



The Scope of Responsibility in Social Education Based on Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*

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(Received: April 2025, Accepted: November 2025)

DOI 10.22034/hsr.2025.51908.1075

Abstract

One of the most crucial pillars of social education is the concept of responsibility. This subject has received significant attention in narrative teachings. Social responsibility, as a key dimension of social education, entails an individual's commitment to their surrounding environment and can be considered an edifying value that counteracts self-centered tendencies such as hedonism and the pursuit of power. The concept of social responsibility encompasses both attention to the

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welfare of others and the pursuit of personal goals without disregarding or transgressing the legitimate expectations of others. This research seeks to utilize the teachings of Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, as one of the authoritative hadith sources, employing a descriptive-analytical method to examine the components of social responsibility from the perspective of Imam Ali (AS). In this study, the components of social responsibility refer to a set of interconnected elements that, through dynamic interaction with one another, guarantee the fulfillment of an individual's responsibility towards society. The findings of this research indicate that Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* refers to components of social responsibility, including awareness of one's time, benevolence, wisdom in speech, the correlation between capability and accepting responsibility, charitable giving, forgiveness, and the social division of labor. This letter addresses individuals' responsibilities in interactions with friends, family, relatives, and opponents, revealing important aspects of the nature of responsible relationships.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Social Education, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

1. Introduction

Human social existence requires the development of social skills, primarily through learning and socialization processes. Central to this

158 is the recognition that individual goals must be pursued alongside an

awareness of others' needs and expectations—forming the basis of social responsibility (Talebi and Bahripour, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 38). Social interaction imposes obligations that do not arise in isolation, making responsibility the core of social education. This study argues that social responsibility forms the link between individual aspirations and societal traditions, impacting both historical continuity and future relationships in any society (Bagheri, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 385). Thus, discussing social responsibility is fundamentally about how individuals relate to the past, present, and future of their societies.

It is noteworthy that in a society, each individual, in addition to fulfilling their own needs, also has a role in meeting the needs of others. In other words, each individual simultaneously contributes to the favorable advancement of their own life and the lives of others, or rather, to the favorable advancement of a society. This role-playing creates a sense of responsibility in the individual, highlighting the necessity of focusing on responsibility within the ongoing educational process. The most general definition of responsibility is the ability of a person to fulfill the commitments they have undertaken (Habibnia et al., 2015 AD/1394 SH: 3).

In the Islamic perspective, special attention is also paid to the issue of responsibility. Imam Ali (AS) stated: "Fear God regarding His servants and His lands, for you, is accountable even for the land and the animals." (Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 167) According to the Islamic view, humans are responsible not only to God and themselves, but also to society and their surrounding environment. The Islamic

worldview instills a sense of responsibility in humans. It is for this reason that it gives spirit, meaning, and purpose to life and existence, consequently placing humans on a path of perfection that does not stop at any defined limit. It also offers humans vitality and encouragement, and thus it is the only worldview in which the commitment and responsibility of individuals towards one another find meaning and significance (Motahari, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 89). Given the importance of responsibility in social education, this research, focusing on Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, seeks to answer the question: ‘How is the scope of responsibility in social education delineated?’

It is worth mentioning that Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* was written in 37 AH and has been narrated through two chains. One narration is from *Ibn Shu‘bah Ḥarrānī* in *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl* and from *Shaykh Kulaynī* in *Rasā’il*, and the other is a testament to *Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah*, which *Shaykh Ṭūsī* and *Shaykh al-Najashi* included in their indexes (Shoushtari, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 8, 301). *Ṣadūq* also narrated it through two chains in the chapter on *Nawādir* in *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh*. The first chain, with its *Isnād*, is reported from *Aṣbagh ibn Nubāta al-Mujāshi‘ī*, who states that the Imam wrote this testament to his son, *Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafīyyah*. The second chain, with a complete teacher-student link, reports that this testament was narrated from *Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Thalj* to *Aṣbagh ibn Nubāta*, and then from *Aṣbagh ibn Nubāta* to *Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafīyyah* (Ṣadūq, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 3, 556; 4, 386 and 392). *Abū*

Aḥmad ‘Askarī, in *al-Zawājir wa al-Mawā‘iz*, as reported by *Ibn Ṭāwūs* in Chapter 163, narrated this testament through four chains, which indicates the reliability and strength of the hadith, adding that the testament of *Amīr al-Mu‘minīn* to his son contains wisdom that should be written with liquid gold (cf. Ḥusaynī Khaṭīb, 1988 AD/1367 SH: 3, 297). Overall, the chains that identify the recipient of this testament as Imam *Ḥasan Muḥtabā* (AS) are more numerous.

2. Research Background

Given its importance, prior research on responsibility includes:

Hosseini et al. (2018 AD/1397 SH), in "Investigating the Social Dimension of Responsibility from the Perspective of the Quran and Islam," found that responsibility encompasses both creedal and individual aspects, as well as social and environmental dimensions. Social life gives rise to specific rights and duties that promote social justice and equity. Social responsibility is inherent in all and must be realized.

