



## The Literary Study of the Concept “The World” in Nahj al-Balaghah

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### ABSTRACT

Nahj al-Balaghah, as the most significant source after the Holy Qur’ān, has attracted human thought and provided direction in the realm of science. It is replete with rich literary topics that offer a conducive environment for research. Despite the extensive research conducted on Nahj al-Balaghah from various perspectives, less attention has been paid to specific topics within this valuable book. Considering the endless knowledge and artistry of the speaker of this book, and given the special place literature holds among Arabic speakers, Imam Ali (AS) has employed numerous literary beauties to introduce the world’s main identity. This paper attempts to analyze Imam Ali (AS)’s precise and insightful view of the world, which demonstrates robust thinking and can be examined from the aspects of form and content using a descriptive-analytical method. One of the findings of this research is that Amir al-Mu’minin Ali (A.S.) speaks according to the audience’s needs to reveal the world’s true face. Most of his words about the world are related to his sermons, where his physical presence and face-to-face interaction are more impactful.

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## 1. Introduction

Nahj al-Balaghah<sup>1</sup>, following the Holy Qur'ān, is not only a pathway to eloquence and rhetoric but also a source of profound interpretations and insights in every word of Imam Ali (AS). To fully comprehend these, one would need to spend years delving into the depth of his words. Speech loses its authority in front of Imam Ali (AS), and words bow before his greatness. No one can adequately describe Imam Ali (AS) as they should; perhaps only his words, illuminated by God's word, can do justice. These words elevate the creature from the realm of humanity to the pinnacle of humanity. It is impossible to truly know him, and no one can comprehend this infinite existence except God and His Prophet. To know him, it is sufficient to immerse oneself in the light of a spark of true love between God and Ali, these two lovers and beloved. We must become entirely receptive, benefiting from the gift of humanity, and take a sip from the sea of infinite mercy that flows from the height of linguistic unity onto the pure soul of the most excellent creature of the Creator. We drink as much as we are thirsty until a drop falls on our soul, and we come alive, soar, and reach perfection.

One of the distinguishing features of religious texts, including Nahj al-Balaghah, is their multi-layered nature. These texts employ literary techniques on a relatively wide scale, which, while adding beauty to speech, transform abstract and intangible concepts into tangible ones in an artistic and wise manner. One of the significant issues addressed by Hazrat Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) is the concept of the world. The exploration and examination of his words serve as a model and guide in theology, ultimately leading to anthropology and theology without a doubt.

Nahj al-Balaghah, due to its literary and religious richness, offers a wide array of topics suitable for research. This comprehensive book has been examined from various angles, primarily focusing on understanding its words, moral and religious concepts. The topics within Nahj al-Balaghah are diverse, meticulously organized, and each contains numerous discussions. Alongside its moral and religious messages, this extensive work serves as a complete encyclopedia, addressing issues that render a person self-sufficient and offering a pathway to mastering rhetoric. "The world" is a recurring theme in Nahj al-Balaghah, with Imam Ali (AS) addressing it in his sermons, letters, and aphorisms approximately 361 times (Mohammadi, 1985, pp. 555-560).

The primary research question centers on how the term "the world" is portrayed in the words of Imam Ali (AS). Additionally, secondary questions have been explored, such as the multiple dimensions present in Amir al-Mu'minin Ali's (AS) discussions about the world and how a conceptual analysis of literary arrays can lead to a deeper understanding of the world. To address these inquiries, a descriptive-analytical approach has been employed, relying on document study and information analysis using statistical methods.

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<sup>1</sup> Nahj al-Balagha, meaning 'the path of eloquence', is a compilation of sermons, letters, and sayings attributed to Ali, compiled by Sharif al-Radi (d. 1015), a prominent Twelver scholar in the eleventh century. The authenticity of Nahj al-balagha has been the subject of polemical debate due to its sometimes-sensitive content. However, recent academic research, by tracking its content in earlier sources, has attributed most of Nahj al-balagha to Ali. The book delves into detailed discussions about social responsibilities, emphasizing that greater responsibilities result in greater rights. It also contains sensitive material, including sharp criticism of Ali's predecessors in its Shaqshaqiya sermon, and disapproval of Aisha, Talha, and Zubayr, who had revolted against Ali (Shah-Kazemi, 2019, p. 227).

## 2. Background

So far, numerous studies have been carried out on Nahj al-Balagheh, some of which are mentioned. Bahrami (2000) in an article entitled “Ali (A.S.) and the Anthropology of the Qur’ān” explores the Imam’s anthropological perspectives and their compatibility with the teachings of the Qur’ān. The article categorizes anthropology into four main branches: *physical anthropology*, *linguistic anthropology*, *cultural anthropology* and *archaeology* and *linguistic anthropology*. Focusing on the branch of anthroposophy, or human nature, the article examines Imam Ali’s viewpoint and compares it with the perspectives of Western psychologists. The author highlights the convergence between Imam Ali’s teachings and the Qur’ānic understanding of human nature.

Mousavi Garmaroudi (2010) explores the anthropological teachings of Imam Ali (A.S.) in an article titled “The Truth of Man and Humanity in Nahj al-Balaghah”. This article examines the significance of values and the struggle against the influence of Satan in shaping human nature, as expounded in Nahj al-Balaghah. Garmaroudi argues that Satan plays a crucial role in corrupting the human soul, while prophets serve as guides to liberation from its influence and the attainment of spiritual well-being. The article highlights the importance of recognizing the devil's machinations and seeking guidance from divine messengers to ensure the preservation of human truth and the flourishing of the soul.

In his article “Ethical Policy or Ethics of Politics in Nahj al-Balagheh: Possibility or Refusal” Fathi (2021) explores his political perspectives and stance on the subject. The research findings reveal that within the realm of governance, the fundamental tenets of moral policy in the Alawite government encompass justice, freedom, rights, and legalism. Imam Ali (A.S.) delves into this matter in Nahj al-Balaghah from a sociological standpoint.

