CHAPTER 2

Leadership in Islam

Islam is the third in a series of monotheistic religions which started with Judaism. Muslims believe that Islam is a way of life and as such it has implications regarding beliefs as well as behavior. Islam consists of two inseparable components: a doctrine and a law. The doctrine and the law are inextricably linked. The Islamic doctrine is the foundation upon which Islamic law is established and the doctrine legitimates the law. That is, the doctrine provides the basis for Muslims to respect the law and to apply it without external compulsion. The Islamic doctrine provides the moral incentive for Muslims to abide by the law. The law transforms a Muslim's belief in the doctrine into actions and deeds. The law organizes all aspects of the life of the individual as well as his/her relationship with society. It also organizes the interactions of the individual with non-Muslims, the environment, and the whole universe. Salvation can only be attained by maintaining the bond between the creed and the law (Shaltout, 2001/2004).

The doctrine includes the set of beliefs by which a person becomes a Muslim. The cornerstone of the doctrine is the belief in the oneness of God. Muslims also believe in the angels, the revealed books, the messengers, and the hereafter and the accountability of human beings (Shaltout, 2001/2004; Esposito, 2002). The law encompasses all the rules and regulations that organize the relationship between

a Muslim and God, a Muslim and his/her fellow Muslims, a Muslim and non-Muslims, a Muslim and the environment, and a Muslim and the Universe. A few of these are expressed in clear and non-equivocal terms. These rules are fixed and cannot be changed by people. However, most of the rules and regulations are expressed in general terms and only their fundamental bases are highlighted. The details of these are left to interpretations that are suitable for the time and place of their application. The Arabic word for the Divine law is "Shariah." The body of knowledge which comprises the interpretation of the law is called "Fiqh." The word "Fiqh" in Arabic means understanding. Thus, Fiqh is the formulation of laws to deal with new problems that face Muslims based on an understanding of the fundamentals of the doctrine and the law. Fiqh rules are not divine and they can change with the change in circumstances, time, and place (Shaltout, 2001/2004; Al-Qaradawi, 2005).

Terminology

We need to examine at the expressions used in the area of leadership in Islam and how they are being used. This will give us an insight into the meaning of leadership in Islam. Several words in Arabic are used to denote a leader. An "Amir" is translated as a prince, but it is derived from the verb "amara" which means commanded or ordered. A commander or a leader is called an Amir. Several prophetical traditions command that whenever a group of Muslims is on a mission, they should elect an Amir to lead the group. The word is used to describe a wide range of leaders. These

include leaders of teams, groups, associations, societies, provinces, or countries. It includes appointed leaders as well as elected leaders (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1300; Hawwa,1988).

The second term used to denote a leader is the word "Khalifa" which derives from the verb "khalafa" which means succeeded but it also means a proxy. Thus, the word "Khalifa" can be used to denote either a successor or a vicegerent. The word "Khalifa" has been used twice in the Quran to denote a vicegerent. Once during the dialogue between God and the Angels about the creation of Adam *"and remember when Your Lord said to the Angels: 'I will establish a vicegerent (Khalifa) on earth'"* [2:30]. The second time to describe appointing Prophet David to rule over the Children of Israel *"O' Daoud (David). We have appointed you a vicegerent (Khalifa) on earth. So, rule over the people with justice and do not follow your whims lest they lead you away from the path of God."* [38:26]. The word "Khilafa" denotes the reign of a khalifa. The word "Khalifa" has been used exclusively in the Islamic literature to denote an Islamic head of state (Al-Merdawi, 1983).

The third word which is used to denote a leader in Islam is the word "Imam." It derives from the verb "amma" which literally means faced towards. It is usually used to denote leading people in prayers, however, its use has also been extended to denote a leader in general. The word "Imam" has religious connotations, while a Khalifa or an Amir need not necessarily be religious leaders. The word Imam implies providing guidance to people, while Amir and Khalifa imply command and governance.