Rostamiyan (2014 AD/1393 SH), in "Responsibility and Duty-Consciousness from the Perspective of the Quran and the Narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)," concluded that human responsibility arises from divine trust, which humans alone accept. Responsibility requires the foundations of piety and faith.

Salar (2013 AD/1392 SH), in "Educating a Responsible Citizen from the Viewpoint of *Amīr al-Mu‘minīn* (AS)," stated that responsibility is not mere conformity to traditions. Rather, Nahj al-

Balāghah teaches that a responsible citizen learns to build correct relationships with people and God to gain divine satisfaction, including social skills.

Yaqubi et al. (2011 AD/1390 SH), in a study titled "Examining the Teachings, Hadiths, and Interpretation of the Quran and Studies in the Field of Social Responsibility," showed that in the conceptualization of this term, each individual is responsible for their own actions and behavior and decides their own destiny. In the teachings of Islam, individuals and groups are responsible for their actions and behavior. Components such as affection, brotherhood, and cooperation pave the way for social responsibility in Islamic society, and Islamic teachings outline the scope of responsibility as encompassing oneself, God, and others. In this research, the author aims to utilize the teachings of Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, as one of the sources of Islamic education, to answer the two research questions concerning the scope and methods of responsibility in social education. This will complement other activities conducted in various fields of education, focusing on the dimensions of human life, and provide the necessary groundwork for guiding students freely and consciously towards achieving the ultimate goal of social responsibility.

3. Research Method

Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is, in fact, an educational charter replete with instructions for the life of a Muslim individual and the best roadmap for the educational system of an Islamic society, coming
162 from Imam Ali (AS), who is considered the perfect model of faith and

ethics. This letter is among the most famous testaments of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS). This research focuses exclusively on those parts of the letter that discuss social education and responsibility. As mentioned, the most fundamental part of social education consists of the norms, traditions, rules, patterns, and ideals that guide an individual's behavior in their interactions with others. The method of this research is applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of approach. Regarding data collection, an analytical method is used to identify concepts within the data. In this research, the study environment is Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and propositions containing concepts related to responsibility are identified and selected through purposive sampling. The data collection method in this research is documentary, and the data collection tool involves taking notes (excerpting) from textual data.

4. Concepts

4-1. Social Responsibility

"Social Responsibility" is a concept that has garnered attention across various branches of science, including organizational management, sociology, political science, economics, educational sciences, psychology, and others. Based on the principles and assumptions of each of these disciplines, differing definitions have been provided; consequently, a single, specific definition cannot be uniformly applied. For instance, according to Schwartz's theory of basic human values, social responsibility can be considered a self-transcendence

value, like benevolence or universalism, positioned in opposition to self-enhancement values such as hedonism, achievement, and power (Schwartz, 1992: 12). In his view, self-enhancement values are associated with the promotion of selfish interests, whereas benevolence focuses on concern for the welfare of close others in everyday interactions.

From Bierhoff's perspective, social responsibility consists of two fundamental parts: first, ensuring the welfare of others in daily life, or in other words, consideration for others, and second, moving towards personal goals without ignoring or violating the legitimate expectations of others (Bierhoff, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 87).

Weber, concerning social responsibility, believed that humans, as social beings in their collective life, are responsible to others and must respect their rights. These "Others" can be divided into two types: general and specific. Specific responsibility involves the actor's responsibility towards others with whom they have an emotional relationship, such as family and friends. However, social responsibility pertains to the actor's relationship with those with whom they have a non-emotional, contractual connection, such as all members of society as citizens—for example, helping those who are injured or respecting the rights of others by keeping one's neighborhood clean (Weber, 2023 AD/1402 AH: 53).

From an Islamic perspective, in the relationships we establish with
164 others, we have mutual rights, but with every right comes

responsibilities and duties. These two are like the two pans of a scale, the balance of which must be maintained. Therefore, just as we have rights, we are also responsible for them. On the other hand, a sense of responsibility in any society regulates social and human relations. That the teachings related to this matter are learnable and acquirable is a clear point, and the divine prophets have outlined the main contours of this responsibility. In the Islamic view, humans face external obligations and imperatives. The individual must act upon these "Musts" and "Must nots" with an imperative arising from within and feel responsible for them. In the educational process, this principle must be applied as a general rule to guide educational methods and approaches (Bagheri, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 150). In other words, by virtue of being human, one has specific responsibilities towards God, oneself, other humans, and the universe. By attending to, accepting, and cultivating all of these, human life assumes a desirable order, and the individual is guided towards their appropriate perfection (Javadi Amoli, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 55). In the present research, with this view, the social responsibilities of humans are considered non-suspendable, and commitment to these responsibilities necessitates social responsibility.