Based on the significant research conducted, the exploration of the world through a literary lens emerges as a novel area of study. The necessity for this research stems from the statistical analysis of the Imam's discourse on the world, highlighting his distinct focus on this subject. By emulating his approach to engaging with and dissecting the world, one can gain insights into the actions and stance of the Imam. Consequently, the central theme of this research revolves around examining and assessing the world through the Imam's words.

## 3. Method

This research delves into the intriguing perspective of Imam Ali (AS) on the world, meticulously explored within the renowned text, Nahj al-Balaghah. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the study aims to illuminate not only what Imam Ali (AS) says about the world, but also how he expresses it. The analysis unfolds in two dimensions: form and content. Examining the form, the study scrutinizes the literary devices and stylistic elements employed by Imam Ali (AS). This unveils how he crafted his message, utilizing metaphors, similes, and other artistic tools to paint a vivid picture of the world's nature. Delving into the content, the analysis decodes the deeper meaning and interpretations embedded within Imam Ali's (AS) words. This reveals his profound understanding of the world's complexities, encompassing its transient nature, its potential for deception, and ultimately, its role in our spiritual journey.

## 4. Data Analysis

Despite the extensive research on Nahj al-Balaghah, there is still significant debate surrounding specific topics. In this paper, the authors will examine the concept of the “world” as described by Amir al-Muminin in Nahj al-Balaghah, a work renowned for its eloquence and rhetoric. The examination will focus on both the form and content of this concept.

### 4.1. Shape and form

#### 4.1.1. Implication of Vocabularies

When it comes to the eloquence and profound content of Nahj al-Balaghah, imagine it as a vast and crystal-clear sea where even the most skilled diver cannot fathom its depths. The Imam’s unique perspective on various issues elevates his words to a level of clarity and stability. Three critical points regarding the implicit meanings of his words are worth noting: Firstly, the Imam’s insightful and deliberate selection of words reflects a cohesive and interconnected stream of powerful ideas. Each word is intricately linked to the others, resulting in profound and captivating interpretations that unveil the limitless reservoir of the Imam’s knowledge in every discourse. Secondly, the Imam tailors his vocabulary to suit the subject matter at hand. When addressing themes such as suffering, worldly attachments, or estrangement from humanity, he employs sharp and cautionary words. In essence, the Imam establishes both a conceptual and logical coherence in his choice of words, ensuring a meaningful and impactful expression of his thoughts. Imam (AS) says in sermon 32:

O people! In your eyes, the forbidden world should be more worthless than the dry straw and scissored scum of ranchers.” (Dashti, 2002, p. 85) who uses vocabularies such as “smaller”, “The bark of acacia” and “The clippings of wool” to show the world as worthless. “The forbidden world is very deceptive and very harmful. It is changeable and unstable, perishable and deadly and a criminal killer, and when it falls into the hand of aspirants and conform to their requests, they see that it is nothing more than a mirage (Dashti, 2002, p. 213).

The words “deceitful”, “harmful”, “perishable”, “changing”, “exhaustible”, “liable to destruction”, “eating away” and “destructive” bring the Imam (AS) to his purpose in the speech.

When Imam Ali (AS) discusses themes of mercy and blessings, he adorns his speech with gentle and soothing tones akin to a tranquil melody. In Sermon 91, when describing the earth’s beauty, he eloquently expresses:

Earth has invited everyone to joy and happiness through beautiful gardens, and with the thin dress of petals that it wore, it surprised every viewer; and with the ornaments that it decorated with necklaces of various flowers, it delighted every viewer (Dashti, 2002, p. 169).

Imam (AS) has used words such as “felt pleased”, “gardens”, “blossoms”, “ornaments” and “soft vegetation”.

The third point is that Imam Ali (AS) demonstrates a remarkable finesse in the selection of his words, ensuring that each word finds its rightful place in conveying his message effectively. In Letter 31, he elegantly articulates:

Father who is (shortly) to die, who acknowledges the hardships of times, who has turned away from life, who has submitted himself to the (calamities of) time ..., and is due to depart from them any day; To the son who yearns for what is not to be achieved (Dashti, 2002, p. 519).

Imam Ali (AS) shares his personal encounters with people to raise awareness about contemporary affairs, aiming to discourage attachment to material possessions. While this message is directed towards Imam Hassan (AS), it is meant for all individuals. Being mindful of mankind's rebellious nature, Imam Ali (AS) initiates his discourse with an emotional appeal: "From a mortal father...; To the son...". In this instance, the audience perceives that the speaker carries more experience. Imam Ali (AS) opts for adjectives over verbs like "left behind", "surrendered" and "migrant" which conveys a sense of evidence and certainty. The use of descriptors indicates assurance, unlike verbs that suggest actions without emphasizing certainty. The term "migrant" originates from the cultural context of that era. Imam Ali (AS) selected this term because the Arabs of that time associated "migration" with moving in a group, similar to a caravan journey. Imam Ali (AS) explains that he is among those migrants in the caravan journeying swiftly from the transient world to the eternal one.

#### 4.1.2. Literary description

Nahj al-Balaghah contains exquisite and distinctive descriptions of Ali (AS) that unveil numerous profound insights. The vivid imagery and descriptions crafted by Imam (AS) are rich in imaginative elements that resonate deeply with the soul. Below, we present a selection of examples illustrating the imaginative narratives in Imam Ali's (AS) reflections on the world.

##### 4.1.2.1. Simile and metaphor

A simile serves to highlight the similarity between two entities by equating them in meaning (Al-Taftazani, 2004, p. 187). Its elegance lies in the challenge of grasping, applying, and interpreting it accurately, yielding abundant fruit. Nahj al-Balaghah features numerous compelling similes. Imam (AS) employs striking similes to depict worldly phenomena. For instance, in sermon 52, earthly gains are likened to a mere drop of water that fails to satisfy the parched. Similarly, the fleeting and superficial allure of worldly desires proves insufficient to satiate the hunger for worldliness:

فَلَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْهَا إِلَّا سَمَلَةٌ كَسَمَلَةِ الْإِدَاوَةِ أَوْ جُرْعَةٌ كَجُرْعَةِ الْمَقْلَةِ لَوْ تَمَزَّرَهَا الصَّدْيَانُ لَمْ يَنْتَفِعْ

Consequently, what has remained of it is just like the remaining water in a vessel or a mouthful of water in the measure. If a thirsty person drinks it his thirst is not quenched.