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Although reference in the prophetic traditions was made to a wide spectrum of leadership practices, most of the Islamic literature deals with political leadership. The books that deal with the subject use the title As-Siyasah ash-Shariyyah or one of its variants. The word As-Siyasah literally means herding and tending the herd. In classic usage it came to refer to all the processes of administration, organization, and development of a people that is the function of a governor. In modern times the term has been appropriated to refer to politics in general. The second term ash-Shariyyah, means that it emanates from Islamic law. AlQaradawi (2005) explains that As-Siyasah involves attending to the needs of the people by the ruler, so that they may lead a good life. He further explains that the term ash-Shariyyah means that the ways used to rule the people are lawful from the point of view of Islamic law. The term is then used to describe politics that is based on an understanding of Islamic law and does not violate its fundamental postulates.

The Nature of leadership in Islam

Leadership in Islam is considered a trust. A leader is entrusted with leading a group of people or managing an organization. The leader is held accountable. The trust and accountability go hand in hand. There are two levels of trust and accountability. A leader is entrusted by God and is accountable to God for his/her trust. The leader is also entrusted by the people and is accountable to them. Leadership is also a collective duty. It is the responsibility of the people collectively to fill all vacant leadership positions with capable candidates.

The Trust

Adam was created to play the role of a vicegerent on earth *"Note that occasion, when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place a vicegerent on earth"* [2:30]. To fulfill his leadership role on earth, Adam had to accept the trust *"the fact is We offered the Trust to the heavens, to the earth and to the mountains, but they refused to undertake it and were afraid, but man undertook it. He was indeed unjust and ignorant"* [33:72]. The trust in this verse refers to all prescribed duties mandated by the Quran and the tradition. It encompasses a wide spectrum of tasks. This includes performing rituals, honoring the pledge, establishing justice, caring for orphans, in addition to a host of other duties. Among the major tasks that God entrusted Adam and his children to undertake are managing the earth's resources and establishing a good and just life for human beings on earth. To enable Adam and his offspring to fulfill this trust, God gave them the ability to learn *"He taught Adam the names of all"* [2:31] and He gave them the message which enables them to establish justice on earth [57:25]. The vicegerency of Adam on earth is a trust.

Thus, each and every leadership role is considered a trust. Islam recognizes that leadership is exercised at different levels. A well known prophetic tradition outlines the concept of multi-level leadership. Each person in the society is a guardian and is responsible for his/her subjects. The ruler, who has authority over people, is a guardian and is responsible for them. A man is a guardian of his family and is responsible for them. A woman is a guardian of her

house and family and is responsible for them. A servant is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it. So, everyone in the society is a guardian and is responsible for his/her charges (Muslim, 2000, 663). This tradition gives examples of people who are expected to play leadership roles which include the man as a husband and father and the woman as a wife and a mother. Thus, leadership has to be exercised at the level of the family as a basic unit of society, at the level of the community, at the level of the organization, and at the level of the country. Ibn Taymiah (1300) provides a long list of people who are required to exercise leadership roles in conducting their duties. The list includes, among others, judges, army officers, tax collectors, school teachers, post officers, mayors and market managers (p. 19). Each one of these people has a trust that has to be fulfilled.

Thus, almost everyone in society has a leadership role to play. This concept of shared leadership transforms the whole society into a team. The word "Muslim Umma" has been used to emphasize the unity of the Muslim nation and the shared goals and responsibility among its members (Armstrong, 2000).

Accountability

A leader is accountable to God in the first instance but he/she is accountable to the people they serve as well. Accountability to God and accountability to people are closely linked in the Quran and the tradition. The Quran states: *"Say [Prophet], 'Take action! God will see your*

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actions- as will His Messenger and the believers- and then you will be returned to Him who knows what is seen and unseen, and He will tell you what you have been doing'" (Abdel Haleem, 2005, 9:105). The verse shows clearly the close link between accountability to God and accountability to people.

