

The Ideal Leadership

Ahmed H. Sheriff.

THE IDEAL LEADERSHIP

IN COMMEMORATION OF 1400th YEAR
OF THE BIRTHDAY OF IMAM HUSAIN (A.S.)

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Published by:
Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania
P. O. Box 20033
Dar es Salaam - Tanzania

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Need of leadership	4
Qualities of good leadership	7
A leader by example	10
The heart of a leader	11
Straight ways of leadership	12
Fair dealing with people	14
Sharing the afflictions of people	17
Leader's misuse of position unacceptable . . .	21
Prerequisites of leadership	27
The outlook of a leader	31
The right of a leader	34
Good leadership inspires teamwork spirit . . .	37
Islamic mentality of a true leader	39
Humility essential for ideal leadership	44
Special favour to leader unacceptable	47
The impact of leader's character	50
Danger in accepting a villains leadership . . .	54
Summary	57

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the days of my youth, I have been fond of reading biographies and watching the life-styles of prominent leaders with particular study of the causes of their rise and fall and the impressions they leave behind on the minds of people. Besides in the course of my wide travelling to distant lands and visits to historical places, I have had an opportunity of gaining an insight into those factors which go to promote and demote the position of a leader, be he a national, communal, religious or a social one. My contacts with people in religious and social fields have also provided me with an idea of what leadership means.

This interest on my part has prompted me to research into the guidance available to us on ideal leadership in Islam in the light of the Holy Qur'an, Islamic traditions and history. The outcome of extensive efforts is this booklet containing a number of viewpoints on the subject, with valuable and relevant quotations from authentic sources.

We are living today in a world beset with widespread cases of corruption and misuse of high positions in almost every country. Mental attitudes have become so materialistic that leadership in general has reached a stage where it is more seen to serve selfish interests and less to serve mankind. The result is chaos, mistrust and calamities.

That this booklet will succeed in bringing about a right understanding and provide guidance on ideal leadership where needed, is my fervent hope.

A special request to readers, one and all. Let this booklet be studied seriously and encourage others also to do so. Let it also find a place in public libraries and help the noble cause of creating awareness of Islamic values.

15th July, 1984
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Grateful thanks to M/s K. N. Panju, M. M. Kermali, M. A. Jaffer and. Y. G. Dharsi for reviewing the language and making valuable suggestions.

NEED OF LEADERSHIP

Man is a social animal. He is divinely endowed with gregarious nature to meet socially, to plan and do tasks in groups, to delight in company, to share and enjoy fruits and even to arise against a common enemy. He even wants to survive, defend, gain and progress. Any group or society, with its diverse needs and talents invariably needs a leader to provide unity of purpose and guidance when needed. Thus leadership is vital in religious, social and political affairs.

Certain creatures too living in a group have a leader to follow. For example the honey-bee. They instinctively follow their Queen – their leader and establish new colonies. Hence the usual practice of honey producers to pick up the Queen-bee from among the bee-hives in the wild and place it in a selected place in order to manufacture a bee-hive and automatically the bees follow.

Stressing the need of leadership, the Imam Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.) said,

إننا لا نجد فرقة من الفرق ولا ملة من الملل بقوا وعاشوا إلا
بقيم ورئيس ولما لا بد لهم منه في أمر الدين والدنيا

“We do not find any sect from sects nor any creed from creeds (of the world) survive and last long except with a guardian and a chief (to supervise them) in their religious and worldly affairs.”¹

In Islam much stress has been laid on acquisition of knowledge and acting with justice and fairplay. The presence of numerous verses and traditions on these two subjects denote their paramount importance in the progress of mankind. As such it can be rightly said that an ideal leadership mainly rests upon possession of adequate knowledge and quality of acting justly with people. Unless a leader has these two things, he can not be expected to benefit and render service to his people with his leadership.

1 Bihar, Vol. 3, p. 109.

For the selectors or electors and for the one aspiring to become a leader of any group of people, it is expedient and desirable to know the qualities which befit the position of leadership. The following saying of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) throws light on the duty of a leader:

من نصب نفسه للناس إماماً فليبدأ بتعليم نفسه قبل تعليم غيره. وليكن تأديبه بسيرته قبل تأديبه بلسانه. ومعلم نفسه ومؤدبها أحق بالإجلال من معلم الناس ومؤدبهم

“Whoever places himself as a leader of the people should commence with educating his own self before educating others. And his teaching should be by his own conduct before teaching by the tongue. The person who teaches and instructs his own self is more entitled to esteem than he who teaches and instructs others.”²

In other words, one should first be willing to search into his own innerself and endeavour to discard his own defects. To

2 *Nahjul Balagha*, saying 73.

be accepted as a leader, one should be of impeccable character and true to his words. Then and only then his leadership would be effective. He must be a leader by example than by mere words. How important it is for one's actions to match with his spoken words can be seen from the following Qur'anic verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ

“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do.”³

QUALITIES OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) is reported to have said that four qualities are requisite in a leader:

1. Chastity,
2. Good Character,
3. Generosity and
4. Intelligence.⁴

3 Holy Qur'an, 61:2.

4 *Maktabe Islam*.

Obviously a leader whose private life lacks chastity and decency, whose character and conduct is demoralizing and who is devoid of generosity, wisdom and insight would not command the respect and following of his people.