In sermon 63 he says:

فَإِنَّمَا عِنْدَ ذَوِي الْعُقُولِ كَفَى الظِّلِّ بَيْنَا تَرَاهُ سَابِغاً حَتَّى قَلَصَ وَ زَائِداً حَتَّى نَقَصَ

"The world, in the eyes of the wise, is like a shadow that has not expanded, it shortens, and it has not yet increased, it decreases." (Dashti, 2002, p. 113)

Who have likened the world to a shadow in which there is no stability, and have known the point of resemblance of the world and the shadow in its premature destruction. In other words for the intelligent, this world is like a shadow; one moment it is spread out and extended, but soon it shrinks and contracts.

In Sermon 114, it is said that the world is akin to an expert archer, always with a bow at the ready. Its arrows never miss their mark, and the injuries they inflict never heal. These are all symbols of its pain and inevitable demise.

أَنَّ الدَّهْرَ مُوتِرٌ قَوْسَهُ لَا تَخْطِئُ سَهَامَهُ وَ لَا تُؤْسِي جِرَاحَهُ يَرْمِي الْحَيَّ بِالْمَوْتِ وَ الصَّحِيحَ بِالسَّقَمِ وَ النَّاجِيَ بِالْعُطْبِ.

As for destruction, the time has its bow pressed (to readiness) and its dart does not go amiss, its wound does not heal; it afflicts the living with death, the healthy with ailment and the safe with distress.

In Letter 68, Imam (AS) presents the true nature of the world to his listeners. He beautifully likens the world to a snake, which, despite its soft skin, carries lethal venom.

إِنَّمَا مِثْلُ الدُّنْيَا مِثْلُ الْحَيَّةِ، لَيِّنٌ مَسَّهَا، قَاتِلٌ سَتَمَهَا...

The example of the world is like that of a snake which is soft in touch but whose poison is fatal ...

The implication of this metaphor is that if a person perceives the world as a snake, they will not be drawn to its allure and will overlook its sorrow. This is because they understand that there is no permanence in the world, and it devastates its admirer with its deceptive charm. What's noteworthy about the Imam's metaphors regarding the world is that most of the analogies chosen by the Imam effectively steer his audience towards his objective. That is, to portray the world in a negative light and denounce it.

A metaphor is a figure of speech that draws a parallel between its figurative and literal meanings (Al-Taftazani, 2004, p. 247). It involves using a word in a non-literal sense, and it's this figurative interpretation that encourages the audience to decipher the intended meaning. An instance of a metaphor can be found in Imam Ali (AS)'s discourse about the world in Sermon 28:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ وَ آذَنْتْ بِوَدَاعِ

So now, surely this world has turned its back and announced its departure

These words suggest that the world has turned its back, signifying that all current conditions and situations are transient and mutable, with nothing enduring or stable. Therefore, to describe and articulate its altered states, the term 'to turn away' is used metaphorically. Similarly, the word 'farewell' is employed in a metaphorical sense. The analogy here is that just as a person feels sorrow when parting with a friend, they also experience sadness when departing from the world and its pleasures. (Ibn Maytham<sup>1</sup>, vol. 2, p. 42) This is further elaborated in Saying 303:

...لَا يَلَامُ الرَّجُلُ عَلَى حُبِّ أَمِّهِ

<sup>1</sup> . The year is not known

.... none can be blamed for loving the mother

In this statement, two metaphors are employed. 'Man' is used as a metaphor for humanity, and 'Mother' symbolizes the world. The commonality in this metaphor is that just as a child harbors love for his mother, humans too are drawn to the world. In Sermon 83, Imam (AS) likens the world to a rearing horse that lifts its legs, unseats the rider, and ensnares him in its snares:

فإن الدنيا قَمَصَتْ بِأرجْلِها، و قَنَصَتْ بِأحْبِلِها

Then raises and puts down its feet (in joy). It entraps him in its trap.

And in sermon 191, Imam says:

لا تَشْمُوا بَارِقَهَا و لا تَسْمَعُوا نَاطِقَهَا و لا تَجِيبُوا نَاعِقَهَا و لا تَسْتَضِيئُوا بِإِشْرَاقِها

Do not keep your eyes on the shining clouds of the world, do not listen to him who speaks of it, do not respond to him who calls towards it and do not seek light from its glare." A deceitful person is a metaphor for the world.

In the words of Imam (AS), there are several noteworthy aspects of the similes and metaphors used, which include: Beyond adding beauty to the language, similes and metaphors aid in understanding the content and help to imprint the words in the mind. Similes and metaphors are particularly effective in making abstract intellectual and mental concepts concrete and tangible, thereby making the speech or writing more clear, expressive, and engaging. The similes and metaphors used by Imam (AS) are devoid of unnecessary embellishments, superfluous scenes, and irrelevant details, demonstrating their artistic usage. Imam (AS) not only considers the thought processes of his audience but also uses familiar tools and symbols from their daily lives to enhance the impact of his words. For instance, he uses animals like horses and snakes, and tools like arrows and bows, which are familiar to the Arab world

#### 4.1.2.2. Irony

Irony in language refers to a situation where a person says one thing but intends something else. In the field of linguistics, it is defined as a word that carries a meaning different from its original intent. (Al-Taftazani, 2004, p. 257) Imam (AS) also employs irony in his discourse. In certain instances, he metaphorically refers to the world as a 'mortal house'. This can be seen in Sermon 36:

قد طَوَّحَتْ بِكُمْ الدَّارَ

You have come out of your houses" which is the "house" of irony from the world. (Ibn Maytham, vol. 2, p. 91)

And in Sermon 223:

وإنَّ السَّعْدَاءَ بِالدُّنْيَا غَدًا هُمُ الْهَارِيُونَ مِنْهَا الْيَوْمَ

Only those who run away from this world today will tomorrow be virtuous.

