

Code of Conduct for the A'amils: An Ethical, Spiritual, and Professional Analysis

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Abstract: This paper distills a coherent “Code for the A’amil” (functionary with delegated authority) by reading Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib’s counsel to governors alongside later Fatimi Ismaili Tayyibi Daw’ah regulatory practice. Ali’s directives define office as moral trusteeship: the A’amil must begin with self-discipline before instructing others, teach through example more than speech, and treat public authority as a duty of character. Administrative priorities are reordered-development of land and livelihoods is placed above tax extraction, because sustainable revenue follows prosperity while predatory collection destroys both country and people. Decision-making is intellectualized and de-personalized: the A’amil is urged to consult the learned, to speak only with knowledge, and to cultivate a righteous ethos marked by modesty, clarity of reasoning, and perseverance. The most stringent safeguard is judicial selection: Ali’s criteria for judges demand resilience, impartiality, resistance to flattery and temptation, aversion to greed, patience in truth-seeking, and firmness in judgment. Later Ismaili Tayyibi articulation, reported from the 43rd Da’i Sayyiduna Abd’e Ali Saifuddin (ra), converts these norms into enforceable tasks: balanced firmness and mercy; private admonition before public proceedings; impartial dispute resolution after hearing both parties; escalation to al-Da’i al-Mutlaq for final determination; and regular reporting from the jurisdiction. Financial stewardship is framed as a principal anti-corruption perimeter: Zakat and Khums must be assessed proportionately without coercion; Bayt al-Mal must be secured, disbursed only with authorization, and recorded through accountable bookkeeping. Legal competence is required, coupled with disciplined deference to primary texts and the Da’i’s court; evidentiary rigor is emphasized by prioritizing oral testimony over mere letters. The 51st Da’i, Dr. Sayyiduna Taher Saifuddin (ra), further systematizes the code (al-Hidayat al-Mushriqah Li-A’amal al-Bilad - ‘The Illuminating Guides for the Works of the Country’) by defining the A’amil as a servant of the Daw’ah whose dignity depends on obedience, humility, audited accounts, social welfare (health care and funerary care), education, inter-communal cordiality, and compliance with the law of the land. Critically, the framework narrows opportunities for abuse by rejecting inflated sovereign titles (e.g., “Wali al-Amr”), insisting on consultative checks, and locating ultimate authority in clearly bounded delegation and transparent accountability. Where practice deviates, the remedy is reporting, review, and disciplined removal of offenders.

Keywords: A’amil; delegated authority; Nahj al-Balagha; governance ethics; anti-corruption; Bayt al-Maal; Zakat administration; judicial integrity; Daw’ah discipline; accountability mechanisms.

Code for A'amil (functionary with authority) by Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as):

1. "He who is appointed as an A'amil or governor over people must begin by teaching himself before teaching others. His teaching of others must be first by setting an example rather than with his words, for he who begins by teaching and educating himself is more worthy of respect than he who teaches and educates others."

2. "Your concern with developing the land (over which he has commanding power) should be greater than your concern for collecting taxes, for the latter can only be obtained by developing; whereas he who seeks revenue without development destroys the country and the people."

3. "Seek the company of the learned and the intellectual in search of solving the problems of your jurisdiction."

4. "No good can come out in keeping silent to the government or in speaking out of ignorance."

5. "The righteous are people of virtue, whose logic is straightforward, whose dress is unostentatious, whose path is modest, and whose actions are many and who are undeterred by difficulties."

6. "Choose the best amongst your people to administer justice. Choose someone who does not easily give up; who is unruffled by enmities; someone who will not be involved in wrong doings; who will not hesitate to pursue right once he knows it; someone whose heart knows no greed; who will not be satisfied with minimum explanation without seeking the maximum understanding; who will be the most steadfast when doubt is cast; who will be the least impatient in correcting the opponent; the most patient in pursuing the truth; the most stern in meting out judgment; someone who is unaffected by flattery and not swayed by temptation and these are but few."

Note: If we examine the intellectual and practical guidance of Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) through his famous epistle to his Governor, we will find that he never left space for corruption. During the era of the Fatimi Imams, the above code was in practice as a cardinal instrument of policy, which was followed by government functionaries explicitly. During the period of the Satr (seclusion) of the Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imams, their Du'at in their Satr framed a number of disciplinary rules as per the need of the time for their A'amils (deputies). It should be noted that an A'amil is not entitled and authorized to be addressed as "Wali al-Amr", as many incorrectly used this designation in their discourses only to influence the masses. He is only one of the personnel who handles the affairs (religious) under the command of the office of the Da'i.

