



# The effects of thinking and reasoning on Islamic life style

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**Abstract:** Life style is a modern term used to indicate a particular way of living. The aim of this paper is to establish the fact that Islam has provided man with comprehensive and complete instructions for all dimensions of his life since 1400 years ago. Using these instructions could guarantee the redemption of man. In this research, it has been tried to document thinking and reasoning as the most essential bases of Islamic life style according to Imam Ali's words in *Nahjul-Balagha* and to elaborate on the impediments to Islamic life style and instances of its performance, which has not been researched before. The findings show that it is possible to infer the best and most comprehensive ways of life style by the careful examination of the Holy Quran and the words of the Holy Prophet and his family members (Ahl-al-Beit).

**Keyword:** Life Style; Islamic Life Style; Nahjul-Balagha; Thinking; Reasoning

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Life style

Life style is a term which describes the way and kind of living. *Sabk* (style) is an Arabic word which means to melt gold and silver and pour them in a mold and the word *sabike* means a piece of molten gold or silver (Ibn Manzour, p.438; Ibn Fares, p.129). In Persian, it means a particular way, approach, or mode which is used by artists to express their feelings and perceptions (Moin, p. 617). This meaning of the word has been expanded to mean way and approach, which is used as the equivalence of life style in English.

Today, researchers believe that life style means human behaviors. This definition has replaced its traditional meaning and includes the behavior of every individual or society originating from their beliefs, insights, culture, and conventions (Faāli, 1393/2013).

In fact, it can be stated that every behavior emitted from an individual is the representative of his or her worldviews, beliefs, insights, thinking styles, and impressions of life. A person's foundations of thought can even be recognized from his parlance, eating habits, hobbies and entertainments, leisure, clothing and make-up, and manners and behaviors. Sometimes, a person's manners are under the influence of the society's culture and customs or choices and the available references in the society. Or they may originate in family, environment, or come from peers and other like-minded people rather than being taken from ideological and spiritual sources. For example, customs and conventions of marriage in different societies, clothing of particular communities or cities, naming a child, different dishes, or a particular culture are all influential in a society. Other examples could be using social media (television, radio, internet, mobile phones, social networks, etc), parlance (truthfulness or lying, pride or modesty, politeness or impoliteness and rudeness), seriousness in interacting with others, observing the rules and the rights of others or breaking them, etc. In addition, the behavior of a person sometimes refers to his own choice and recognition, which may be considered typical or atypical in a society or family.

Overall, it can be concluded that life style has its roots in the beliefs, worldviews, attitudes, purposes (or lack of them), thinking foundations, and cultural outlooks. The important role of religion and religious beliefs emerges at this point. It can be contended that even the basis of ordinary behaviors like shaking

hands, neatness in appearance, paying attention to the cleanliness of one's living environment, and choosing one's clothing originate from the person's intellectual principles and belief system.

A number of people, who are not rare these days, base their life styles on imitating other people's behavior and perceive others' life styles as the best. This kind of life style is unstable because these people do not have stable beliefs or cannot decide about or manage their lives thoughtfully and mostly have uncertain beliefs and ideologies. These people are usually under the influence of temporary behaviors which are mostly taken from western culture. They attribute this style of living to being open-mindedness; however, the fact is that they do not think about anything even the mode of their clothing.

Sometimes, the customs and conventions of a society or community are part of the internal layers of life style, which are evaluated by some people based on their belief and thought systems and if they are in contrast with their religious beliefs, they do not perform them. On the other hand, for some other members of the society, customs and cultural or tribal traditions are the priority and obeying the orders of their religion is secondary, or they think that religion must only be used in rituals like saying prayers or fasting. As a result, they face a paradox in choosing their life style.

Some points need to be clarified about Islamic life style:

- The basis of the Islamic life style is behavior; however, paying attention to the heart of the behavior is as important. Thought and worldview have important effects on choosing a life style. The nature and spirit of behavior are rooted in religious beliefs like monotheism and resurrection.
- According to Islamic moralities, the purification of people's spirit and heart is important and all moral commands are for the purpose of the spirit's promotion and development. The representation of this purification emerges in the form of behavior.
- The Islamic life style can be deduced from narrations about morality and Islamic conventions directly or indirectly.
- Life style can also be deduced from culture and conventions; however, it should be evaluated based on wisdom and religion.