The term ‘virtuous’ is used ironically to refer to those who have consciously chosen to disregard worldly pleasures and have refrained from amassing worldly possessions. Another instance of irony can be found in Sermon 111:

... عَقَرْتَهُمُ لِلْمَنَاخِرِ وَوَطَّئْتَهُمُ بِالْمَنَاسِمِ

...Threw them down on their noses, trampled them under hoofs

This ironic statement paints a picture of those engrossed in worldly matters who, instead of finding joy in the world, are met with trials and tribulations. The world humiliates them, grinding their faces into the dirt and trampling over them. Irony serves to pique the audience’s curiosity and lends prominence to Imam’s discourse. The ironies employed by Imam (AS) pivot around themes of love and animosity. For instance, the irony in Sermon 223 instills hope and motivation in the audience, while the phrase ‘Threw them down on their noses’ from Sermon 111 carries a warning, coupled with a sense of chill and discomfort, which is the primary intent of these ironies.

#### 4.1.2.3. Music

One significant factor in engaging and persuading an audience is the sensory connection between sound and words, which lends value to the words. The art of intonation is a skill that an orator masters. In other words, “prose that possesses an aesthetic and artistic quality impacts through rhythm, complemented by its balanced and orderly movements” (Challaye, 1968, p. 55). The eloquence of Imam’s (AS) speech is such that any displacement of words or disruption of the speech’s melody diminishes its beauty and compromises the clarity of his discourse. One of the ways of intonating the words is the use of pun and rhyme, which are abundantly seen in the words of Imam (AS). As an example, Imam (AS) says in sermon 83:

«فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا رَيْقٌ مَشْرُهَا، رَدِغٌ مَشْرُهَا، يُوبِقُ مَنَظَرُهَا وَ يُوبِقُ مَخْبَرُهَا»

“Certainly this world is a dirty watering place and a muddy source of drinking. Its appearance is attractive and its inside is destructive.”

There is a clever play on words between “يُوبِقُ” and “يُوبِقُ”, as well as a rhyme between “مَشْرُهَا” and “مَشْرُهَا”, and “مَنَظَرُهَا” and “مَخْبَرُهَا”. In Hadith 77, which Imam (AS) mentions this

فَعَيْشُكَ قَصِيرٌ وَ خَطَرُكَ يَسِيرٌ وَ أَمَلُكَ خَفِيرٌ

Your life is short, your importance is little and your liking is humble.

There are puns and rhymes between the words “قَصِيرٌ”, “يَسِيرٌ” and “خَفِيرٌ”. It should be noted that in the past centuries, some people claimed that rhyme was not an inherent feature of the Arabic language, but rather a phenomenon that emerged in the fourth century and had no ancient roots. Based on this claim, they regarded the Imam’s rhyming sermons, letters, and aphorisms as fabrications and inventions of the fourth century. In response to this claim, Ibn Abi’l-Hadid says: Some scholars think that rhyme is one of the flaws of speech, and therefore they consider the Imam’s rhyming speech to be corrupted. If rhyme is one of the flaws of speech, then there should not be any rhyme in the speech of God. However, in the verses of the Holy Qur’ān, there are many examples of rhyming verses; and the Holy Qur’ān



was not compiled in the fourth century. It is also important to pay attention to the fact that rhyme is only reprehensible and rejected if it is displeasing to the ears, but if rhyme is beautiful and pleasant, it is commendable and praiseworthy. (Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, 1988, vol. 1, p. 126) 1 Besides the melody of the words, the images and descriptions of the Imam (AS) are also full of color, and the Imam has used the common colors of the early Islam in various ways.

#### 4.1.2.4. Color

In religious symbolism, the color green is often associated with goodness and faith, as noted in Al-Shahir (p. 4). This is also frequently referenced in the Holy Qur'ān, symbolizing life, freshness, vitality, and movement. In verse 99 of Surah Al-An'am, God declares:

...فَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهُ خَضِرًا...

... And with it we bring forth vegetation of all kinds, and out of it we bring forth green stalks ... (Ayati, 1995, p: 76)

And in the description of the heavenly states in verse 31 of Surah Al-Kahf, God says:

...وَيَلْبَسُونَ ثِيَابًا خُضْرًا مِنْ سُنْدُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ...

...They will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade, reclining therein on adorned couches... (Ayati, 1995, p, 170)

The color green is predominantly used in depictions of Imam (AS) from the world. This color has been employed numerous times by Imam (AS) to represent the allure of the world. As stated in sermon 45 by the Imam:

و الدنيا دارٌ مُني لها الفناء و لأهلها منها الجلاء و هي حلوة خضراء و قد عجلت للطالب و التبتت بقلب الناظر

This world is a place for which destruction is ordained and for its inhabitants departure from here is destined. It is sweet and green. It hastens towards its seeker and attaches to the heart of the viewer.

In his interpretation of a particular sentence from sermon 111, Ibn Maytham discusses the words spoken by Imam (AS):

فإني أهدرك الدنيا فإمّا حلوة خضرة

Certainly I frighten you from this world for it is sweet and green.

Much like the human palate finds pleasure in the sweet taste and the human soul is delighted by the color green, the human soul also derives joy from worldly pleasures. Therefore, when one thinks of worldly pleasures, the color green and a sweet taste often come to mind (Ibn Maytham, vol. 3, p: 86).

The color yellow is also utilized in the Holy Qur'ān and in the descriptions of Imam (AS). In the Holy Qur'ān, the color yellow carries two contrasting meanings. At times, it is a color

that brings happiness and joy to its observers, such as in the following from the verse of 69 of Surah Al-Baqarah:

...إِنَّمَا بَقَرَةٌ صَفْرَاءُ فَاقِعٌ لَوْنُهَا تَسُرُّ النَّاظِرِينَ

It is a yellow cow, bright in color and pleasing to the observers

At times, this color is employed in discussions pertaining to hardship, despair, and destruction, as illustrated in the following from the verse of 21 of Surah Az-Zumar

...يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطَامًا...