In another saying related by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) that the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) had said,

لا تصلح الإمامة إلا لرجل فيه ثلاث خصال: ورع يحجزه
عن معاصي الله وحلم يملك به غضبه وحسن الولاية على
من يلي حتى يكون لهم كالوالد الرحيم

“Leadership would not impart benefit except of a person possessing three qualities:

- 1. Such Piety that prevents him from committing sins.*
- 2. and Forbearance with which he can control his anger.*
- 3. and Authority with which he rules (over people in such a way) till he becomes like a kindly father.”⁵*

5 *Usoole Kafi.*

Obviously such a leader with no sufficient piety and fear of Allah which enables one to control his actions is likely to commit such sins and errors that would harm the interests of his people. His impious way of life would debar him from enjoying their respect and confidence.

Besides if a leader lacks forbearance and suffers from fits of outrage and anger, he would commit such actions as to harm others and injure their feelings. This would fail him to attract their support and co-operation.

An oppressive ruler who exercises his authority with show of power causes fear to be aroused and prevents his people from enjoying mental peace and security. A true leader needs to appear like a kindly father and not a harsh authoritarian.

Describing some of the traits of the pious and beloved of God, The Holy Qur'an says,

وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“....and those who control their anger and are forgiving to men and Allah loves the doers of good.”⁶

A LEADER BY EXAMPLE

Once there was scarcity of wheat in Madina. The price in the bazaar was mounting upwards every day. People out of panic were busy purchasing more and more in order to hoard the grain. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) asked his store-keeper the amount of stock held in the house and he was informed that it was more than sufficient. The stock of wheat held in the house would last for some months to come.

When the Imam learnt of this, he at once gave the instruction to sell the whole stock to the people and then to buy domestic needs on day to day basis from the bazaar.

⁶ Holy Qur'an, 3:134.

He also gave instructions that wheat and barley be used in equal proportion when baking the daily bread so as to economise the consumption of wheat.

Thus the Imam set an invaluable example of anti-hoarding and displayed the true spirit of leadership by illustration.

THE HEART OF A LEADER

Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) is reported to have said:

آلة الرياسة سعة الصدر

“The means of securing leadership is a generous heart.”⁷

What it means is that a good leader needs to have a kind and munificent but discerning heart whereby he does not act with emotion, does not take hasty decisions, nor does he come under easy influence of others who may be trying to poison his ears. Being ever concerned

⁷ *Nahjul Balagha*, saying 176.

with exercising fairplay and differentiating between what is right and wrong, he persistently displays forbearance and thinks more while he speaks less.

An ideal and true leader does not harbour in his heart personal interests or such inclinations and attachments which are likely to influence his decisions. His primary concern is the welfare of his people and pleasure of Allah. He does not worry about what people say or criticize on the mode and course of his action.

His motto is always service and not self-interest or self-glory. He acts calmly when faced with crises and with far-sightedness lest he aggravates a situation. He also aims at maintaining unity among his people even at the sacrifice of his own interest.

STRAIGHT WAYS OF LEADERSHIP

During his Caliphate, Imam Ali bin Abi

Talib (a.s.) was once approached by frustrated well-wishers with a suggestion to bring down the treacherous and usurper Mua'wiyah, his arch enemy, by means of some tricks and conspiracy. The Imam replied by explaining that divine laws and commands could only be exercised by the one who fulfils three conditions:

لا يقيم أمر الله سبحانه إلا من لا يصانع ولا يضارع ولا
يتبع المطامع

1. *One who does not conspire and play tricks in the affairs of people.*
2. *One who abstains from falsehood and does wrap the garb of untruth over his action.*
3. *One who does not cast covetous eyes over properties of people.⁸*

From the foregoing, we learn that dishonest ways of dealings are anathema at all times even when facing an enemy. Concealing true nature of one's actions and

8 *Nahjul Balagha*, saying 110.

presenting false picture is undesirable and one should never cherish selfish interest in the properties of others. Should he not be free of such base character, he would not command respect and trust of the people whom he leads.

FAIR DEALING WITH PEOPLE

When Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) appointed Muhammad bin Abi Bakr as governor of Egypt, he gave him comprehensive instructions in regard to dealings with people during the course of his duties as their leader. The essence is:

فاخفض لهم جناحك، وألن لهم جانبك، وادبسط لهم وجهك،
وأس بينهم في اللحظة والنظرة حتى لا يطمع العظماء في
حيفك لهم ولا ييأس الضعفاء من عدلك بهم،

1. *Behave humbly with people.*
2. *Keep yourself lenient and meet with them whole-heartedly.*
3. *Accord them equal treatment so that the affluent do not expect unjustified favour*

*from you. The needy and the poor do not get disappointed of your justice.*⁹

Once during his reign as Caliph, Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) had proclaimed from the pulpit that he would not discriminate even by one dirham in the process of distribution of *Baytul-Maal* (the state treasury). All were to be treated equitably. From the gathering, a very close relative of Ali stood up and yelled and irritably asked whether he too, was going to be treated on equal basis as a black man in Madina.

Being terribly annoyed with such an unfair question, Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) reacted sharply by asking him to sit down. He then asked him what superiority could be expected in Islam except on basis of *Taqwa* (piety), provided he had it.