Imam Ali (AS) censures the spirit of *Tawākul* and *Takhādhul* (meaning leaving matters to each other and shirking responsibility), emphasizing that the spread of this spirit will lead to social degeneration. He rebuked the people of Kufa for such acts of

negligence (Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 27). Ultimately, this process guides members of society from a passive and irresponsible state towards becoming capable, committed, and active members. However, the realization of this, as one of the necessities of modern society, depends on enhancing individuals' knowledge, insight, and understanding of the necessity of cooperation in both micro and macro social spheres. Reflection on the *'Alawid* legacy shows that numerous propositions are found regarding a wide spectrum of responsibilities. This category of narrations can be considered as evidence for inferring the necessity of responsibility as one of the requisites of social education.

4-2. Social Education

Socialization and the social development of the learner are objectives pursued in "Social education." Theories of "Social learning" (Olson et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 493) are based on the influence of the social environment on the formation of the learner's personality and behavior, aiming to direct the individual's social actions toward educational goals.

From an Islamic perspective, social education is the process of actualizing humans' innate inclination for collective life and other-orientation, and nurturing them for adaptation, convergence, brotherhood, justice, beneficence, and mutual sympathy, with the aim of achieving the good life and forming the unified Islamic Ummah (A

Education has various dimensions, and attention to all these dimensions seems essential for humans. However, many Western schools of thought focus on and consider only one or a few dimensions of human existence as amenable to education. For example, structuralists, behaviorists, cognitivists, etc., each focus their educational efforts on the development of one human dimension, such as the social, behavioral, physical, intellectual, etc., believing that the development of other human dimensions is a function of the development of that specific dimension (cf. Seyf, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 75-90; Shabani, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 85-97); but from an Islamic viewpoint, humans are created as the noblest of creatures and God's vicegerents on Earth. Occupying this status and position requires attention to and the education of all aspects of their being, because neglect of any aspect of human existence will lead to a lack of education and the creation of abnormalities in that dimension. With this explanation, the Islamic perspective on human education is comprehensive and coherent.

In a general classification, humans have both individual and social dimensions. The Islamic view also recognizes these two dimensions, but despite attention to individuality and providing instructions for individual growth, it seems to pay greater and more special attention to the social dimension, to the extent that it sometimes considers individual growth dependent on social growth or possible only within a social context. In other words, Islam is the only religion whose

foundation is based on society, and the matter of society has been considered in all its aspects (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 4, 94).

This is because, following the formation of society, forces and properties emerge that are very powerful and, in times of conflict and contradiction, overpower individual forces and properties (ibid: 97). From the perspective of researchers, in the system of the unified Ummah, moving away from individualism and personal preferences is necessary. Responsibility, emerging from the confines of egotism, committing to others, and subsequently providing the ground for social growth, is an effect of the unified Ummah, and the value of individual actions increases upon entering this system (Kermani, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 17).

5. Components of Responsibility in Social Education

Responsibility, directly or indirectly, impacts the individual and social life of humans, and all individuals benefit from its fruits. This concept, in religious literature, is considered a very important indicator of social capital. The component of responsibility, at the micro level, establishes a relationship within the domain of relational action indicators because it is actualized in connection and interaction with others. At the macro level, this component is situated more within the sphere of social expediencies (Mohasses, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 126). A sense of responsibility is a conceptual precondition for desirable social

168 behaviors. Attributing responsibility elicits emotional reactions, which

are themselves the primary factor in promoting positive social behaviors (Bierhoff, 2016/1395 SH: 229). Accepting any responsibility is only possible if the individual or society possesses the necessary maturity to accept and fulfill that responsibility (Vatandoust, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 71). The root of social responsibility can perhaps be found in its role as a prerequisite for creating and developing individual independence. This enables the person to achieve self-perception and self-knowledge. In a complex society, individuals who possess individual independence and pursue goals stemming from their mental structure about realities are more successful than those who simply surrender themselves to circumstances. In fact, if a person acts based on a system of self-control and responsibility, they can utilize their capabilities more effectively (Bierhoff, 2016/1395 SH: 227). In the Islamic intellectual framework, every human being is held accountable for their actions, whether small or large, apparent or hidden (Nahj al-Balāghah, Letter 27). They are responsible both for themselves and for others because they value their own work, consider it good and normative, and thus invite others to do the same (Motahhari, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 101).

In this research, the intended meaning of the components of social responsibility is a set of interconnected elements that, through dynamic interaction with one another, ensure the realization of an individual's responsibility towards society. The components of social responsibility, as the fundamental units of the responsibility system,

provide a framework for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating social behaviors.