“Then he produces thereby crops of varying colors; then they dry and you see them turned yellow; then he makes them [scattered] debris.”

In discussions about ‘the world’, Imam Ali (AS) employs the second interpretation of the color yellow. As stated in sermon 89 by the Imam:

الدُّنْيَا كَلِيفَةُ النُّورِ، ظَاهِرَةُ الْغُرُورِ، عَلَى حِينِ اصْفَرَارٍ مِنْ وَرَقِهَا وَإِبَاسٍ مِنْ ثَمَرِهَا

While the world was devoid of brightness, and full of open deceitfulness. Its leaves had turned yellow and there was absence of hope about its fruits

#### 4.1.2.5. Summoning Figures

‘Supplication’ is the art of invoking characters through words, used to express specific models and concepts. Imam Ali (AS) frequently references the Prophet (PBUH) as an exemplar in his discourses, such as in sermon 105, which outlines the characteristics of the Prophet (PBUH). However, when discussing worldly matters, Imam (AS) in Letter 3, uses the titles of figures such as Kisra (the title of the kings of Iran), Caesar (the title of the Roman emperors), Tubba (the title of the governors of Yemen), and Himyar (the title of the kings of southern Arabia). He guides his audience to learn from the fate of oppressive kings (as symbols of worldliness), reminding them of the transience of the material world and urging them to abstain from it. He states:

هَذَا مَا اشْتَرَى عَبْدٌ ذَلِيلٌ مِنْ مَيْتٍ قَدْ أُزْجِحَ لِلرَّحِيلِ، اشْتَرَى مِنْهُ دَارًا مِنْ دَارِ الْغُرُورِ، مِنْ جَانِبِ الْفَانِينَ وَخَطَّةَ الْهَالِكِينَ... فَمَا أَدْرَكَ هَذَا الْمُشْتَرِي فِيمَا تَرَى مِنْهُ مِنْ دَرَكَ فَعَلَى مُبْلَبِلِ أَجْسَامِ الْمُلُوكِ وَ سَالِبِ نَفُوسِ الْجَبَابِرَةِ وَ مُزِيلِ مُلُوكِ الْفِرَاعِنَةِ مِثْلَ كَسْرَى وَ قَيْصَرَ وَ ثُبُعَ وَ حَمِيرَ

This is about a purchase made by a humble slave (of Allah) from another slave ready to depart (for the next world). He has purchased a house out of houses of deceit in the area of mortals and in the neighborhood of mortals... If the buyer encounters some (evil) consequences of this transaction, then it is for the one who dismantles the bodies of monarchs, snatches the lives of despots, and destroys the domain of Pharaohs, like Kisras, Caesars, Tubbas and Himyars.

The preference for using a title over a name is twofold. Firstly, while a name signifies only the essence, a title conveys both the essence and attributes of praise or blame (Ibn Aqil,

2008, vol. 1, p. 120). Secondly, the Arabs were more acquainted with the titles of kings from various nations than with their actual names.

#### 4.1.3. Paradox

The concept of 'breaking the habit' implies that the audience has formed a certain understanding of a topic, and is now confronted with a new perspective or term that creates a paradox, prompting them to reflect and think. The term 'paradox' in Arabic is equivalent to 'Al-Tanaghoz Al-Zaheri' (Wahba, 1984, p. 123). The Oxford dictionary provides several definitions for it, the most significant being: "In rhetoric, a word appears to contradict itself and goes against common understanding, but upon interpretation, it can be understood as a word with a valuable meaning." (Simpson, A, 1989. p: 185) These contradictions seem to oppose each other on the surface, but they are harmonious internally, aligning elements that appear to be opposite and distant. (Ishmael, 1996, p. 161) This artistry can be beautifully observed in the words of Imam Ali (AS). In sermon 83, Imam Ali (AS) provides a description of the world:

أَنْتَ نَافِرُهَا وَاطْمَأَنَّ نَاكِرُهَا

When its despiser begins to like it and he who is not acquainted with it feels satisfied with it

In Sermon 97, Imam Ali (AS) delves into the psychology of those who are enamored with worldly pleasures. This sermon is particularly directed towards the Kufians. He states:

صُمُّ دَوُوْ أَسَاعٍ وَ بُكْمٌ دَوُوْ كَلَامٍ وَ عُمِّي دَوُوْ أَبْصَارٍ

You are deaf in spite of having ears, dumb in spite of speaking, and blind in spite of having eyes.

In Sermon 191, Imam Ali (AS) issues a warning about the allure of the forbidden world and urges withdrawal from it. He introduces the world in the following manner:

... حَالُهَا انْتِفَالٌ، وَ وَطَأُتُهَا زَلْزَالٌ وَ عَرْجُهَا ذَلٌّ وَ جِدُّهَا هَزَلٌّ وَ غُلُوْهَا سَفَلٌ

...its condition is changing, its step shaking, its honour disgrace, its seriousness jest, and its height lowliness."

In Sermon 226, Imam Ali (AS) discusses the state of those who were infatuated with worldly pleasures and are now laid to rest in narrow, dark graves. He says:

أَصْبَحَتْ أَصْوَاتُهُمْ هَامِدَةً وَ رِيَاحُهُمْ رَاكِدَةً وَ...

Their voices have become silent, their movements have become stationary...

In Sermon 111, Imam Ali (AS) elevates this literary discourse to its zenith, aiming to enhance our understanding of the world. He articulates:

... عَيْشُهَا رَيْقٌ وَ عَذَّتْهَا أَجَاجٌ وَ خُلُوها صَبْرٌ وَ غِذَاؤُهَا سِإَمٌ وَ ... وَ عَزِيْزُهَا مَغْلُوبٌ

Its life is dirty, its sweet water is bitter, its sweetness is like myrrh, its foods are poisons and ... and its means are weak.