Therefore, Islamic life style can be extracted from both belief systems as foundations and moral commands as ways of living correctly. They can also be extracted from Islamic rules and jurisprudence as religious duties. They can also be induced from conventions and customs; however, in the Islamic life style, the foundation of life style is on Islamic rules.

## 1.2 Thinking and reasoning

Literally, *Tafakor* (thinking) means using your heart in doing something or the involvement of heart in performing a matter (Ibn Fares, p. 446). It has also been assimilated to a light which guides human beings from the darkness of ignorance (Ghazāli, p. 59). *Taaqol* (reasoning) means purposeful thinking with an adjustment to the rules, or in better words, with the adjustment of rules whose validity has been proved with them (Jafari, 1384/2005, p. 222). The word *lab* (/læb/) means pure wisdom and deep thinking. God has emphatically ordered to the empowerment of wisdom. Therefore, in those verses in Quran in which the term *lab* has been used, the purpose is to encourage and persuade for thinking and reasoning (Jafari, 1383/2004, p. 84).

## 1.3 Nahjul-Balagha

Nahjul-Balagha is a precious book full of different ideological, moral, scientific, and political issues, which are stated by the first believer to the Holy Prophet Mohammad and his successor.

This book has been named as the brother of Quran and its follower and no book has gained such credibility, thoroughness, and precedence (Khamenei, 1388/2009). This valuable book has three important features: comprehensiveness, immortality, and realism, which are similar to those of Quran (Makarem Shirazi, 1388/2009).

## **2. The influence of thinking and reasoning on the choice of life style**

The base of choosing a happy life as the reason for seeking perfection and development and enjoying one's life is related to man's thinking and reasoning. The impressions that a person gains about life and purposefulness as well as choosing a particular life style are related to his thinking and reasoning too.

### **2.1 The importance and status of thinking and reasoning**

Thinking has been greatly emphasized in Islam. The Verses related to the necessity of thinking for an aware human being who is seeking a wise living are 17 cases (Jafari, 1389/2010). These include monotheism in life and purposefulness, understanding the world's facts, choosing the best life style, high understanding of life and moral and educative development (Al-Imran Surat, Verses 191-192). According to Nahjul-Balagha, the power of thinking and reasoning is God's bestowment to human beings in order for them to pass through stages of doubt and reach to the best destination (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 68). Purified hearts and consciences, receptive ears, serious thoughts and prudent wisdoms can accept eloquent examples and curing advices which will heal their deviations and inner illnesses (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbe* (Sermon) 68). A perceptive and knowledgeable man takes lessons from all things around him and takes advantage from them with thought and speculation Nahjul-Balagha, Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 103, 105, 153).

According to Imam Ali (pbuh), thought and wisdom are regarded as the best properties (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 113), the best kinds of satiety (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 38 & 54), means of rescue (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 407), bright mirrors (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 5), the kinds of best science (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 113) and kinds of God's worship. Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 22). Wisdom is God's prophet and pectoral argument for the guidance of that kind of man who has a clean and purified inside and is not polluted with impurities and dirt or is not under the influence of the accusing soul (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 421). Imam Ali (pbuh), in replying a question about who a wise person is, asserted that, "a wise person is one who can do everything in its place" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 235). Real wisdom is that which is not after temptations and desires. In other words, the most important sign of ignorance is following temptations (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 424). People who lack wisdom live like animals and their behaviors and deeds are against sound judgment. The result of this situation is barbarity and fanaticism (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 83).

God has bestowed thinking power to man to use in different issues before performing any behavior, choose the best way and not to deviate, learn lessons from the lives of ancients and think about their states and impacts, think about the world and its changes, think about life and its changes and how to use its opportunities his lifetime, speculate about God's blessings and how to take advantage from them, and think about death, resurrection, and the destiny of man (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 83).