These components in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* are as follows:

5-1. Contemporary Awareness

One of the key elements of political insight is awareness of the times. Here, "Times" refers to the historical situation of society and the prevailing temporal conditions and requirements. Different historical periods have specific characteristics and laws (Shoa' Hoseini, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 263). Imam Ali (AS), in one of his advice to Imam *Hasan* (AS), stated: "He who feels secure from the vicissitudes of time will be betrayed by it; he who attributes greatness to time will be disgraced by it; he who gets angry with time will be thrown down by it; and he who seeks refuge in time will be surrendered by it." (Majlisī, 1969 AD/1390 AH: 77, 213) His Eminence also says in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"I intended to begin your education by teaching you the Book of Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, and its interpretation, the laws and injunctions of Islam, its halal and haram, and not to go beyond that for you. But I feared that the diverse desires and opinions confusing the people might overwhelm you, just as they had overwhelmed them. Therefore, I considered it more beloved to me to make you aware of it, even though I disliked alerting you to it, rather than leaving you to a matter [ignorance of these differences] whose ruin I do not feel safe

from for you."

From the perspective of the commentators of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the expressions of the Imam (AS) in this part of the testament emphasize once again that the Imam is not speaking here in his capacity as Imam, and Imam *Hasan* (AS) not as his successor, but rather as a concerned father speaking to a son in need of instruction and education. This is because, as previously mentioned, Imam Hasan (AS) was over thirty years old at that time. Is it possible that the Imam (AS) had not taught him the Quran until then and made him aware of false opinions?! (Mughnīyah, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 4, 425)

From attention to these narrations and similar cases, it is inferred that a Muslim must be familiar with the conditions of their society. This is because, according to the tradition of the perpetual conflict between truth and falsehood, society is always pregnant with various seditions and doubts that mix truth and falsehood to such an extent that, for a healthy passage through these seditions, the individual needs insight to distinguish the right from the wrong. This is only possible by the individual gaining awareness of the conditions of their time. In other words, the cornerstone of insight is awareness. To the extent that this awareness is directed towards truth and reality, the individual's insight and, consequently, their action towards truth will be more powerful. Therefore, one of the most important responsibilities that each individual has, both towards themselves and

towards the rest of society, is to become aware and to make others aware—in other words, clarification. In fact, in this part of Letter 31, Imam Ali (AS) has recommended insight and political maturity. An insightful person, with the knowledge they possess about events and current issues in society on various subjects, is less prone to error and more likely to distinguish right from wrong and move towards the truth.

5-2. Benevolence

Benevolence is one of the moral virtues frequently recommended in the Quran and narrations; it leads to righteousness in this world and the hereafter. *Khayr* means goodness, benefit, and advantage. Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) said in a narration: "It is incumbent upon a believer to be a well-wisher for [their brother] believer, whether in their absence or presence." (Kulaynī, 1978 AD/1399 SH: 2, 208)

In another statement, he said: "Upon you is to be an advisor to Allah regarding His creation, for you will never meet Him with an action more virtuous than that." (Āmilī, 1953 AD/1373 AH: 16, 382) *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) also says in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* to his son:

"O! My son, make yourself a measure between you and others. So, desire for others what you desire for yourself, and dislike for them what you dislike for yourself. Do not oppress, just as you do not like to be oppressed. Do well, as you would like to be treated. Consider bad for yourself whatever you consider bad for others. Be content for

172 people with what you would be content with for yourself."

From consideration of all these narrations, it is concluded that benevolence is necessary, essential, and indeed universal. It encompasses all situations and times and is not subject to suspension. In these statements, *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) advises the addressee to reform their behavior with people by making themselves the criterion for measurement between themselves and others. The reason Imam (AS) used the word "Measure" (*Mīzān*) metaphorically for his son is so that he would act justly between himself and others, like a scale (Ibn Maytham, 1955 AD/1375 AH: 5, 40). From the Islamic perspective, one of the fundamental rights a brother has over another is precisely this benevolence, which should not be neglected. Therefore, corresponding to this right, a responsibility is placed upon each individual, which they must diligently fulfill.

Sometimes, benevolence is so profound that the recipient is not necessarily aware of it, such as when it is extended towards children or someone who is uninformed about the matter in question. However, the recipient's lack of awareness does not negate the individual's rights in this regard, and the responsibility remains intact. It should also be noted that according to Islamic teachings, every good or bad deed a person performs reverts to them; the Quran states: "If you do good, you do good for your own souls. And if you do evil, [you do it] against them."

Benevolence is no exception to this general rule, and the benevolent person benefits from the outcome of the action in both this

world and the hereafter. In other words, attention or inattention to this responsibility impacts society.

5-3. Wisdom in Utterance

The ability to speak is one of the great blessings of the Lord and a characteristic of humans. However, despite its many benefits for human growth and development, it can also be the source of numerous physical and spiritual harms for the individual themselves, those around them, and even society, distancing humans from happiness. Therefore, there are many recommendations and instructions in Islam regarding guarding one's tongue and speech. Imam Ali (AS) says in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"Do not say what you do not know, even if what you know is little."