In this world, those who are alive are susceptible to death; those who are healthy are susceptible to illness. Its dominion can be taken away, and the strong within it can be defeated. In the same sermon, he describes those who have transitioned from the mortal realm to the eternal realm as follows:

جَمِيعٌ وَ هُمْ أَحَادٌ وَ جِيْرَةٌ وَ هُمْ أَبْعَادٌ، مُتَدَانُونَ لَا يَتَرَاوِرُونَ وَ قَرِيبُونَ لَا يَتَقَارِبُونَ

They are together but each one apart. They are neighbors but far from each other. They are close together but do not see each other. They are near but do not meet.

#### 4.1.3. Intertextuality

The term 'Intertextuality' in Arabic is referred to as 'Tanas' (Samir, 2001, p: 74), and in Persian, it is known as 'Binamatni' (Ahmadi, 1991, vol. 1, p: 103). This term signifies the influence of one or more texts on another text, encompassing concepts such as adoption, guarantee, allusion, and suggestion. While 'Binamatni' has been utilized since ancient times, it was not known by this name and term. However, it now holds a special place in literature.

Imam Ali (AS) has employed Intertextuality in various ways. Qur'ānic Intertextualities are more evident in Nahj al-Balaghah. There are statements where the verse is clearly reflected, and there are speeches and writings where the concept of the verse is presented in a pleasing manner. For instance, in Sermon 111, he draws upon verse 45 of 'Al-Kahf':

لَا تَعْدُوا إِذَا تَنَاهَتْ إِلَى أَمْنِيَّةِ أَهْلِ الرِّغْبَةِ فِيهَا وَ الرِّضَاءِ بِهَا أَنْ تَكُونَ كَمَا قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى سُبْحَانَهُ « مَاءٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنْ السَّمَاءِ فَاسْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيَّاحُ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُقْتَدِرًا »

When it reaches the extremity of desires of those who incline towards it and feel happy with it, the position is just what Allah, the Glorified, says (in the Qur'ān)... [Like the water which send we down from heaven, and the herbage of the earth mingles with it, then it becomes dry stubble which the winds scatter; for Allah over all things hath power.]

In another segment of the same sermon, he draws upon verse 104 of 'Al-Anbiya'. He articulates:

قَدْ طَعَنُوا عَنْهَا بِأَعْمَالِهِمْ إِلَى الْحَيَاةِ الدَّائِمَةِ وَ الدَّارِ الْبَاقِيَةِ كَمَا قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى سُبْحَانَهُ « كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ وَعَدًا عَلَيْنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ »

They departed from it with their acts towards the continuing life and everlasting house as Allah has said: . . . [As we caused the first creation, so we will get it return. (It is) a promise binding us, verily we were doing it.]

As another example of Intertextuality in the words of Imam Ali (AS), we can look at this statement from Sermon 99:

... و ما لا يحصى من أعداد نِعَمِهِ و إحسانِهِ

...and for (thanking Him) for His countless bounties and goodness.

These words are reminiscent of the honorable Verse 18 of Surah An-Nahl, which God has said:

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصَوْهُ

And if you should count the favors of Allah, you could not enumerate them

Another example of intertextuality is in Saying 104, where Imam Ali (AS) says:

طُوبَى لِلزَّاهِدِينَ فِي الدُّنْيَا، الرَّاعِينَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ، أُولَئِكَ قَوْمٌ اتَّخَذُوا الْأَرْضَ بَسَاطًا وَ تُرَابَهَا فَرَاشًا وَ مَاءَهَا طِبْيًا

Blessed be those who abstain from this world and are eager for the next one. They are the people who regard this earth as the floor; its dust as their bed-cloth, and its water as their perfume.

The concept of intertextuality in this context is linked to the phrase “its water as their perfume”. This suggests that water is used as a fragrant perfume, an interpretation found in the words of Christ (AS), who said: “My sweet perfume is water and my stew is hunger.” (Mubarak, 2006, p. 46).

Imam Ali (AS) frequently references verses from the Holy Qur’ān. It is apparent that Imam (AS) seeks to interpret these divine words, with his interpretations serving as a form of Qur’ānic exegesis. Furthermore, Imam Ali (AS) substantiates his statements by citing these divine verses. It is important to note that the Qur’ān and Nahj al-Balaghah share a thematic unity. As such, there is no contradiction between them, and they both reflect the same worldview.

## 4.2. Content

### 4.2.1. Manner of Expression

The profound wisdom of Imam Ali (AS) and the beautiful expressions that resonate beyond mere words are derived from a divine and innate nature. This nature is unique to the existence of the Amir al-Mu’minin expression. The innovation he introduces in his speech captivates the audience, serving as a testament to his eloquent discourse, a trait inherited from the Holy Qur’ān. His words are robust and steadfast, accompanied by a beautiful rhythm that enhances the vibrancy of his speech.

#### 4.2.1.1. Good system and freshness of words

The remarkable artistry of Imam (AS) is evident in his speech. While he uses standard language, he also considers the vernacular of the general public. Imam (AS) beautifully integrates Bedouin Arab expressions into his discourse, refining it with Islamic decorum and ensuring a seamless flow. As he states, “The best speech is that which is well arranged and

orderly and is understood by scholars and common people” (Ghurar Al-Hikam, 1992, vol. 2, p. 463). One distinctive feature of Imam Ali’s (AS) speech is its freshness, a result of the proper organization and arrangement of topics. This freshness is apparent in his wonderful interpretations, where he transitions from news to questioning, from surprise to denial. This is exemplified in letter 45, as stated by Imam Ali (AS).