Code of conduct of A'amil (functionary with authority) further interpreted on the basis of instructions of Amir al-Mumineen Ali al-Murtada (as) to his Ummal by the 43rd Ismaili Tayyibi Da'i, Sayyiduna Abd'e Ali Saifuddin (ra)

The learned author of "Mausam'e Bah'ar" has reported "Principles of the Daw'ah organization vide Para XI p.340 giving reference of a Letter written by the 43rd Shia Fatimi Ismaili Tayyabi Dawoodi Da'i, Sayyiduna Abd'e Ali Saifuddin Ibn Sayyiduna Abd al-Tayyib Zakiuddin (ra) to his A'amil (functionaries). He had given ten (10) basic instructions to them regarding adhering to the Shariah to be humble, polite, just, honest and accountable to Mumineen under them. Therefore, A'amil is accountable before public as per the precedents of Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) which he himself established.

1). It is a duty as well as the responsibility of the A'amil to condition his attitude and mold his character in light of the guidance provided to him by the Da'i. He should handle the affairs of the people with due political wisdom and prudence. He must not deal with people harshly and strictly which may evoke unpleasant feelings, nor handle the matters so leniently which may damage and degrade his position. If an A'amil finds anyone indulging in unhealthy practices, he must give them advice privately. If the person confesses and repents upon what he has committed, well and good, otherwise the A'amil must charge him before the Jam'at. He is duty bound to keep a strict and vigilant eye, irrespective of anyone being rich or poor, and to regulate the affairs of the Daw'ah in an efficient manner. Hence, by following the above instructions, children of the Daw'ah (Mumineen) may get their due blessings and benefits.

2). It is the responsibility of the A'amil to establish harmony, peace, and understanding amongst the members and remove sources of unpleasantness. To eliminate the cause of any dispute, he has to decide the case not on the statement of one party but after hearing both the sides. If the litigants do not agree on any solution, then the case should be referred for final decision to Al Da'i al-Mutlaq, who may decide the matter according to the principals of the Shariah.

3). The collection of Zak'at is the responsibility of an A'amil; he should instill the teaching of the Shariah and Awliya among the children of the Daw'ah in this regard. He is made answerable to command Zak'at as per means of people and should not pressurize and compel them to give beyond their financial power.

4). It is the responsibility of an A'amil to safely keep the amount of Bait al-Mal (public funds) and not spend it unnecessarily. This applies to each specific dealing in which cash is involved. An A'amil must not spend without the permission of al Da'i al-Mutlaq, nor sanction anybody even a single Dirham. With the consultation of four members of the Jam'at, he should appoint a person to maintain the accounts of the Jam'at. He should not utilize the fund of Jam'at as per his wishes, but as per the advice of the four. Even his own funds should not be utilized for Israf and Tabzir (pomp and display).

5). An A'amil must know the Fiqh provisions and observe the dictates of the Shariah. He must be well versed in the issues related to Nikah and Talaq; he should keep himself away from Ra'i and Qiyas - assumption and presumption, which are Har'am. For each problem and question an A'amil should consult "Da'aim al-Islam", and if he cannot find the solution from the primary sources then he must forward the case for the final decision and solution to the court of al Da'i al-Mutlaq. The instructions given in this regard from the office of Al Da'i al-Mutlaq should then be obeyed.

6). It is incumbent upon an A'amil that he should not rely on the evidence of the letter only (documentary evidence excluded). Evidence of the letter is not valid but oral evidence is compulsory, as per the instructions and practice of Ahl al-Bayt (as). Moula Abi Abdillah Al Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) himself rejected the evidence presented to him through a letter. A person came and asked the Imam:

"O Son of Rasulullah (S)! My neighbor has brought a letter in which evidence has been recorded by me, but I am unaware of the fact. What is your verdict on this issue?"

Moula Abi Abdillah Al Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) replied:

"If you are unaware of the matter, then you are not a witness, although you may have written it and recognized your handwriting."

7). An A'amil should guide the followers of the Daw'ah towards the injunctions of the Shariah. He should especially instruct the children of the Daw'ah to attend the Salaat in Masjid punctually. The one who ignores the practice should be disciplined.