For anyone to suggest discrimination on the basis of color or any high status

⁹ *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 27.

in life was so abhorring to Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) that it made him react sharply. He condemned it on the spot even though it was raised by his own close relative among the people present. This shows the paramount importance for a leader to exercise absolute fairplay and justice.

أملك حمية أنفك وسورة حدك، وسطوة يدك، وغرب لسانك.
واحترس من كل ذلك بكف البادرة وتأخير السطوة حتى
يسكن غضبك فتملك الاختيار، ولن تحكم ذلك من
نفسك حتى تكثر همومك بذكر المعاد إلى ربك

“Have control over (your) sense of prestige, any outburst of anger, the might of your arm and sharpness of your tongue. Guard against all this by avoiding haste and by delaying severe action till your anger subsides and you regain your self-control. You cannot withhold yourself from this unless you bear in mind that you have to return to Allah.”¹⁰

10 Nahjul Balagha, letter 53.

Anger has been described as a kind of madness. One who is overtaken by a fit of anger tends to lose self-control and act harshly and unfairly.

Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) advises leaders to exercise control over their tempers and accustom their minds to this by constant remembrance of Allah that to Him is the ultimate return when they would have to account for their misdeeds and injustice to others.

SHARING THE AFFLICTIONS OF PEOPLE

An ideal leader of a society is the one who ever remains aware and conscious of the problems afflicting his people. The one who feels deeply concerned of their poverty, sickness and lack of means for their upliftment. Despite himself having sufficient provisions of food and other amenities for his own home, he refrains

from remaining satiated in order to share with his people in their afflictions.

Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) when as Caliph of the Muslim Ummah appointed Uthman bin Hunaif as his governor of Basra. When he came to know that the people of that place had invited him to a banquet and served him with sumptuous dishes, he wrote him a letter with the following words of reprovment:

وما ظننت أنك تجيب إلى طعام قوم عائلهم مجفوا. وغنيهم
مدعو

“I never thought that you would accept the feast of a people who turn out the beggars and invite the rich....”¹¹

ألا وإن لكل مأموم إماما يقتدى به ويستضيء بنور علمه،
ألا وإن إمامكم قد اكتفى من دنياه بطمريه، ومن طعمه
بقرصيه

“Remember that every follower has a leader

11 *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 45.

whom he follows and from the brightness of whose knowledge he takes light. Realize that your Imam has contented himself with two shabby pieces of cloth out of the (comforts of the) world and two loaves for his meal....¹²

فوالله ما كنت من دنياكم تبرا، ولا ادخرت من غنائمها
وفرا، ولا أعددت لبالي ثوبي طمرا

By Allah I have not treasured any gold out of your world nor amassed plentiful wealth nor collected any clothes other than the two shabby sheets.....¹³

ولو شئت لاهتديت الطريق إلى مصفى هذا العسل ولباب
هذا القمح ونسائج هذا القز، ولكن هيهات أن يغلبني
هواي ويقودني جسعي إلى تخير الأظعمة. ولعل بالحجاز أو
اليمامة من لا طمع له في القرص ولا عهد له بالشيع، أو أبيت
مبطانا وحوالي بطون غرثي وأكباد حري؟

If I wished, I could have taken the path of

12 Nahjul Balagha, letter 45.

13 Nahjul Balagha, letter 45.

(relishing such pleasures as) pure honey, refined wheat and silk clothing but it cannot be that my possessions should lead me and my greed should make me enjoy good meals, while there may be people in Hijaz or Yamamah who have no hope of getting bread and who do not get a full meal. Should I lie with a satiated belly in the midst of hungry bellies and thirsty livers?”¹⁴

Perhaps those leaders and men in high positions who are accustomed to amassing wealth by dubious means and live a life of pomp and extravagance would draw lesson from the above words of the Imam. Their doing so is in fact at the expense of the poor masses who ill-afford the rising cost of basic needs of life.

أأقنع من نفسي بأن يقال أمير المؤمنين ولا أشاركهم في مكاره
الدهر

“Shall I be content with being called

14 *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 45.

*Ameerul-mu'mineen (The Commander of the Faithful) although I do not share with the people in their hardships of the world?"*¹⁵

Ibn Abee Rafay says that on an Idd day sitting with Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) he saw a bag containing dry pieces of bread softened with water. He asked, "Has God prohibited you to eat better food?" The Imam replied, "No, but I want to eat the kind of food which the poorest of this realm can afford atleast once a day. I shall improve it after I have improved their standard of life."

LEADER'S MISUSE OF POSITION UNACCEPTABLE

One of the main subjects on which the dailies these days present to us fresh news of our morning reading is the ever-increasing cases of fraud and corruption. Be they committed by individuals or by those in high positions

¹⁵ *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 45.

in public institutions, the news are indeed sickening for honest readers. It makes one wonder if in our midst of generation of thugs and crooks is being allowed to grow up. So daring have those involved become that the amounts of funds or properties disappearing run into millions of shillings.

This subject would appear more appalling and tragic when one observes that those involved are men in high public positions, those relied upon and entrusted with the job of safeguarding public properties. Let us view this question in the light of past Islamic history and may be we get an idea of the causes behind this scourge and possible solution for it.