... فَحَبْلَكَ عَلَى غَارِيكَ قَدَانَسَلْتُ مِنْ مَخَالِيكَ وَافْلَتُ مِنْ حَبَائِلِكَ وَاجْتَنَبْتُ الدَّهَابَ فِي مَدَاحِضِكَ. أَيْنَ الْقُرُونُ الَّذِينَ غَرَرْتَهُمْ بِمَدَاعِيكَ؟ أَيْنَ الْأُمَمُ الَّذِينَ فَتَنَهُمْ بِخَارِفِكَ؟ ... أَتَمْتَلِي السَّائِمَةَ مِنْ رَعِيهَا فَتَبْرَكَ؟ ... وَيَأْكُلُ عَلَيٌّ مِنْ زَادِهِ فَيَمِجُّ! قَرَّتْ إِذَا عَيْنُهُ إِذَا اقْتَدَى بَعْدَ السِّنِينَ الْمُتَطَاوِلَةِ بِالْبَهِيمَةِ الْهَامِلَةِ وَالسَّائِمَةِ الْمَرْعِيَةِ.

...Your rein is on your own shoulders as I have released myself from your clutches, removed myself from your snares and avoided walking into your slippery places. Where are those whom you have deceived by your pleasures and enjoyments? Where are those communities whom you have enticed with your embellishments? ... Should Ali eat whatever he has and fall asleep? Like the cattle who fill their stomachs from the pasture land and lie down, or as the goats (who) graze, eat the green grass then go into their pen! His eyes may get blind if he, after long years, follows the ways of loose cattle and pasturing animals.

#### 4.2.1.2. Movement and Dynamics

Without a doubt, Imam’s (AS) discourse is captivating. The power of imagination in Imam’s (AS) words spans a broad spectrum. The most intricate concepts in Imam Ali’s (AS) thoughts take on beautiful forms, shedding their rigidity and stagnation to embrace movement and dynamism. In each passage, the audience encounters a new image, all the while maintaining coherence between words and visuals. What strikes one at first glance is the precision with which Imam (AS) employs imagery to depict the creations of his creator. This not only enhances the beauty of his words but also magnifies the wonder of creation for humans. It’s as if the splendors of creation attain their true beauty through Imam Ali’s words. Imam’s (AS) use of imagery is elegant, vibrant, and dynamic, particularly when he discusses nature and its phenomena as manifestations of divine beauty.

For instance, in sermon 165, the description of the peacock presents beautiful moving, visual, and auditory imagery. As the peacock struts with pride, it admires its beautiful tail and wings (moving image). Observing the beauty of its plumage and the various colors of its feathers, it chuckles. However, when it glances at its feet, it squawks as if it were crying, sounding like a plaintiff (auditory image). The peacock is likened to scattered blossoms, with spring rain and the sun’s heat playing a minimal role in its growth. It’s astonishing that occasionally, it sheds the cover of its beautiful feathers, revealing its body. Its feathers fall one after another, only to regrow. This cycle adds a dynamic element to the peacock’s existence, further enhancing the vividness of Imam’s (AS) description.

#### 4.2.1.3. Stable Logic

Indeed, it is important to note that the power of imagination in Imam’s (AS) words is a gift to the intellect, and this art of conveying meanings is rooted in reality. This reality, along with the logic and strength of the word, is evident in Imam’s speeches. The coherence, harmony, and interconnectedness of his words weave together various discussions, opening new horizons for his audience. A beautiful aspect of these connections is that Imam (AS) has expressed various topics with ultimate stability, strength, and unity. He describes the transformations of the world, the nature of people, and the phenomena of creation with firm

logic. Alongside this, he has established moral and social commands for people and concludes his imaginative imagery with a warning to his audience. This approach underscores the depth and breadth of his discourse, making it a rich source of wisdom and insight. He states in Sermon 32:

أيها الناس! إنا قد أصبحنا في دهرٍ عَنُودٍ و زَمَنِ كَنُودٍ، يُعَدُّ فيه المحسنُ مسيئاً و يَرْدَادُ الظالمُ فيه عُنُوداً، لا نَتَنَفَّعُ بما علمنا و لا نَسْأَلُ عما جهلنا و لا نَتَخَوَّفُ قَارِعَةً حَتَّى تَحُلُّ بنا...فلتكن الدنيا في أعينكم أصغر من خُثَالَةِ القَرظِ و قُرَاضَةِ الجَلَمِ و اتَّعَطُّوا بَمَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ قَبَلًا أَنْ يَتَّعِظَ بِكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمْ و اِرْضَوْهَا دَمِيمَةً فَإِنَّهَا قَدْ رَفَضَتْ مَنْ كَانَ أَشْغَفَ بِهَا مِنْكُمْ.

O' people! We have been borne in such a wrongful and thankless period where in the virtuous is deemed vicious and the oppressor goes on advancing in his excess. We do not make use of what we know and do not discover what we do not know. We do not fear calamity till it befalls... The world in your eyes should be smaller than the bark of acacia and the clippings of wool. Seek instruction from those who preceded you before those who follow you take instruction from you, and keep aloof from it realizing its evil because it cuts off even from those who were more attached to it than you.

#### 4.2.1.4. Truth of the World

In Nahj al-Balaghah, it is emphasized that comprehending the world is of utmost importance. The 'world' as referred to by Imam (AS) in his discourses and writings, can be likened to a coin with two faces. Scholars have the ability to discern both faces, whereas the common folk typically perceive only one. This concept is articulated in Saying 303:

الناسُ أبناءُ الدنيا، و لا يُلامُّ الرجلُ على حُبِّ أُمِّهِ

People are the progeny of the world and none can be blamed for loving the mother.

The world, as created by Imam Ali's beloved (AS), serves as a testament to God's grandeur and singularity. The heavens, the earth, and all that they encompass are signs of His divine presence. God's exquisite visage is reflected in His creations, from the towering mountains and vast seas to the twinkling stars and radiant sun, and even in humans. These marvels originate from Him, and the gift of life along with the world's bounties are bestowed upon humans. This world is but an introduction to the afterlife, a means to attain the ultimate objective and true love. Despite the world's allure, it is not deserving of our affection. As stated in the verse 77 of Surah Al-Qasas:

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنْ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ

Seek the abode of the Hereafter by means of what Allah has given you, while not forgetting your share of this world. Be good [to others] just as Allah has been good to you.

