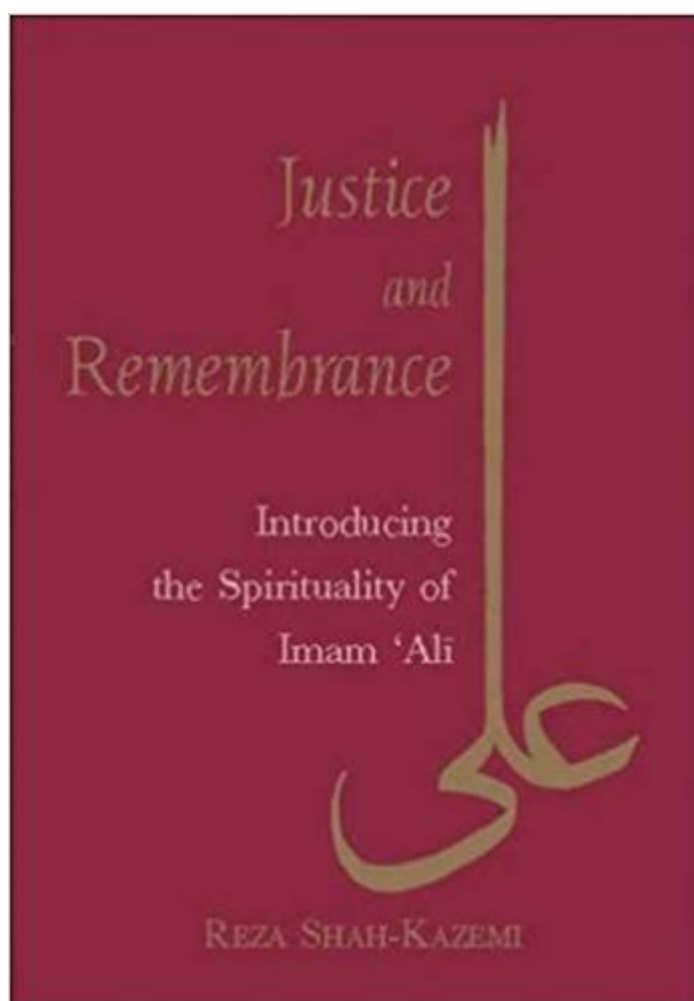


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Justice And Remembrance: Introducing The Spirituality Of Imam Ali



Synopsis

Ali b. Abi Talib, son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, first Shi'i imam and fourth caliph, is a monumental figure within the Islamic tradition. But despite the immense importance of Imam Ali, there is a dearth of literature in Western languages about his life and thought. This book -- the first serious engagement in English with the intellectual principles underpinning his teachings -- is therefore a welcome and valuable addition to the sources available. It consists of three parts. Part one introduces the person of Ali in a general manner, and focuses particularly on the spiritual and ethical content of his teachings. Part two evaluates Ali's "'sacred conception of justice'" Part three addresses the theme of spiritual realization through the remembrance of God, the central mystical practice of the Sufis. Justice and Remembrance will be of great value to students and scholars of Islamic thought, as well as to those interested in the relationship between spirituality and ethics.

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Customer Reviews

"this book is a powerful and refreshing interpretation of Ali's life and thought." --The Muslim News

Reza Shah-Kazemi holds a doctorate in comparative religion from the University of Kent and is currently a Research Associate at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. He is the author of numerous articles and books, which include *Crisis in Chechnya* (1995), *Avicenna: Prince of Physicians* (1997) and an English translation of *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam* (2001) from the Persian text by Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani.

Although this book is not an easy read it is well worth the effort. It explains the Shia concept of justice (putting everything in its proper place) by reviewing a letter written by Imam Ali to his deputy in Egypt. This section should be required reading for everyone in a leadership position. I have yet to read the section on Remembrance(calling God to mind) but I am sure it will be equally uplifting.

One of the best books I have read.

Relevant.

"Justice and Remembrance" is a tripartite study of the spiritual ethos of Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, who represents the elaboration par excellence of the meanings contained in the Qur'an and enshrined in its application in the precedent set by its Messenger. This task is one of tremendous importance for appropriating the roots of religion and understanding the essential doctrines that constitute Islam as such, apart from an Islam which has pinned to it long complicated histories of sectarian and political interests which is of little concern for those serious seekers of Truth. The Imam says: 'People are of three types: a lordly knower ('alim rabbani); one who seeks knowledge (muta'allim) for the sake of deliverance; and the common folk (hamaj ra'a) following just anyone, swaying with every current, not desiring to be illuminated by the light of knowledge, nor seeking refuge from any strong support'. One could see the three dimensions of Islam as corresponding to these three categories of people; Ihsan (spiritual virtue) being the way of the lordly knower, Iman (faith) being the way of the seeker, and Islam (submission) the way of the common folk. The main text under consideration is the Nahj al-Balagha (the Peak of Eloquence), a collection of sermons and doctrinal exposition attributed to Imam 'Ali compiled by Sayyid al-Radi. It is possibly the most important work of classic Arabic literature (the Qur'an, or any Sacred Book, cannot be considered literature) and has been much praised for its unmatched rhetorical style, parables and the eloquence of its expression. The text does have its particularities, but its universal currents are pronounced more strongly, even in the more political sermons. The author Reza Shah-Kazemi focuses his study of the Imam's spiritual ethos on that unmistakable universalism which distinguishes the Imam from those tendencies which reduce Islam to its legal tradition or to sentimental theology. Those particulars have their respective levels of importance, but only in relation to the universal, for Truth is One and simplicity is closer to unity than complexity. The work is divided into three sections: an introduction to the spiritual ethos of the Imam, a detailed study of the Imam's conception of justice ('adl) as the foundational virtue of Man, and the Imam's teaching concerning the remembrance of God (dhikru 'Llah). Words fall short