Sometimes a person's lack of awareness regarding their words can be harmful to others or society. For example, in producing or spreading rumors, creating doubts, or promoting incorrect statements that lead to the disrespect of another Muslim, etc. In this case, the person not only distances themselves from happiness but also provides the means for misleading others. Therefore, individuals' responsibility for their speech is very serious. One of the causes of human happiness or misery is this very tongue; thus, paying attention to this responsibility and being careful to avoid speaking without knowledge is highly important. It should be noted that this advice does not mean

that individuals are granted a license to remain silent on various social matters under the pretext that their knowledge is insufficient for commenting. Rather, simultaneously, a Muslim is obliged to strive to gain sufficient knowledge on matters where expressing an opinion can somehow impact society and to then offer their view. This is because, in such cases, silence is not always equivalent to social benevolence and can sometimes cause social harm and loss.

Proportionality of Capability and Accepting Responsibility

In Islam, responsibility is a divine trust, and for every responsibility a human undertakes, there is accountability. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) has also stated many points regarding social responsibility, one of which is in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"Do not place on your back a burden beyond your capacity, lest the weight of it become a punishment for you."

According to this advice, accepting a responsibility that is beyond one's capacity will bring punishment upon the person during reckoning. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) in Letter 5 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, addressing *Ash'ath ibn Qays*, one of his agents, says:

"Indeed, your position is not a morsel [for you to enjoy] but a trust upon your neck."

Thus, the ability and competence of officials play a key role in the selection of managers. This is to the extent that someone like *Abū Dharr*, who was a great companion of the Prophet (PBUH) and a close companion of Imam Ali (AS), was prohibited by the Prophet

from holding any administrative position. This principle also applies to smaller responsibilities at lower levels of management. Because, from a general perspective, if a person accepts a responsibility they cannot fulfill, they have actually created a flaw in its execution and diverted the action from achieving its goal, which contradicts responsibility. Therefore, one of the components of responsibility can be considered the knowledge of one's capabilities and capacity in performing tasks, and consequently, accepting responsibility within one's limits. Of course, the effort to increase one's capacity and ability has not been overlooked in Islam, and every Muslim is also obliged to increase their ability and acquire more skills. Sometimes, the complete and correct performance of assigned responsibilities itself provides the means for increasing one's capacity, and in a way, the path of individual growth is precisely the performance of responsibilities within one's capacity at any given time and place.

5-4. Giving Charity

Infāq (giving charity) is one of the most important and practical social recommendations in Islam, with numerous benefits that follow. In the common usage of the Quran and religious texts, *Infāq* technically refers to giving wealth or something else in the way of God to the needy and other divine causes (Jurjānī, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 1, 53). Imam Ali (AS) also speaks about the benefits of *Infāq* in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

176 "Increase your charity from it [your wealth] while you are capable of it."

"And consider it a gain when someone borrows from you in your time of plenty, so that its repayment may be for you on the day of your hardship."

Among the beneficial effects of spreading *Infāq* in society is its significant role in enhancing the security and well-being of society, to the extent that it is considered a necessity of social life. The importance of *Infāq* in Islamic culture is so great that commentators interpret the "Ruin" mentioned in verse 195 of Surah *al-Baqarah* as the dominance of enemies over Muslims due to refraining from spending wealth in the way of jihad and generally abstaining from giving charity for God's pleasure, which ultimately leads to the weakness of Muslims and the spread of insecurity in society (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 2, 64). Given that striving to preserve the stability, survival, and security of a society is a public duty incumbent upon each and every member of society, and considering the mentioned points, it seems that utmost effort should be made in this regard. Additionally, considering the impact of *Infāq* in achieving this important goal, it can be considered a crucial component of social education responsibility.

5-5. Forgiveness and Clemency

At first glance, forgiveness and pardon appear to be individual recommendations in Islam with little social aspect. However, upon closer examination of human nature, it is understood that all humans have faults and make mistakes. Because humans are constantly

engaged in the struggle between animal instincts and higher human inclinations, it is natural that one cannot expect all individual behaviors to be correct and free from error and mistake. However, in many cases, the harm caused by these errors and mistakes is not limited to the individual themselves, but also affects others. Under these conditions, if every wrongdoer were to be punished and everyone were to retaliate and seek revenge for harm suffered, human life would be filled with anger, rancor, and hatred. This is where the social effect of forgiveness and pardon becomes apparent, leading us to view it as a social responsibility. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) also says in this regard in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"Be gentle with whoever is harsh with you, for it is likely that they will soon become gentle with you. And take [revenge] upon your enemy by showing excellence (forgiveness), for it is the sweeter of the two victories."