Accountability to God is one of the major themes of Quran. Accountability to the people has been emphasized in the Quran, the tradition of the Prophet (pbuh), and the practice of the early Muslim Leaders. The Quran addresses the Prophet (pbuh) saying: *"It is not for any Prophet to deceive (mankind). Whoso deceives will bring his deceit with him on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul will be paid in full what it has earned; and they will not be wronged."* (Abdel Haleem, 2005, 3:161) The Prophet (pbuh) has been quoted to have said:"If a person dies having cheated the people he/she was entrusted with, he/she will not smell the scent of paradise."(Muslim, 2000). He also indicated that it is a major sin for a leader to appoint a person to a position, while someone else is more qualified to do the job.

In his inauguration speech, Abo Bakr[1] said:"I have been made your leader and I am not better than anyone of you. Support me if I do good, and correct me if I do wrong. Follow me as a long as I follow the commands of God and His Prophet, if I do not follow their commands, then you don't have to follow me." (Al-Salaby, 2001).

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[1] Abo Bakr is the first Caliph, he succeeded the Prophet (pbuh). He was born 572 C.E., became khalifa 633 C.E. and died 635 C.E.

The exchange that happened between Omar[1] the second Khalifa and a man in the congregation shows the awareness of the leader as well as the followers of the centrality of the accountability of the leader to the political life in Islam. In his inauguration speech, Omar addressed the congregation saying:"If you find crookedness in my behavior, you have to straighten me out." A person in audience responded to him by saying if we find crookedness in your behavior, we will straighten you out even if we have to use the sword. Omar expressed his happiness with this response (Al-Salaby, 2001). To appreciate the importance of this exchange, we have to understand how Omar's character was perceived by people. Before becoming a khalifa, Omar was known for his physical strength, courage, and determination. People were generally careful around him. Nobody wanted to say or do something that would upset Omar. So, to stand up in a crowd and warn Omar against any transgression is an act which does not only require courage on the part of the person who said it but also an understanding that he should not expect any harm to befell him as a result. Rulers understood that they are accountable to people and people practiced this right.

Collective Duty

Muslim scholars concluded that leadership is an obligation (Ibn Khaldoon, 1377). In Islam duties are categorized as either individual duties or collective duties. Individual

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[1] Omar ibn Al Khattab is the second Caliph. He was born 583 C.E., he became khalifa in 635 C.E. and died 646 C.E.

duties must be undertaken by each and every Muslim. Individual duties include acts of worship e.g. prayers and fasting. A collective duty is a duty which can be fulfilled by a group of people who volunteer to perform it on behalf of the rest of the community. These include duties that need not be performed by each and everyone in the community. Since, leadership is necessary for the proper conduct of the affairs of people in society, it is therefore a collective duty (Hawwa 1988; 1990). Reference is usually made to the tradition "if three people were traveling together, they should appoint a leader"(Hawwa, 1988, p.15) to show how important leadership is to the daily life of a Muslim. Muslim scholars often cite the events that took place immediately after the death of the Prophet and resulted in electing Abo Bakr as his successor before the Prophet was even buried, to show that appointing a head of state is a matter of highest priority (Ibn Hehsam, 820).

Examples of Leadership in the Quran

Two examples for leadership are given in the Quran. The queen of Sheba is given as an example of a good leader, while the Pharaoh of Egypt is given as an example of a bad leader. The Quran commends the way the Queen of Sheba handled the threat of invasion posed by Prophet Sueliman's (Soliman, pbuh) army. She gave her advisors all the facts available to her and sought their advice. When they suggested that they have a strong army and war against Sueliman's army can be easily won, she pointed out that they have no information regarding the strength of Sueliman's

army. Instead, she wisely suggested that they needed more information. Her decision and actions saved her country from a disaster.

On the other hand, the Egyptian Pharaoh was not interested in an honest advice from his advisors. He arrogantly made the decision single handedly. When he was given an advice that he did not like, his response was *"I want to make you see what I see myself; I am guiding you along the right path."* [40:29]

These two stories suggest clearly that Quran indicates that consultation is imperative for effective leadership. An effective leader should be able to interpret the advice given wisely. This principle has been reiterated in another verse which addresses the prophet *"Consult them in the conduct of affairs, but when you make a resolution then be firm in implementing your resolution and put your trust in God"* [3:159]. So, an effective leader needs to consult but he/she has to be resolute and firm in making decisions to achieve the objectives.