### **2.2. Instances of thinking and reasoning**

Sometimes man cannot solve the problems of his life by himself, but rather needs to benefit from others' thoughts.

#### **2.2.1. Benefiting from others' experiences**

According to Islam, obstinacy and dictatorship are unpleasant features. On the other hand, benefiting from others' experiences is highly encouraged and recommended. The best benefit that could be taken from the wise and elderly is using their experiences (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 86). Gaining experience is important in organizing our mundane and material lives; a wise person uses this opportunity (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 31) and utilizes self and others' experiences in his life. A miserable person is one who cannot benefit from such an opportunity (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 78). Utilizing others' experiences is in fact sharing in their righteous thoughts and ideas. A wise person does not ignore such an opportunity in life because life is not long enough to let trial and error in everything and repeating others' mistakes to reach the best conclusion Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 31). According to this statement by Imam Ali, experimenting from others' destinies is in fact benefiting from the outcomes of their lives. It is like having a lifespan as long as others' lives but with the difference that one does not repeat their differences. As a result, one of the successes in a person's life is benefitting from the experiences of wise people, which

eventually leads to correct thinking (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 211). A wise person is one who utilizes the experience of another person who has crossed a path and is familiar with its ups and downs.

### 2.2.2. Taking lessons

One of the effects of thinking and speculation in life is taking lessons from different events in others' and one's lives. This has been recommended and encouraged in Quran and Hadith Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 103). A wise person takes lessons from others' failures, problems, and difficulties and uses his power of thinking to speculate about their reasons and effects. Imam Ali (pbuh) in a letter to his son, asserts that the reason for studying the states and destinies of the past people is taking lessons from them (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 31). A wise man ignores the appearance of the things and reaches to their heart. He does not pay attention to the external layer or apparent reasons of issues, but rather analyzes them and examines all their dimensions and aspects and is finally able to take lessons from them and utilize them in his life (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 199).

In his letter to Hares Hamedani, Imam Ali (pbuh) advises him to "take lessons from the past for future, because some of these events are similar to each other and their ends join the beginning of others and all of them are temporary and unstable" (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 69). In the words of Imam Ali, it has been recommended to take lessons from the destiny of others and to think about divine revelations, destiny of the past and God's worship and prayer. "O servants of God, learn from beneficial lessons and obvious divine revelations and accept the forbiddance of deviations by observing complete and eloquent threats and take advantage from God's prayer and from preachments" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 85).

Another example is taking lessons from others who have experienced a way before. Imam Ali asserts, "Learn from those who passed away before those who are coming in future learn lessons from you" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 32). Accepting the advice of true advisors and benefiting from their experiences will lead to intellectual development and insight in life. A wise person should take the full advantage from such trophies and exit from ignorance (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 153).

### 2.2.3. Providence

One of the instances of correct thinking which is effective in choosing the life style is to have a correct understanding of the purpose of life. This purpose has been verified by theology and philosophy; however, the nature of this purpose and its dimensions can be understood by the heart's perception (Jafari, p. 743). A wise man understands the purpose of life judicially and plans for it (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 154). His redemption is due to prudence and careful organization which are possible through the correct use of thinking (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 48). Man understands realities by thinking and reasoning and, therefore, stays safe from simple or multiplex ignorance and can see the end of everything clearly (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 48). He looks at everything tactfully and wisely and, as a result, will not deviate in life (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 281).

### 2.2.4. Consulting with the wise and experts

In Islamic life style, obstinacy and dictatorship in thinking and practicing are reprehended. Wise people consult with experts and the experienced in their important decisions. Imam Ali contends that, "A person who uses others' ideas and opinions is able to understand cases of mistake and error" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 173) and is able to avoid those mistakes and errors. "Counseling is the best support and backer of humans" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 54) and causes them to gain more self-confidence and mental power and to find the appropriate solution. The end of obstinacy is failure and confusion in life and the end of counseling is sharing in others' wisdom. "Everyone who chose obstinacy perished and everyone who consulted with others shared their wisdom" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 161). Therefore, counseling is exactly the same as seeking guidance to the correct way and obstinacy is the same as seeking danger and embarrassment. Imam Ali asserts that, "Everyone who felt independent by relying only on his own ideas endangered himself" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 211).