By the time Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) was implored upon by the Muslim Ummah to accept to accept the Caliphate and when he reluctantly did so, there had existed a state of widespread corrupt practices. Even some of the governors and commissioners

in the Islamic state had succumbed to temptations of misuse of public properties. Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) embarked upon eradicating all sorts of corrupt practices in his administration as he strived day and night to establish an Islamic rule of social justice free of frauds and nepotism. In his letter to a commissioner of some area, he wrote:

بلغني أنك جردت الأرض فأخذت ما تحت قدميك وأكلت
ما تحت يديك، فارفع إلي حسابك، واعلم أن حساب الله
أعظم من حساب الناس

“... I have been given to understand that you have taken possession of state lands and that you have not only brought them under personal use but have also misappropriated government money. Will you immediately send detailed accounts (about both the items). Remember the reckoning of the Lord (on the Day of Judgement) is far more severe than an audit which man can carry out.”¹⁶

16 Nahjul Balagha, letter 40.

How imperative it is for leaders and heads of institutions to keep a look out for cases of frauds and misappropriation and be ready to demand accounts and explanation from those responsible is what we learn from the foregoing. This could only be done effectively by those who have clean hands and maintain straight records themselves.

In the eyes of Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) more than the human audit and scrutiny is the fear of Allah and His reckoning and chastisement in after life that is effective in checking human misdeeds. Hence his repeated mention of this in his sayings, sermons and letters to his officers and people. The fact is that unless man is made to inculcate in his mind the fear of his Lord and conviction about the severe accounting before Him one day to come, he could hardly be expected to exercise self-control over his actions.

Again to one of his provincial governors who ran away with public treasury, he wrote this:

واختطفت ما قدرت عليه من أموالهم المصونة لأراملهم
وأيتامهم اختطاف الذئب الأزل دامية المعزى الكسيرة،
فحملته إلى الحجاز

“You invaded the public treasury and you looted as much as was possible the money which was reserved for old, widows, orphans and the poor. In this plunder, your action was so quick, so nimble and so effective that it resembled the action of a very active and weary wolf attacking and snatching away a wounded and helpless goat. You have with pleasure sent this looted wealth to Hijaz.”¹⁷

From the foregoing, it is evident that Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) was drawing attention to those in high public positions, that they should not lose sight of the fact that any misuse of public funds is in fact directly or indirectly from funds reserved for the

¹⁷ *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 41.

upliftment of the poor of whom some could be orphans and widows as well. How would they like others to misappropriate properties belonging to their own widows or orphans when they were no more alive in this mortal world? Again in expressing the resemblance of such people with a wolf snatching away a wounded helpless goat, the Imam was in fact exposing their extreme cruelty and lack of sense of humanity and sympathy over the weak and poor.

Thus we see that the scourge of misuse of positions and frauds in one form or the other to have been in existence even in olden times. Man is so greedy and hasty in his desire to grow rich overnight as if it were his main aim of life. Unless he is provided with high moral education and his mind is effectively inculcated with fear of Allah, with conviction of his having to account for his deeds and misdeeds, no other method could be more effective

to check his actions. Those engaged in fraudulent practices for amassing wealth forget that in the end they are the losers as the natural law of 'tit for tat' works its way. Easy comes easy goes as the saying goes, the illicitly acquired wealth irrespective of hardship caused to others does not last nor does it provide true happiness.

What is essentially needed today is effective moral education with regular lessons on ethics to be introduced in schools. Similarly moral awakening through lectures and seminars in public institutions need be given paramount importance. Let leaders of every department in public institutions also set examples by their upright character and honest efficient services for the welfare of the public.

PREREQUISITES OF LEADERSHIP

In Islam leadership rests mainly upon two things – Knowledge and Justice.

It is obvious that without sufficient knowledge about the people whom he is to lead, their conditions and requirements, a leader would not be able guide them aright. For this, a leader needs not only right informants but also to remain personally in closer and constant touch with his people and be concerned about their affairs.

Besides unless a leader possesses a full sense of justice and fairplay and is free of constraints of sentiments of blood, commercial, monetary or any worldly attachments, he would not be expected to act fairly and justly with his people nor enjoy their confidence and respect.

The olden past history of Iran prior to the advent of Islam has recorded Nawsherwan as the most just and fair-minded person having ever lived in the world. So strict was his sense of justice over the people over whom he ruled that his name became

synonymous with JUSTICE. Interesting tales about his rule of justice have been told. During his days of childhood, Nawsherwan had a teacher who was exceedingly far-sighted and concious of practical ways of training his students.

Once the teacher without any reason suddenly embarked upon scolding and even canning Nawsherwan. So severe was the beating that he cried loudly and the hatred and prejudice for this remained forever in his heart. When Nawsherwan grew up and became the king of Iran, he thought of taking a revenge. He called upon that teacher and inquired to know the reasons for that undue punishment and beating during his childhood. The reply from the teacher was:

“I noticed that you were paying exceedingly good attention in doing your lessons. I was confident of your ability in future and that you were going to inherit the kingdom after your father had passed away.

I preferred to see you taste beforehand the pang of oppression and injustice so that you do no injustice to anyone when you become the king.”¹⁸

On hearing this, Nawsherwan was amused and he smiled.