Many people, when faced with harshness, choose the path of harshness, and hostilities escalate exponentially, sometimes reaching dangerous levels. But if a person controls themselves and, through willpower and decision, restrains themselves in the face of harshness and chooses gentleness instead of harshness, not only do the hostilities end, but they are replaced by friendship, affection, and gentleness, just as the Holy Quran emphasizes this meaning and recommends good in return for evil, considering goodness a means of attracting friendship.

In the subsequent sentence, which emphasizes the previous advice,

178 Imam Ali (AS) says, "You might overcome your enemy through

severity and harshness, or you might overcome them through showing affection and friendship; certainly, the latter is sweeter and has a better outcome." This is because in the future, you will have no fear of harshness, whereas if you prevail through harshness, you will always expect new harshness from the enemy. In other words, in the first method, the enemy remains an enemy, while in the second method, the enemy transforms into a friend. And this is indeed the two victories that are achieved (Makarem Shirazi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 9, 653).

With this viewpoint, Islam, while preserving individuals' rights to claim their rights, promotes and recommends forgiveness, pardon, and clemency. Imam Ali (AS) in his covenant to *Mālik Ashtar* says: "Let people benefit from your forgiveness and pardon in the same way you would like God to benefit you from His forgiveness and pardon."

5-6. Social Division of Labor

Humans' various needs and their inability to fulfill them alone lead to the formation of society. In the interaction between humans within a society, each individual, based on their talents, interests, and abilities, undertakes a specific task. This necessitates the division of labor and its expansion in societies. It is clear that the absence of division of labor and engagement in various tasks not only yields no success but also leads to the waste of resources, facilities, and time, resulting in a lack of necessary efficiency. Conversely, the division of labor enhances skill and initiative, leading to the flourishing of both the individual and society (Majidi, Mogherri, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 102). **179**

Imam Ali (AS) says in this regard:

"Assign each of your servants a specific task for which you hold them accountable, for this is more likely to prevent them from neglecting their duties towards you and being slack in your service."

Considering these statements and examining similar cases, the division of labor and its acceptance can be considered one of the most crucial components of responsibility in public interactions within society. This is because, practically speaking, collective life would be disrupted, and the daily affairs of people and society would not be managed without it. On the other hand, almost all sociologists who have explained the system of social inequality have mentioned the division of labor as one of its fundamental causes. Furthermore, the division of labor is one of the most important principles of management because, without it, people often wait for others, shifting responsibilities onto them. When work is left undone, they excuse themselves to the employer by saying they thought others would do it, and if others are asked, they offer the same excuse. However, when tasks and responsibilities are divided, everyone knows they are responsible for their own work and strives to perform it.

This advice shows that Imam (AS) was fully aware of the principles of management and advised his son accordingly (Makarem Shirazi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 9, 700).

5-7. Role-Modeling

180 One type of human learning is observational learning. Based on this

type of learning, one of the most important and widely used educational methods is education through role models. This method gains importance due to humans' innate desire for perfection and their tendency to emulate, as humans naturally seek out models superior to and more perfect than themselves in their interactions, thereby drawing closer to perfection. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) also emphasized this importance in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, stating:

"And know, my son, that the most beloved part of my advice for you to adopt is the fear of God, restricting yourself to what God has made obligatory upon you, and adhering to the practice upon which your predecessors—your forefathers and the righteous among your household—have passed."

If noble models are not introduced to a person, and the individual errs in identifying true perfection and emulates incorrect models, they distance themselves from genuine happiness and spend their life traveling down the wrong paths. Conversely, the closer the models are to true perfection—or, in other words, the more perfected they are—the greater the degree and depth of their impact on the emulator will be. This is why *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) also says in Sermon 97 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"Look at the household of your Prophet. Proceed in the direction they are going and follow their footsteps, for they will never lead you out of the path of salvation nor return you to ruin. If they halt, you halt, and if they rise, you rise. Do not precede them, for you will go astray, and do not lag behind them, for you will be destroyed."

6. Types of Social Responsibility

Through a detailed examination of the scope of responsibility in social education based on the teachings of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, we will reach an understanding. In other words, if an individual is able to implement these matters in their interactions, they are considered responsible from the Islamic perspective. The recommendations Imam Ali (AS) makes regarding social responsibility in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* fall into three general categories:

1. Individuals' responsibilities in interactions with friends;
2. Individuals' responsibilities in interactions with relatives;
3. Individuals' responsibilities in interactions with opponents.