of describing the profundity of Kazemi's erudition. One is immediately reminded of that intellectual tenor which characterizes those champions of the Sophia Perennis, but it is clear that Kazemi's concern is that universal Truth which is to be gleamed through the prism of the Islamic tradition and not mere speculation on universal principles divorced from their traces in Manifestation. In Imam 'Ali we find the crystallization of this universal Truth which compliments in its inwardness and supra-formal orientation that same Truth found in the Qur'an and its Prophet in its more outward and formal manner. Justice and Remembrance reflect the two functions of the Imam, the former found in his arresting chivalry on the battlefield and his impenetrable integrity in the office of Caliph, and the later in his majestic sanctity and his function of initiating the esoteric tradition within Islam. The chief aim of this study is clearly to encourage us, through the Ihsani, sapiential, or intellectual perspective, to become that "polished mirror" before the Light that is God by assisting us in comprehending the metaphysical infrastructure of the relationship between God and Man and by drawing our attention to the two poles of religious practice: concentration on the Absolute (the remembrance of God) and conformity to the Absolute in the human order (Virtue, or Justice). In regard to the former Imam 'Ali has said: 'Do not remember God absent mindedly (sahiyan), nor forget Him in distraction; rather, remember Him with perfect remembrance (dhikran kamilan), a remembrance in which your heart and tongue are in harmony, and what you conceal conforms to what you reveal. But you will not remember Him according to the true reality of the remembrance (haqiqat al-dhikr) until you forget your own soul in your remembrance'. In regard to the later Imam 'Ali has written to one of his governors: 'Infuse your heart with mercy for the subjects, love for them and kindness towards them. Be not like a ravenous beast of prey above them, seeking to devour them. For they are of two types: either your brother in religion or your like in creation, Mistakes slip from them, defects emerge from them, deliberately or accidentally. So bestow upon them your forgiveness and pardon, just as you would have God bestow upon you His forgiveness and pardon; for you are above them, and the one who has authority over you is above you, and God is above him who appointed you ... and through them He tests you', and 'Let your most beloved treasure be the treasure of virtuous acts. Dominate your inclinations, and exercise self-restraint in the face of that which is unlawful for you--for indeed self-restraint engenders within the soul a proper balance as regards what it likes and what it dislikes.' One could understand the scope of this work by seeing it as an extensive introduction to the Ihsani tradition or quintessential Islam through the sermons and maxims of Imam 'Ali. Kazemi shows us how the Imam's use of paradoxical pronouncement on the ultimate nature of the Real and our relationship with this Real on all the various levels of the hierarchy that is Man activates the Intellect ('aql)--referred to by the Imam as a "buried treasure",

much like the hadith qudsi where God refers to Himself as a "hidden treasure" Who "longed to be known"--and ushers us towards the realization of Tawhid in its highest sense. This Ihsani tradition is the understanding and appropriation of Revelation through the Intellect, which is its microcosmic compliment, and includes the various sacred sciences which return us from our natural heedlessness and baseness to our supra-natural sanctity and perfection. As the Imam says, 'The prophet of a man is the interpreter of his intellect (rasul al-rajul tarjuman `aqlihi)', and 'He attains deliverance whose intellect dominates his caprice'. If one is seeking to understand the Real through its self-disclosure in that rich tradition which is Islam I can think of no better place to start than a patient and contemplative study of this most precious work. It is as if the warrior sage himself has been resurrected in the humble writings and reflections of Reza Shah-Kazemi; something the author himself would undoubtedly deny, but which for this reader cannot but be the case. This is also a work which pushes the reader beyond its covers, as books can only be supports for spiritual practice and can never take their place. Theoretical or conceptual understanding is naught in the light of that universal Truth which the Imam defines thus: 'Al-Haqiqa (unconditioned Truth) is the unveiling of the splendors of Majesty, without any allusion ... the effacement of that which is erroneously imagined (al-mawhum), together with the clarity of that which is truly known (al-ma'lum) ... the attraction of the absolute unicity of the quality of Tawhid ... a light dawning from the morn of eternity, its traces shimmering on the temples of Tawhid'.

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