8). It is the duty of an A'amil to send a detailed report of his assigned area to Al Da'i al-Mutlaq regularly. He should not present any lame-excuse to forward any matter of his area, and should not indulge himself in any business or profession other than that assigned to him (Amalat).

9). It is incumbent upon an A'amil to live amongst the children of the Daw'ah with dignity and respect; he should neither damage his position nor force by demanding Salaam (money as an offering) or other gifts. He should spend his life with Qina'at (simplicity) and be penny-wise. Any small-value gift presented to him irrespective of its worth by Mumineen should be accepted wholeheartedly. He should not feel that any gift is below his dignity.

10). It is compulsory upon an A'amil to observe Taqwa; he must depend on in all matters upon Allah and ask for His help to solve the matters.

Code of Conduct of the A'amil defined by the 51st Ismaili Tayyibi Da'l al-Mutlaq, Dr. Sayyiduna Taher Saifuddin (ra) in the year 1377 (AH) in the guidance of Amir al-Mumineen Ali al-Murtada (as) given to his Umm'al. The Risalah contains 202 Articles, known as: al-Hidāyāt al-Mushriqah li-A'māl al-Bilād - 'The Illuminating Guides for the Works of the Country'.

(Published: by Al Jamea tus Saifyah, Surat, India.)

For the interest of the readership translation of only nineteen (19) selected Articles are presented here:

Article 11. *“An A’amil can be defined as a servant of Daw’ah. It is obligatory upon him to perform his duty continuously with sincerity of heart and soul as per the instruction of Daw’ah. For this reason, an A’amil should fulfill his responsibility so that the purpose of appointment may be achieved, and Allah may bestow upon him the best reward with the additional pleasure of his Imam and Da’i.”*

(Some A’amil, however, seem to imagine that an appointment is a coronation, so they conduct themselves as rulers and treat the public as if it were born to serve; and, as one might expect, their wives readily assume the airs of queens. Mumineen must therefore know their Huquq (rights) and decisively renounce the culture of flattery toward an A’amil, because such praise does not “honour” him; it merely feeds his arrogance, emboldens his excesses, and opens the door to corruption.)

Article 14. *“An A’amil can maintain the dignity of his position only if he follows and obeys the instructions of Al Da’i al-Mutlaq, and by doing his duty with sincerity and devotion. Haughtiness will become an impediment in maintaining cordial-relationship with the Mumineen, and can become an obstacle in the implementation of the instructions of Al Da’i al-Mutlaq. It is obligatory upon an A’amil that he maintains relations with humility. The 14th Shi’i Fatimi Ismaili Imam al-Muiz (as) says as follows:*

“The one who purifies his intentions and works and struggles to carry out good deeds, believes that the deeds he has performed were because Allah created him to do so. The work he does is then purified through our supporting hands, as Allah has bestowed that authority upon us. A’amil should realize that it is he who implanted in believer the habit of performing good deeds, which is not because of his strength (but Allah and His Wali), so he should not be proud of it. It will make him suitably fortunate for this world and the world hereafter. Allah has helped him with his support, and will recompense and reward him aplenty; he will gain in abundance beyond imagination. His intentions should be for Allah only, no one else than Him, as everything is related to his intentions, and for that he is rewarded and recompensed and punished too. And the one who is proud must be present to Allah with his arrogance.”

Article 30. *It is necessary for an A’amil to be punctual for Fard Salaat as it is one of the pillars of religion, and is a standard of Islam. This practice differentiates Mumin and Kafir. An A’amil should be aware of its importance and convey the same to the children of Al Daw’ah al-Hadiyah while stressing on punctuality as described in Qur’an and Shariah. While offering Salaat, a Mumin gets closer to Allah and between every two Salaat his sins are forgiven.*

(Some A’amil, it seems, have discovered a “new timetable” for Fardh Salah: punctuality appears only on prominent Islamic dates, when eyes are watching and attendance is noticed. On ordinary days, Salah is quietly demoted to a secondary matter, while the real “priorities” are preserved-endless meetings and engagements, as though the call of Allah may be kept waiting.)