Individuals' Responsibilities in Interactions with Friends

Friendship and friendly interactions in Islam do not refer exclusively to an intimate relationship between two or more people; rather, it has a broader definition and are referred to as a relationship of brotherhood, which, in addition to intimacy, entails specific rights and duties. In fact, Islam has elevated the level of the bond of friendship among Muslims to such an extent that it likens it to the closest bond two humans can have in social relations, based on equality, which is the connection and affection between two brothers. Based on this important Islamic principle, Muslims of every race, tribe, language, and age share a deep sense of brotherhood among themselves. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) says in Letter 31

182 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"When your brother cuts off relations, you maintain them. When he turns away, be kind and conciliatory. When he withholds, be generous. When he distances himself, draw near. When he is harsh, be gentle. When he wrongs you, offer an excuse [for him], as if you are his servant and he is your benefactor. But beware of placing this [behavior] in an inappropriate place or doing it for someone who is undeserving."

"Do not let your brother be stronger than you in severing ties, nor be stronger in doing wrong than you are in doing well."

In this advice, Imam (AS) cautions his son against reciprocating the harshness and lack of affection from friends and instead recommends responding with the opposite in such cases. This is because reciprocation can jeopardize the foundation of a friendship and lead to the loss of friends. However, if one responds to a lack of affection with affection and to wrongdoing with goodness, the friend will soon realize their mistake, feel ashamed, and seek to make amends, thereby strengthening the foundations of friendship more than before. Since some base-minded and shortsighted individuals might exploit such behavior, Imam (AS) makes an exception for this group, saying:

"But beware of placing this [behavior] in an inappropriate place or doing it for someone who is undeserving."

The difference between the phrases "Placing it in an inappropriate place" and "Doing it for someone who is undeserving" is that the second phrase refers to undeserving, stubborn, and spiteful individuals

for whom goodness in return for their evil only increases their audacity and boldness—it is like showing mercy to a sharp-toothed leopard. The first phrase, however, refers to those who do not have such a character, but repeated kindness in the face of their coldness might cause them to err and think they have done something good. The use of the imperative "Carry" (*Iḥmil*) at the beginning of this advice indicates that being good in the face of evil, though difficult for a person, must be imposed upon oneself (Makarem Shirazi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 445).

Amīr al-Mu'minīn (AS) says: "If you befriend the enemy of your friend, you have wronged your friend and spent your humility and affection in the wrong place. In this case, you have not managed your inclinations and tendencies correctly and have practically fallen into a kind of carelessness and lack of principle in observing rights." (Taherzadeh, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 2, 355) *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) says in a passage of Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

"Do not take the enemy of your friend as a friend, lest you become an enemy to your friend."

From the commentators' perspective, this is a hypocritical act—to be friends with both one's friend and the enemy of one's friend. This is the method of those who lack sincere friendships and whose aim is to benefit from everyone, without shying away from contradictory actions along this path. Of course, this applies when the enemy's enmity is unjust, not when

enemies. Additionally, this saying applies when the goal of proposing friendship with a friend's enemy is not to reconcile them. If this action is for the purpose of reconciliation, it is not only not ugly and reprehensible but is a very worthy deed. This point is true not only for individuals but also for groups, nations, and governments, even though in today's world there are many governments that propose friendship to both sides of a conflict without intending peace or reconciliation; rather, their goal is to use both to secure their personal interests (Makarem Shirazi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 452).

One of the most important reasons for creating strength and continuity in friendship is benevolence and heartfelt concern. Islamic and ethical teachings frequently address this matter, and almost all Imams and religious leaders have emphasized it. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) also says in his testament to his son:

"Offer your brother sincere advice, whether it is good [to hear] or bad."

"And if you intend to sever relations with your brother, leave a remnant [of friendship] within yourself for him to return to, should he wish to do so someday."

From the Islamic perspective, it is not only fitting to behave with utmost concern and benevolence towards those with whom we have a pact of friendship and brotherhood, but this is also a kind of responsibility that each individual has in their friendly interactions and relations towards others. For example, one should overlook the mistakes of friends, and if we notice a mistake, we should remind

them and try to rectify it. Likewise, if we see a good deed, we should praise them from the depths of our heart and, as much as we are able, assist our friends in acquiring perfections to provide for their growth and happiness. In other words, each individual is responsible for creating and helping the growth path of those around them, specifically their friends. In this regard, *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (AS) says: "Offer your brother and friend your sincere advice and concern; whether in good or evil [matters], be sincerely concerned and benevolent for him, and be his supporter and helper in all circumstances."

7. Individuals' Responsibility in Interacting with Relatives

One of the ethical directives of religious teachings is proper and desirable social interaction with relatives. Kinship is a means through which individuals connect with their past and future and understand their family history. Therefore, it is these very kinship bonds that form the basis for expectations, obligations, and commitments, and they also play a significant role in shaping individuals' identities (McCarthy, 2011/1390 SH: 464). Imam Ali (AS) in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* reminds us of this important matter and states:

"Honor your kin, for they are your wings with which you fly, your root to which you return, and your powerful hand with which you strike."