When asked wherefrom did he learn the strict and deep sense of justice, Nawsherwan replied:

“Once during the early days of my kingship, I had gone out to the woods for hunting accompanied by my armymen. I witnessed a strange incident. I saw someone hitting a dog with a stone which broke its leg. After a short while I saw a horse galloping by and kicking that man thereby breaking his leg. And hardly a few steps had that horse run when suddenly its leg ran into a ditch and fracturing itself. On watching this sequence of events and the ‘tit for tat’, I learnt a lesson that oppression and injustice in this world is

18 Minhaju Soroor, p. 80.

swiftly repaid in the same coin hence I resolved to rule and tolerate no injustice whatsoever in my kingdom.”¹⁹

So famous did he become as *Nawsherwane Aadil* (a just ruler) in the world that even the Prophet of Islam is mentioned to have said,

ولدت في زمن الملك العادل

“I was born during the time of the just king.”²⁰

What can be concluded from the above tales is that would-be leaders need to be trained to inculcate in their minds the deep sense of acting justly and fairly with all people.

THE OUTLOOK OF A LEADER

What sort of an outlook should a leader of an institution have can best be learnt from the following words of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.). In his detailed letter of

¹⁹ *Minhaju Soroor*, p. 81.

²⁰ *Minhaju Soroor*, p. 83.

instructions to his last Governor designate of Egypt Malik bin al-Harith al-Ashtar:

وإياك والإعجاب بنفسك والثقة بما يعجبك منها وحب
الاطراء فإن ذلك من أوثق فرص الشيطان في نفسه ليمحق
ما يكون من إحسان المحسنين

“You should avoid self admiration having reliance in what appears good in yourself and love or exaggerated praise because this is one of the most reliable opportunities for satan to obliterate the good deeds of the virtuous.”²¹

A self-esteemed and over-confident leader is not likely to listen to the views of people nor would he tolerate their criticisms. As such he may run the risk of misjudgement and taking dangerous decisions harmful to their welfare. And if he also succumbs to flattery and cheap praise of people around him, he is likely to become biased and act unfairly. Therefore the paramount need for a leader is to inculcate in himself a sense of deep humility if he is to succeed.

21 *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 53.

وإياك والمن على رعيتك بإحسانك، أو التزيد فيما كان من فعلك أو أن تعدهم فتتبع موعدك بخلفك، فإن المن يبطل الاحسان، والتزيد يذهب بنور الحق، والخلف يوجب المقت عند الله والناس

“Avoid showing (the existence of) obligation on your subjects for having done good to them or praising your own actions or making promises and then breaking them because showing obligation destroys good, self-praise takes away the light of truth and breaking promises earns the hatred of Allah and of the people.”²²

Obviously a kind act loses its charm and reward from Allah when done under obligation because of impure aim. The one who is accustomed to exaggerate in his own words is not truthful and would not easily be trusted. And the one who is in the habit of breaking promises is not only liable to be mistrusted but also to earn hatred of people.

22 *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 53.

THE RIGHT OF A LEADER

In his treatise of rights, Imam Zayn al-Abideen (a.s.) is mentioned to have said that:

فأما حق سائسك بالسلطان فأن تعلم أنك جعلت له فتنة
وأنه مبتلى فيك بما جعله الله له عليك من السلطان

“As to the rights of a Sultan (Chief-leader), you should be aware that he is already burdened with deep problems and subjected to hard test for your sake.” (Therefore do not cause to overload him with extra problems).²³

Normally a leader is mentally burdened and heavily occupied in the discharge of his numerous duties for his people. He very much needs peace of mind and co-operation from the people. Therefore it is only prudent and reasonable not to add to his burdens. It is only fair to expect people to be considerate and assist him in his duties.

²³ *Torasul A'eemma*, p. 275.

Unfortunately in some societies today, the role of a leader is reduced to that of a supervisor, to oversee traditional rites and settle some disputes here and there. In a society which aims high, a leader with a desire to do real good for his people needs to have a wide scope. Indeed such a person may have high ambition to uplift the standard of his people in several spheres.

In the circumstances, whereas he is performing more important duties, it is but fair that he is absolved of worrying about, say spoons and plates at a feast or chairs at a meeting. Alas! He gets frustrated and exhausted at times with limited and narrow scope allowed for his role. Moreover, cheap criticism, distracting and divisive arguments by those with superiority complex deprives him of peace of mind he always needs.

Therefore it is only fair that people should know that they have a duty to be

considerate and co-operate with their leader in the discharge of his duties.

Obviously no leader shoulder his responsibilities smoothly without the help of advisers. As such it becomes imperative for him to choose and seek advice from the right people to ensure that he is not misled on any issue. To Malik al-Ashtar, the governor-designate of Egypt, Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) gave the following advice:

ولا تدخلن في مشورتك بخيلا يعدل بك عن الفضل ويعدك
الفقر، ولا جباناً يضعفك عن الأمور، ولا حريصاً يزين لك
الشره بالجور، فإن البخل والجبن والحرص غرائز شتى يجمعها
سوء الظن بالله.