Article 32. *"It is necessary for an A'amil to come to Masjid for Fard Salaat punctually and if he commits any error or shows slackness, he will be lacking in his virtues and eventually bounties will decrease. He should understand the advantages in offering Salaat in Masjid, and must call others towards it. It is the responsibility of the A'amil to explain the advantages in a manner which attracts people. For grooming personality and learning etiquettes and cultural values, regular attendance of Masjid is helpful. The A'amil should explain the twelve "Aad'ab of Masjid", including the basic rules of Salaat to Mumineen in detail and encourage them to follow the same."*

(As for etiquette, it appears to be entirely beneath them-far too "small" for such towering pride. What they have truly perfected is not Adab but abuse: foul language delivered with confidence, and insults reserved especially for the one person who dares to argue what is right, as though truth itself were an act of insolence).

Article 37. *"It is the prime responsibility of the A'amil to look after the health issues of the followers in his jurisdiction. He should encourage the followers to remain neat and clean and similarly take care of their residence. If anyone falls ill or experiences any health problems, the A'amil should visit them and provide assistance in the best possible manner."*

(Contrary to this Article, an A'amil's "concern" seems to awaken only in the presence of the wealthy-those from whom something can be extracted; the poor, meanwhile, may remain invisible, for they offer nothing to be "taken," and therefore merit, in his eyes, no attention at all.)

Article 38. *Through proper and timely diagnosis and prevention, one can prevent major health problems. For this purpose Ummal should work hard to make arrangements to provide medical facilities. In hospitals, maternity-services should be provided at low-cost which can help the members of the community.*

Article 39. *"It is indispensable for an A'amil to look after the funeral services in his area. Funeral arrangements should be arranged in a manner which ensures comfort and solace to the bereaved families."*

(Typically, an A'amil discovers the virtue of attendance only when the deceased is wealthy; otherwise, the poor are honoured with a substitute, some subordinate dispatched in his place, as though even Janazah has a "status threshold" for his presence.)

Article 40. *"An A'amil should carry the Janazah (coffin) of the Mumin, attend the funeral, and understand its reward. He should call others (Muntazim and Mumineen) to attend the funeral services, and explain its importance from time to time. Moreover, he should lead the Salaat al-Janazah without any impediment and hesitation and in the process become an example for the followers."*

(An A'amil, of course, is far too "occupied" to spare a mere two or three hours for a funeral; and so it is not uncommon that when someone passes away in the early morning, the Janazah is conveniently deferred until the evening, so that his many "engagements" may be satisfied first, as though the rights of the deceased must wait for his diary to clear).

Article 85. "It is indispensable for an A'amil to look forward for the betterment and unity of the community, and impart teachings for living with tranquility. Through harmony, unity and open-heartedness, people can be saved from unpleasant situations. Usually, behind every dispute or litigation is a misunderstanding or minor differences. It is the responsibility of the A'amil to take necessary action and to remove the difference of opinions, which may likely lead to a major problem in the future."

(For so "lofty" a responsibility, an A'amil should first manage the simple feat of reading Nahj al-Balaghah in full-only then may he begin, if he is truly inclined, to attempt practicing even a fraction of what it teaches).

Article 86. "A'amil should try his best to pronounce a decision acceptable to both the litigants. If disputed situation arises, then a jury consisted reputable members of the Jam'at should be appointed, and the A'amil should exercise as an Arbitrator. It is necessary for an A'amil to keep the executive body of the Jam'at up-to date while pronouncing any decision."

Article 87- It is essential for the A'amil to know that judgments are of two types. One is regarding cumulative and administrative matters, and the other is about religious affairs. In every decision, both aspects should be considered and then judgment should be delivered.

Article 119- In each city/town/village there are some regional customs, traditions and rituals. It is necessary for an A'amil to scrutinize them, and if he finds them repugnant to Shariah, he should immediately stop them. If, however, it is legal and recommended by Shariah, he should continue it and take necessary measures for its promotion. If he wishes to introduce any new ritual, he must consult Dawah authority so that any deficiency can be removed, if any. He should also obtain the permission (consent) and Dua of Al Da'i al-Mutlaq.

Article 136. "Funds of the Jam'at should be utilized properly so members of the community can benefit from it. Accounts should be maintained properly for this reason. Regular auditing is the responsibility of an A'amil."

(An A'amil often conducts himself as a ruler-so indifferent that even the Jam'at management opinion in projects is treated as a mere formality. Whatever he utters is presented as a "divine decision," beyond question, as though accountability were a sin; and it is no surprise, then, that only a rare few can actually implement Article 136 in practice.)