From the perspective of the noble religion of Islam, maintaining
186 and sustaining kinship relations is part of divine commandments, and

the responsibility associated with them is considered on par with upholding divine sanctity. Almighty God says: "And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs (kinship ties). Indeed, Allah is ever, over you, an Observer." (al-Nisā': 1)

In the field of social sciences, a topic called "Social Capital" is discussed, which refers to the social framework that facilitates relationships among individuals (Coleman, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 77). This definition encompasses concepts such as order, trust, cooperation, and mutual relations among members of a group in society working towards a common goal. Sociologists believe that the kinship network serves as a source of social capital for families, which can be effective in resolving family problems. A healthy family needs emotional support, stable housing, access to services, and other essential resources; these issues are often better addressed through kinship relations. By visiting relatives, families discuss their life issues and problems, which represents the minimum level of emotional support that reduces depression and tensions to some extent. Consultation and seeking advice in matters, using experiences, and gaining useful information for family life are among the known benefits of these meetings.

8. Individuals' Responsibility in Interacting with Opponents

The world is the arena of constant confrontation between truth and falsehood. With this assumption, Islam has always had, and continues

to have, various groups of opponents. On the other hand, religions have always introduced themselves as responsible for guiding all human beings, considering this responsibility non-suspendable. Therefore, correct interaction with opponents becomes important, as these interactions can provide the means for guiding individuals, as well as many groups and nations, which is a lofty goal of the Abrahamic religions. Imam Ali (AS) also recommends this and states:

"Deal with your enemy with favor (grace and benevolence), for it is the sweeter of the two victories (revenge or forgiveness)."

The Imam (AS) says that in confronting your enemy, adopt the path of virtue and forgiveness and show magnanimity, because if victory over him is sweet for you, this type of conduct is sweeter and more victorious. This is because, through this behavior, the deepest innate layer is satisfied and flourishes, and one attains a capital that many humans do not achieve. It is true that you are permitted to react harshly to people's enmity, equip your force, defeat him, achieve victory over him, satiate your anger, and reach the sweetness of victory over the enemy. But there is another way that is sweeter, and that is showing favor and magnanimity towards the enemy. Choose this second option to reach a much higher horizon (Taherzadeh, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 2, 374). In reality, the Imam considers forgiveness preferable because it paves the way for growth, elevation, and guidance for both the forgiver and the forgiven. Human potential is

horizons that transcend revenge or retaliation. This type of interaction makes one conscious of a sublime power, and if there is a potential for transformation and guidance in the enemy, he will be transformed.

From the viewpoint of the commentators of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, in this section, the Imam (AS) has advised the addressee to interact with the enemy in a virtuous manner and has drawn his attention to the best way, which is a requirement for one of the two victories [revenge - forgiveness]. This is because victory has two paths and two means: one is frightening and brings the enemy to his knees through force and dominance, which is very clear. The second way is to show affection and kindness to him, thereby taming him and winning his agreement. The phrase "For it is the sweeter of the two victories" is the minor premise of an implied syllogism, and the major premise is also considered as such: whatever one of the two victories applies to is worthy of being done (Ibn Maytham, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 5, 85). In this interpretation, it is as if the individual has a choice between two victories, and the Imam recommends the second state. In other words, the Imam says that victory over the enemy is possible in two ways: "Either through domination and overcoming or through doing well to him. And, of course, subduing the enemy with kindness and benevolence is sweeter than defeating him and is more commendable in the method of magnanimous people." (Sarakhsi Neyshaburi, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 1, 251)

Conclusion

This article, by examining the scope of responsibility in social

education based on Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, has analyzed the concepts and methods of responsibility from the perspective of Imam Ali (AS). This research demonstrates that social responsibility is not only a moral necessity but also a religious and social obligation that plays a central role in both individual and collective human interactions. From Imam Ali's (AS) perspective, responsibility is not limited to individual commitments, but also encompasses human obligations towards God, oneself, others, and the surrounding environment. This comprehensive view of responsibility strengthens the foundations of social education in Islamic society, helping individuals preserve their individual identity while acting as active and responsible members of society.

In this article, drawing on the teachings of Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, key components of social responsibility—including awareness of the times, benevolence, wisdom in speech, proportionality of capability and acceptance of responsibility, charitable giving, forgiveness, and division of social labor—are examined. These components are not only introduced as strategies for improving social interactions but are also considered tools for achieving a good life and forming a unified Islamic Ummah.

Imam Ali (AS), in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, emphasizes the importance of responsibility in interactions with friends, relatives, and even opponents, showing that social responsibility extends beyond
190 friendly relations to encompass all human interactions. This

comprehensive view of responsibility enables individuals to behave responsibly and ethically in every situation, whether interacting with friends or confronting adversaries.

According to the content of Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, social education based on responsibility not only helps improve social relations and increase societal solidarity but also acts as a fundamental strategy for realizing social justice and achieving individual and collective happiness. Therefore, attention to hadith teachings in the field of social responsibility can be used as a practical model and help form a responsible and committed society.

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