“Do not include among those you consult a miser who would keep you back from being generous and caution you against destitution. Nor a coward who would make you feel too weak for your affairs. Nor a greedy person who would make beautiful to you the collection of wealth by evil

ways. This is because although miserliness, cowardice and greed are different qualities, yet they are common in having an incorrect idea about Allah.”²⁴

GOOD LEADERSHIP INSPIRES TEAMWORK SPIRIT

A true and intelligent leader does not display his superiority over his people nor does he impose himself or stage his personal show-off. Instead, he inspires and encourages teamwork spirit. Consultation and exchange of views become the rule rather than exception in order to get the best out of his colleagues. This involvement in decision making wins their confidence, strengthens their will and resolution and boosts determination to shoulder responsibilities. Thereby they get satisfaction of accomplishment through teamwork for common good.

²⁴ *Nahjul Balagha*, letter 53.

By accustoming his mind and remembering to say 'Thank You' in sincere appreciation of every small or big service rendered, he is likely to attract more co-operation and assistance from his colleagues and from public in his work programs.

The Prophet of Islam was once on a journey in the desert of Arabia accompanied by his companions. They broke the journey at a place for prayers, and distributed among themselves the jobs to be done for cooking food. One started clearing the ground, another sent to fetch water and another prepared to slaughter a lamb for meat. They saw the prophet move out to gather firewood. His companions protested saying they did not expect their leader to take part and soil his hands in such activity. The Prophet smiled and replied he would not sit idle and would participate in the work like everyone else. Allah did not like him to exalt his position over his companions. So saying the Prophet went and brought in firewood from the bush.

In such an august personality as the Holy Prophet displayed such humility and spirit of working in union with his followers, should not leaders emulate this noble example?

ISLAMIC MENTALITY OF A TRUE LEADER

It is an accepted fact that the destiny of a community or a nation rests a great deal on its leader. However, elected with massive votes of the people one may be, and whatever outward magnetism and high show of dignity he may possess, yet a great deal of inner purity of heart, sincere intentions to serve his people and tactful handling of problems are essential to make one an ideal and worthy leader. When one is entrusted with leadership in a society, the power and prestige that it carries with it is likely to corrupt his mind. He could be tempted to consider himself above all others. He may be misled to consider

himself above law and feel safe to subjugate people under him.

The holy Qur'an has repeatedly emphasised upon people particularly those with authority to act with fairplay and justice:

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ ۤأَلَّا تَعْدِلُوۡا ۗ اَعْدِلُوۡا هُوَ اَقْرَبُ
لِلتَّقْوٰى

“And let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly; deal justly, that is nearer to piety.”²⁵

Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) strongly believed in the equality of all and preference or special consideration to none before the rule of Islamic law and justice. Not even the Caliph himself was to be given any special attention before a Qadhi in the Islamic court.

While returning from the battle of

25 Holy Qur'an, 5:8.

Siffin, Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) had lost his armour. After a few days, it was found that christian was wearing it. The Imam demanded it back but that man refused claiming to be his own property. He filed a case against him in the Islamic court of the time before Qadhi Shuraih.

When the case was mentioned, the christian argued that the armour was his property, the proof being that it was in his personal possession. When Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) was asked to submit his evidence, he said, "This is my armour which I have neither sold nor gifted."

The Qadhi felt that whilst there could be no doubt against the claim of Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.), the plaintiff, the burden of the proof i.e. the possession of the armour by the defendant, was against him. In absence of enough and reliable evidence otherwise, the Qadhi was hesitating to give judgement against him in his position as Caliph of the

Ummah (nation). On noticing this, Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) told him not hesitate but issue the judgement as was befitting and in accordance with the rule of the court.

The verdict then issued was against Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) who cheerfully accepted it. But the christian was so much impressed with such a fair and just rule of law that he later went to Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) and willingly surrendered the illicitly possessed armour and also accepted Islam as a true faith. The Caliph in welcoming this new convert offered him back the armour as well as a horse as gifts from him.

Would a Caliph of a stature and exalted position of Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) file in the Islamic court such a weak suit in which he knew he would not be able to produce accepted evidence? Or was he so much attached to his armour as to rush to the court without confidence of being able to prove his case?

Such are the questions which could arise in the mind of any simple reader of this incidence.

The fact is that the Prophets and Imams as infallible representatives of Allah on earth, were not in their life actions concerned about their self-esteem nor personal material interests. Their very action was totally aimed at imparting guidance to mankind and setting noble examples worth emulating for others. They acted in strict obedience to and for the pleasure of Allah.

In my opinion Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) might have deliberately filed the suit in order to test the Qadhi's fair style of dispensing with justice and also to set an example of the right procedure to be followed in an Islamic court.

Not only was the ideal example set of the rule of law and justice, but also of refraining from the misuse of position as a Caliph and leader of the nation.

HUMILITY ESSENTIAL FOR LEADERSHIP

Lest man in his narrow and secular outlook considers himself big and exalted on attainment of high position in the society, Imam Ali bin Husayn Zain al-Abideen (a.s.) has in his supplication of Makarim guided us to pray in these words:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ، وَلَا تَرْفَعْنِي فِي النَّاسِ دَرَجَةً إِلَّا
حَظَّطْتَنِي عِنْدَ نَفْسِي مِثْلَهَا، وَلَا تُحَدِّثْ لِي عِزًّا ظَاهِرًا إِلَّا
أَحَدَّتْ لِي ذِلَّةً بَاطِنَةً عِنْدَ نَفْسِي بِقَدْرِهَا.