Article 137. "It is necessary for an "organized, peace loving community" that cordial relations be maintained with other schools of thought. In this regard, Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) directed as follows:

"You should mix with the people in such a way that when you live with them, they are attracted towards you and when you die, they cry upon you".

The A'amil should strive to maintain cordial relations with other communities and promote such activities"

(Usually, as long as an A'amil is spending time in public they are crying and when he is leaving they are enjoying. In some cases, as a human nature some A'amil are doing well so public responding them and when they are leaving they are weeping).

Article 139. *"A'amil should take interest in social contacts, outside of the community, which builds peace, harmony, tolerance and good relation amongst natives of that area. A'amil should explain that such activities would be helpful for local Jam'at and they can take benefits from it at various stages."*

Article 140. *"One must strictly follow the law of the land. For the welfare of the nation, and prosperity of the country, Mumineen must contribute in the development programs."*

(Spirit of charity and welfare is disappeared from our people at large. A research is necessary on the root cause behind these ideal Talim of Islam.)

Article 152. *"Basic causes of any problem which creates hurdles in handling the affairs of Madrasah by the Muallimeen should be attended to. If any Muallim is not well versed with modern teaching methodology, their efficiency is decreased. Furthermore, lack of appreciation of the teaching-staff discourages their morale. Both these matters are interlinked which creates lack of interest. It is therefore necessary for the A'amil to encourage teachers of the Madrasah and take care of them."*

Article 156. *"Besides the Madaris, it is important for an A'amil to maintain contacts with the students of schools and colleges to inculcate in them the 'ilm of Ahl al-Bayt (as) through sincere devotion for Al Daw'ah al-Hadiyah and love for the country and nation. Moula Abi Abdillah Al Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) said:*

"If a youngster from my Shiah who is not educated comes to me, I would teach him manners." Therefore, it is necessary to maintain a proper procedure for the education and training of youngsters."

Article 157. *"It is necessary that Umm'al should provide proper guidance to school and college students. Well informed Umm'al can advise students regarding government/private scholarships which can help in their education. It is necessary that students acquire modern-education, as per the need of the time, which will definitely help them in their professional life."*

(In practice, an A'amil can scarcely advise students on higher education or scholarships unless he is himself genuinely versed in such matters-yet, more often than not, worldly education is precisely the field in which he is least acquainted, while still offering "guidance" with the usual confidence).

Concluding discussion:

Prior to closing this topic, it is necessary to discuss the misuse of power by an A'amil. Those who are assigned power for religious affairs should not override the amplitude of their powers. Generally problems are created due to misuse of the power of Raza by an A'amil/Masul/authorized for it. It is the direction of Al Da'i al-Mutlaq that if an A'amil or an assigned for granting permission exceeds limit, creates hurdles, and misrepresents authority, then children of the Dawah should report to Al Da'i al-Mutlaq, without any miasma of reservation and hesitation. Historical records provide several unpleasant happenings only due to mishandling of power and command of permission, and misdeeds committed by an A'amil. "Nahj al-Balagha" provides us with a number of Letters of Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) to his Umm'al as precedent, and the manner in which he strictly handled them, irrespective of their status. When he found them guilty of any major sin or crime, they were terminated permanently.

Taken as a single architecture, the code is not a collection of pious exhortations; it is a compliance framework. Its first control is internal: self-governance, modesty, and principled speech restrict the ego that typically precedes institutional abuse. The second is structural: consultation with the learned, strict criteria for functionaries, and evidentiary discipline reduce discretionary arbitrariness. The third is financial: permissioned spending, audited accounts, and proportional Zakat collection treat Bayt al-Mal as a trust, not a reward of office. The fourth is jurisdictional: the A'amil's authority is expressly derivative-he administers under the command of al-Da'i al-Mutlaq and cannot lawfully inflate his designation into sovereignty. The critical gap arises where "delegation" is socially performed as dominion: coercive fundraising, selective access to the wealthy, suppression of legitimate questioning, and weaponization of "authority" as a private gatekeeping tool. The texts anticipate this failure mode by prescribing reporting upward, hearing both sides, and terminating offenders irrespective of status. Therefore, the logically consistent application is clear: community members must know their Huquq (rights), flattery must be socially stigmatized as a driver of corruption, and institutional remedies (documentation, audits, periodic review, and appreciation to the Da'i's court) must be treated as routine governance, not as exceptional dissent. Only then does the A'amil remain what the code intends: a servant accountable to Allah, law, and the people he is assigned to serve.

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