This world, as perceived by Imam Ali (AS), is a blessing from his beloved and serves as the pathway leading us to the beloved. The world is not denounced, but in its description, not even the slightest motion is overlooked. It criticizes those who have detached themselves from the world, stating:

يَا عُدِّيْ نَفْسِيْ! لَقَدْ اسْتَهَامَ بِكَ الْحَبِيْثُ! أَمَا رَجِمْتَ أَهْلَكَ و وَلَدَكَ؟! أَتَرَى اللَّهَ أَحَلَّ لَكَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ و هُوَ يَكْرَهُ أَنْ تَأْخُذَهَا؟! أَنْتَ أَهْوَنُ عَلَى اللَّهِ مِنْ ذَلِكَ!

O' enemy of yourself. Certainly, the evil (Satan) has misguided you. Do you feel no pity for your wife and your children? Do you believe that those things which Allah has made lawful for you, He will dislike you if you use them? You are too unimportant for Allah to do so.

He cherishes phenomena, as all phenomena are reflections of divine beauty. In his view, the virtuous are those who partook in the worldly pleasures with the people of this world, yet the worldly people did not partake with them in the Hereafter. The virtuous resided in the finest houses and savored the finest foods in the world, experiencing the same pleasures that the worldly people had, as mentioned in letter 27:

فشارِكُوا أَهْلَ الدُّنْيَا فِي دُنْيَاهُمْ وَ لَا يُشَارِكُوا أَهْلَ الدُّنْيَا فِي آخِرَتِهِمْ، سَكَنُوا الدُّنْيَا بِأَفْضَلِ مَا سَكِنَتْ وَ أَكَلُوا بِأَفْضَلِ مَا أَكَلَتْ فَحَظُّوا  
مِنَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَا حَظُّوا بِهِ الْمُتَرَفُّونَ.

For they share with the people of this world in their worldly matters while their people did not share with them in the matters of the next. They lived in this world in the best manner of living. They ate the choicest food and enjoyed herein all that the people with ease of life enjoyed.

However, when the world turns into a playground at the mercy of those who worship it, sacrificing human virtues in the process, it becomes an impure Satan that plunges humanity into a pit of despair. In this context, Imam Ali (AS) is likened to a tempestuous ocean and a powerful storm, battling against such a world whose enticing lights gradually dim into oblivion. The world is a contemptible demon that presents itself before Ali (AS) in all its forms. It appears oblivious to the fact that Imam Ali (AS) has renounced the world thrice, leaving no room for reconciliation, as cited in Saying 77:

قَدْ طَلَّقْتُكَ ثَلَاثًا لَا رَجْعَةَ فِيهَا

I have divorced you thrice after which there is no restitution

And here he says in Sermon 42:

كُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ وَ لَا تَكُونُوا مِنْ أَبْنَاءِ الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّ كُلَّ وَلَدٍ سَيَلْحَقُ بِأُمِّهِ (أُمِّهِ) يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

You should become sons of the next world and not become sons of this world because on the Day of Judgement every son would cling to his mother.

Ali (AS) is a mystic deeply in love, who fully recognized the rights of his beloved. 'Walking towards God for the sake of God' is a tenet of Ali's (AS) mysticism. Isn't the essence of love such that the lover's seeker diverts their heart from everyone else, yearns for the beloved, and considers their heart to belong solely to the beloved? In other words, for Ali (AS), the world is a platform for realizing the truth and experiencing God's presence. As the love for truth resides in his heart and he has dedicated himself to it, the world becomes a place of worship, servitude, and spiritual purification. It is in this context that Imam Ali (AS) chooses to distance himself from the world, and with a romantic and mystical fervor, spreads his wings towards his unparalleled beloved and proclaims:

فَرْتُ وَ رَبِّ الْكَعْبَةِ.



I swear to God that I was saved (Mohadathi, p. 465).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Research in Nahj al-Balaghah reveals that Imam Ali (AS) employed numerous literary techniques to depict the world and its identity. He established a coherent and logical system, taking into account the needs of his audience. Through dynamic descriptions, tangible similes, and ironic interpretations, he crafted images that stimulated thought in his audience, thereby setting the stage for message delivery. He imparted cultural concepts and social laws to his audience. By breaking conventions, invoking figures, intertextuality, and the use of music and color, he not only attracted and persuaded his audience but also enhanced the impact and effectiveness of his words. Simultaneously, Imam Ali (AS) was mindful of the form and used words in complete harmony with the context. His descriptions are pleasing and accompanied by imaginative images. Behind each literary word lies a point with the power to persuade the audience. An important observation is that Nahj al-Balaghah is another interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān. Therefore, there is no contradiction between these two books, which share thematic unity. The reason for this is that both books guide and inform the people of the world with the same worldview. The discussions that Imam Ali (AS) initiates about the world can be categorized into four main groups. The following table illustrates the prevalence of these discussions.

Table 1. Frequency of the Term “World” in Nahj al-Balaghah

	Sermon	Letter	Aphorisms	Total
Recognition of the world	92 (25%)	17 (5%)	54 (15%)	163 (45%)
Worldliness	30 (8%)	10 (3%)	19 (5%)	59 (16%)
Aversion to the world	58 (16%)	10 (3%)	18 (5%)	86 (24%)
Way of dealing with the world	33 (9%)	9 (3%)	11 (3%)	53 (15%)
Total	213 (59%)	46 (13%)	102 (28%)	361 (%100)

The majority of discussions in Nahj al-Balaghah about the world pertain to the recognition of the world. This indicates that Imam Ali (AS) directs the audience's attention towards “understanding the world and gaining awareness of it”. Another observation is that the topic of “world recognition” is more prevalent in sermons than in letters and aphorisms. As can be seen, 59% of the discussions about the world are expressed in sermons. This suggests that Imam Ali (AS) verbally communicates the most crucial discussions about the world in a direct and face-to-face manner with the people of his time.

## References

The Holy Qur'ān

Nahj al-Balaghah

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