Meanwhile, it should be noted that some people are not qualified enough to be consulted with, and even consulting with them would lead to the reverse conclusion. One should avoid consulting with those who are not sane mentally and ideologically. For example, counseling with mean people distances man from God's blessing and mercy and creates fear of poverty in him. Or counseling cowards causes fear and

conservation in doing things and counseling greedy people causes man to become greedy himself (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 53).

### **2.3. Impediments to correct thinking and reasoning**

#### **2.3.1. Persistence on doubt and uncertainty**

One of the mental problems regarding man's moral and ideological principles and foundations which are important in choosing life style is doubt. A person who doubts rationalities suffers from quarrel, fear, and disequilibrium and will become doubtful in recognizing and choosing the correct way of living (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 31). Quarrelling, fear, doubt and passivity which are the results of incorrect thinking are all harmful in choosing the correct life style (Ravandi, p. 65).

#### **2.3.2. Prejudice**

Another important impediment to correct thinking and reasoning is prejudice or bias. Prejudice means showing favoritism or animosity toward a person, group or issue without any reason or more than normal (Dehkhoda, 1376/1997, pp. 5963-5964). Satan was the first who established incorrect prejudice; therefore, Imam Ali regards prejudiced people as the followers of Satan. Imam Ali states that, "All angels prostrated except for Satan who was prohibited by his prejudice and prided himself on his origin of creation (which was from fire) over Man. Satan who is God's enemy and has been the leader of all bigots and the pioneer of all the arrogant, established the basis of prejudice and contested God's almightiness. He wore a fake dress of dignity and took off the garment of modesty and God's servitude (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 192). Imam Ali continues, "Extinguish the fires of prejudice and ignorance animosities which are buried in your hearts, because prejudice in a Muslim originates from devil's temptations, arrogance and suggestion (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 192).

#### **2.3.3. Obeying incorrect passions**

Obeying passions and desires which are not adjusted to human wisdom is another important harm to sound thinking and choosing the correct life style. Imam Ali states that, "How many are cases where wisdom is captured by passion" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 211). "Wisdom is like a sharp sword for the tempting soul, therefore ... kill your temptations and passions with wisdom" (Feiz-Al Islam, 1368/1989, p. 1285).

Imam Ali prohibits man from obeying passions and having unattainable wishes and expectations because their first harm is to thinking and reasoning. As man is unable to reach all those expectations and passions in his short lifespan, he will become desperate and hopeless about his destiny too (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 42). Imam Ali says, "O people, my strongest fear for you is about two things: the first is obeying your passions and the second is unattainable wishes; but the former stops you from benefiting from God and the latter causes you to forget the Resurrection Day" Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbe* 42).

#### **2.3.4. Poverty**

Poverty causes deficiencies in religion, reductions in wisdom and works as a motive for animosity and hatred. Imam Ali says, "O my son, I am fearful about your poverty [which may cause you to beg things greedily from people and not to be contended with what God has given to you]. So appeal to God from its badness as poverty is a kind of deficiency and failure in religion [because it may lead you to betrayal, untruthfulness, abasement, and not defending the right, all of them are deficiencies in religion] and it is a confusion in wisdom [because the impatient poor loses the right way and his wisdom becomes confused and wandered] and it causes animosity [because people hate the helpless and avoid them] and it causes God to become their enemy due to their dishonest deeds like betrayal and lying and deprive them from His mercy, or they become the enemies of people and hate friend and foe due to jealousy and envy" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 319; Feiz-Al Islam, 1368/1989, p. 1338).

#### **2.3.5. Vicious manners and immortalities**

Vicious manners and immortalities are other harms to correct thinking. For example, egoism and vanity are, according to Imam Ali, the blights of wisdom and against honesty (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 31).

Furthermore, greed and covetousness are the most important reason of the failure and mistakes of thoughts (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 219).

