated your adopting such measures, and try to win them over. You should always try to make peace with your enemies for peace brings happiness and prosperity. Even after the conclusion of peace, be watchful of your enemies for they are sometimes apt to deceive you. You must keep your promise to your enemy at any cost. Never violate the terms of a treaty. Neither break your promise with your enemy nor try to deceive him. Avoid bloodshed. Never kill anyone without sufficient cause. Verily on the Day of Judgment God will punish those who have shed the blood of others unnecessarily. Never consolidate your position by putting men to the sword unnecessarily and unlawfully, for it is bound to weaken the kingdom. Never take pride in your high rank. Treat the subjects kindly and you must act according to whatever promises you have made. Do the right thing at the right time in the right way. Should the people be unanimous about a particular course of action, never thrust your opinion on them. Never lose your temper and try to keep your passions under control. Always remember God and try to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). Follow these instructions faithfully and sincerely."

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