“O my Lord! Bless Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his progeny, and do not elevate my status in the eyes of the people but at the same time make me think lower of myself to the same extent and do not bless me with an outward honor until You make me inculcate humility in my innerself.”²⁶

Attainment of an elevated position of high honor is likely to corrupt the mind

26 Sahifa Al-Kamilah, Sup. 20.

of not coupled with a deep inner sense of humility. A leader, however elevated before his people he may be, he is not likely to render true and fair service to them if he does not develop and cherish inner humility. It would not be out of place to quote herewith some of the words of advice by Sayed Khomeini at the investiture ceremony of President-elect Muhamadali Rajaie:

“As long as a man’s outlook and perception is limited and secular, worldly status is likely to intoxicate him. Once in our hearts we have been enlightened with the Divine radiance and submission to Him, such insignificant worldly status is not likely to impress us. Yesterday you were a Prime Minister, before that you were a Cabinet Minister, and before that you were a School Teacher, and further before that you were a simple student at school. And it is not known when you will depart from this world. It is likely that immediately after you leave or even while you are present here, a bomb may explode and liquidate all of us.”

If this is a factual possibility, why should one's character change after he is elected President? After all what is Presidency? What is it before a person whose heart is lit with the light of Monotheism? What is the whole of universe compared with the glory and magnificence of the Blessed and Supreme Lord? The whole of this material universe has no significant weight compared with the spiritual world, wherefore should we, as a headman of a village, or a alderman of a city or the head of the state think that we are now something and look upto ourselves and down upon others?"²⁷

Thus only when a leader broadens his outlook and deepens his perception into the spiritual world that he can find that this worldly status is very insignificant and transient. When he looks down upon himself as nothing in this vast universe and embarks upon serving mankind with his status that it would be appreciated in Islam.

27 Tehran Times.

Almighty Allah had revealed upon the Prophet to be humble and gentle before the believers as can be seen from the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

وَاخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

*“And lower the wing (make yourself gentle) to the believers.”*²⁸

The metaphors is from a bird who lowers her wing in tender solicitude for the little ones.

SPECIAL FAVOUR TO LEADER UNACCEPTABLE

It was during the times of his caliphate when once Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) accompanied by his slave Qambar went to a bazaar of Kufa. They entered a shop and inquired about some kind of garments. The shopkeeper recognizing his status promptly responded by saying,

28 Holy Qur'an, 15:88.

“O Ameer al-Mu’mineen! I can supply what you need.”

When Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) found out that the shopkeeper was making a gesture of special attention and possible favour to him being conscious of his high status, he withdrew without making any bargain. Both then entered another shop and the Imam purchased two garments, the superior one at three dirhams he presented to Qambar (his slave) and inferior one at two dirhams he retained for himself. On seeing this Qambar said,

“O my master! It is you who should wear the better quality garment as you have to go up the pulpit to deliver sermons.”

To this Ali (a.s.) replied,

“No Qambar! It is you who should wear the better garment because you are young and like other young ones, your desire for adornment is more. Besides I am ashamed before God that my clothing be better than

yours because I have heard the Prophet of Islam recommending: Clothe and feed your slave the same way you do for yourselves!"

From the foregoing incidence, some useful lessons worth emulating are derived:

1. That top leaders and men of high positions, be they of a nation, a community or any society, ought to be careful in not misusing their positions in dealings for their personal benefit. In withdrawing from the first shop without closing any bargain, Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) perhaps meant to drive home to the shopkeeper and set example that he was there in his personal capacity and not as Ameer al-Mu'mineen who would not accept personal favours.
2. That Islamic Sharia' has prescribed fair and equitable rights to slaves can also be derived from this incidence. In presenting a superior garment to his

slave in preference to himself, the Caliph wanted him not to suffer from any inferiority complex at the same time setting example of generous and humane treatment to the downtrodden class.

THE IMPACT OF LEADER'S CHARACTER IN THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

Did Islam spread at the point of sword or by coercion over people as alleged by some non-muslim orientalists? Or did the true and simple message of Islam appeal to them under the impact of the humane and humble character of its divinely appointed leaders? Islamic history has recorded some interesting incidents which provide a good insight into the true facts on the subject.

It is mentioned that after the defeat in the battle at Jabale Tai during the ninth Hijra, Adi bin Hatim Tai, a prominent tribal

leader, fled to Syria. From there, through his sister, he came to Madina. He was warmly welcomed when ushered in the presence of the Prophet. The two then together were on their way home, Adi closely watched the Prophet how he behaved with people on the way. He was deeply impressed with his tolerance and kindness as he listened sympathetically and humbly to what an old woman had to say about her personal problems. Adi says that he said to himself: “*By God this man (Muhammad) could not be one from worldly rulers.*”²⁹

Why? Because a worldly king or a ruler does not behave like this. In order just to fulfil a need or solve a problem of an ordinary old woman in the street, the Prophet had demonstrated so much humility and spent so much time after her.

Adi says that he then accompanied the Prophet to his house and saw how simple

²⁹ *Maktabe Islam*, 12:12.

the room in which he sat and slept was. The only piece of mat that he possessed was a small one made from the palm tree leaves. He spread the mat for me and requested me to sit on it whilst he himself sat down on the ground.