### **2.3.6. Friendship with the fool and the weak-minded**

Imam Ali says, “Avoid the companies of those who have a weak and unstable will or who commit mortalities, because one becomes similar to his friend [so he is assimilated to his friends by people]” (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 69).

## **3. Instances of utilizing thinking and reasoning in life**

### **3.1. Being polite**

Jocularity and joking refreshes body and soul and is not forbidden in Islam; however, politeness necessitates that the conditions of joking with others be observed and this is the sign of mental maturity and intellectual development in a person. For example, time and place conditions, personal modes, age, gender, etc. Imam Ali says, “With any joke that a person makes, he loses part of his wisdom” (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 450). This emphasizes extravagance in joking, otherwise, jesting in a balanced way not only is not regarded as something unpleasant but the religious leaders and saints did it themselves (Makarem Shirazi, 1382/2003).

### **3.2. Managing life choirs and time**

One of the signs of a faithful and wise person is that he is able to use his time and has a planned organization for his life. Imam Ali asserts that, “a faithful man divides his life into three parts: part is devoted to worshiping God, the second is devoted to affording his life, and the third part is used for enjoying God’s legitimate (*Hala*) and pleasant blessings. It is not correct that a wise person spends his life except in these three ways: to correct the problems of life, to work for the other world’s living, and to enjoy from legitimate joys” (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 390).

### **3.3. Keeping your secrets**

A person who is wise and understands different situations of life does not reveal his secrets to others. A prudent person is successful in life and safe from different mental, personal, family and social problems. “Success is due to expedience and caution in life, which are the basis of thinking, and sound thinking needs attention and lookout (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 48).

### **3.4. Speaking calculatingly and carefully**

One of the ways to identify the mental and psychical features of people and their levels of wisdom and understanding is their parlance or way of speaking. Imam Ali asserts that, “man is hidden under his tongue” (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 140) and that “the speech and speaking of every person shows his wisdom and thinking style; nobody can hide something in his heart unless his speech and facial expressions reveal it” (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 26). A virtuous person speaks based on correct thinking (Nahjul-Balagha, *Khotbeh* 211). A wise man measures his speech first and then speaks, but the fool speaks first and then thinks about it (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 40). The words of the sage and the wise, if correct, are the cure of ignorance and foolishness (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 265). And finally, reticence is a sign of wisdom and thinking. “When wisdom becomes complete, speech decreases” (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 71).

### **3.5. Accepting advice**

A right-minded and wise person learns lessons and tries to acquire more experience permanently. He should not hesitate to accept others’ advices. Imam Ali says, “Learn lessons from affairs or from the changes in the blessings and use the time’s warnings (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 157). The difference between man and animal is that man thinks and speculates and learns from the world affairs, but animals only know fear. Imam Ali says, “Don’t be amongst those who do not learn from lessons except when you persist in their reproaching, because wise people learn their lessons from advice but animals learn from biting” (Nahjul-Balagha, Letter 31).

### 3.6. Restraining anger

Humans' thinking power does not work while they are angry and whatever the person does or says may brings about regret later. "Bad temper is a kind of insanity because a bad-tempered person regrets what he has done and if there is no regret, then his insanity is proven" (Nahjul-Balagha, *Hekmat* 247).

### CONCLUSION

1. Life style is the same as the kind of human behavior, which is formed based on his worldviews, cultures, and thinking styles.
2. A man's thinking style and speculation is influential in choosing his life style.
3. In Quran and the words of the leaders of Islam, thinking has been emphasized greatly. Similarly, in Nahjul-Balagha, there are a lot of sentences by Imam Ali, which emphasize the importance of thinking and reasoning.
4. According to Imam Ali, outcomes like having irrational doubts, being prejudiced, following passions, committing immoralities, and friendship with fools are all referred to as the impediments of correct thinking and reasoning.
5. Observing politeness and courtesy, managing one's time, keeping one's secrets, speaking calculatingly, accepting advice and conquering and restraining anger are instances of using wisdom in the Islamic life style.

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