So humane and humble he was that his behaviour created a profound impact on my heart. I became so convinced of his truthfulness that in my heart I said:

“Undoubtedly this gentleman ought to be a messenger of Allah as claimed by himself.”³⁰

After a short discussion between us, I decided to discard my previous faith and offered my hand in accepting Islam as a true and divine religion.

Thereafter Adi turned out to be one of the most faithful companions of the Prophet and staunch defender of Islam.

³⁰ *Maktabe Islam*, 12:12.

Once Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) happened to be on a journey in the company of a non-muslim under the protection of the Islamic state. He inquired where the Imam was destined to go and the reply was “Kufa.”

When they both arrived at a juncture where two ways separated, the non-muslim took the way of his destination but Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) instead of separating on way to kufa, continued to follow him. Rather surprised to see this, he inquired the reason. In reply, the Imam said,

“The Prophet of Islam had taught that at the time of separation from a companion in a journey, one should follow him by few steps as a mark of respect and bidding farewell to him. I wished to comply with this teaching hence my following you.”

The non-muslim being deeply impressed with this teaching of the Prophet reacted by saying:

“Verily those who had become the

followers of the Prophet was due to his supreme humanely conduct. And let me hold you OAli! As witness on my acceptance of Islam as a true and divine religion.”³¹

DANGER IN ACCEPTING A VILLAIN’S LEADERSHIP

People have been warned of a great danger against accepting leadership of those villainous and undesirable characters. The following saying of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) provides useful guidance:

إذا ساد القوم فاسقهم، وكان زعيم القوم أذلهم، وأكرم الرجل
الفاسق فلينتظر البلاء

“When a community is led by their villains and if their leader happens to be wretched and if a debauching is honoured, then let them wait (expect) a calamity (to behalf them).”³²

31 *Maktabe Islam*, 12:12.

32 *Nafhat Risaliyya*, p. 6.

Obviously when any community or a group of people allows a person of low character and the one openly indulging in sins to rule and lead them, then there is always a risk of his misusing his authority to serve his own personal ends. However capable and smart a leader may be, he is liable to mislead them and be the cause of chaos and calamity to befall them, should he be a man of debased principles and a person of double standards in his dealings. And that is why the criteria of selecting a right leader in Islam is *Taqwa* – the fear of Allah and respect for Islamic values of noble character.

What better example of rejecting the leadership of a villainous and low charactered person can be cited herewith other than that of Yazeed by Imam Husayn (a.s.), the grandson of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.). When in 60 A.H., Yazid the Omayyad prince usurped the caliphate of the Islamic Ummah and per force demanded pledge of allegiance, it was the Imam who

rejected it outright. His following words in presence of Walid bin Utbah, the governor of Madina, have been recorded in the annals of Islamic history:

إننا أهل بيت النبوة، ومعدن الرسالة، ومختلف الملائكة، بنا فتح الله وبنا يختم، ويزيد رجل فاسق، شارب للخمر، قاتل النفس المحرمة، معلن بالفسق، ومثلي لا يبايع مثله

“We are the household of the Prophethood, the source of messengership, the descending place of the angels, through us Allah has begun (showering His favours) and with us He has perfected (His blessings)...

... Yazeed is a sinful man, a drunkard, killer of innocent people and one who openly indulges in sinful acts. A person like me can never pay allegiance to a person like him.”³³

Historians have reported that Yazid spent much of his time in the pleasure of singing and amusing himself with apes and hunting-hounds. His open and persistent violations of Islamic norms

³³ Luhoof of Ibne Tawoos.

were shocking. Imam Husayn (a.s.)'s acceptance of Yazid's leadership would have been an endorsement of his vicious way of life and negation of the divine mission of the Prophet.

The Supreme sacrifices of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his companions saved Islam from extinction. The Omayyad dynasty eventually lost its rule. No ruler of a muslim country since then ever dared ridicule Islam and the precepts of the Prophet.

SUMMARY

In the light of the foregoing chapters, it can be summarised:

1. That no group of people, be they a nation, a community or a society, can survive on its affairs without a leader.
2. That a progress of a people rests a

great deal upon the quality of their leadership.

3. That the ideal leadership mainly depends upon adequate general knowledge about people and their needs as well as upon the quality of Justice and fairplay.
4. That the ideal leadership is that which is adorned with the spirit of public service and not polluted with self-interest nor by misuse of position for personal motives.
5. That an ideal leader is the one who enjoys chastity, noble character, generosity and intelligence. He is the one who leads by example and inspires teamwork and who is able to attract co-operation and understanding of his people.
6. That the ideal leader is the one who

is also humble and not lured by the outward show of position nor interested in self-glorification.

7. That both a leader and his people have a duty of mutual respect and co-operation.
8. That should a community or a society accept leadership of those ignoble and vicious character and those who dare openly indulge in sins, then it should expect to be overtaken with calamity.
9. That when a nation or a society is blessed with a God-fearing and service-motivated intelligent leader, then not only it survives against whatever odd but also becomes a model for the whole world.
10. That no creed other than Islam has provided such exhaustive guidance and useful examples of ideal leadership. The

life-styles of the Prophet of Islam and his household members act as beacons of ideal leadership for mankind.

July, 1984

3500 copies



Published by:
Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania
Box 20033, Dar es Salaam

Printed by:
PRINTWELL LIMITED, Box 99308, Mombasa