Early Organizational Structures in Islam

The roots of Islamic organization started as early as 623 C.E., when the first Muslim state started in Medina[1]

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(1) Medina is a city about 500 Km to the north of Mecca. This is the place where the first Muslim state was established. The Prophet (pbuh) and his companions migrated from Mecca to Medina around 623 C.E. fleeing the persecution that they have experienced at the hands of the pagans of Mecca.

(Armstrong, 2005). The fundamental bases of the Islamic work ethic was enunciated by the Quran and practiced by the Prophet. Islamic work ethic encourages people to work hard, acquire new skills, and to be honest and fair in their dealings (Yousef, 2000). One of the very first tasks that the Prophet (pbuh), as a head of state, undertook was to write down a constitution for the newly founded state. After the constitution has been ratified by the leaders of the major groups that constituted the new state, the Prophet (pbuh) started organizing his government by appointing advisors, lieutenants, and assistants to counsel him and to perform certain duties on his behalf. Al-Jawziyyah (1313/1373) indicated that among those who were appointed by the Prophet (pbuh) are a secretary, various deputies, a commander of security, various emissaries to foreign lands, and poor-dues collectors. Among his advisors were Abo Bakr who succeeded him as a head of state and Omar who succeeded Abo Bakr (Ibn Hesham, 802).

Omar is credited with the first formal organization of civil service in Islam. He established the Diwan (Al-Mawardi, 1996). The Diwan was initially established to enumerate people and to compile a register for the revenues and expenditures of the treasury. Omar also, divided the Muslim land into provinces and appointed an Amir and a judge for each province. He minted the first Islamic coin. He established the Hijri[1] Calendar, the general archives, and

(1) Hijri is an Arabic word that refers to the migration of Muslims from the city of Mecca to the city of Medina. Hijri calendar start date is 623 C.E. and it has twelve lunar months.

general stores for food (As-Souoti, d. 1505). Al-Mawardi (1996) suggested that the Diwan has to be comprised of four departments to look after the army affairs, the financial affairs of the provinces, the appointments of officials in the provinces, and the treasury. Ibn Khaldoon (1377) suggests that the Khalifa has to appoint deputies to help in fulfilling the various activities entrusted to the Khalifa. He indicated that security, financial and court duties are highly important positions that need to be filled by highly competent people.

Political Leadership

Most of the literature on leadership in Islam deals with political leadership. However, many of the methods and conclusions can be extended to other types of leadership. The word Khilafa denotes the processes and institutions that deal with statehood. Al-Mawardi (1058) (as cited in Al-Merdawi, 1983) defines Khilafa as succeeding the Prophet (pbuh) in protecting the faith and conducting the worldly affairs of the nation. Ibn Khaldoon (1377) defines Khilafa as helping the people to conduct their affairs according to Islamic law. This includes protecting the interests of people in this life as well as in the hereafter. He further explains that this does not mean that an Islamic government is a theocracy. He stresses that a Khalifa is not the vicegerent of God on earth[1] but he is the successor of the Prophet (pbuh) of God. As such, he is a fallible human being. He

[1] That role rather belongs to all of humanity not to a single person that assumes a divine mantle by which to justify dictatorship.

quotes Abo Bakr (the first head of state after the Prophet (pbuh) who said: "I am not the vicegerent of God, I am the successor of the Messenger of God." (Ibn Khaldoon, 1377, 171). Tabarah (1977) cites a verse which indicates clearly that the Islamic ruler does not derive his authority from God: *"You who believe, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you. If you are in dispute over any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day: that is better and fairer in the end."* (Abdel Haleem, 2005, 4:59). The construction of the verse indicates clearly that the authority of the messenger of God is derived from God, the authority of Muslim leaders is not. The messenger received revelations from God which embodied certain commands that had to be obeyed by the believers. Muslim leaders cannot claim they are inspired by God. Their commands are based on their understanding of Quran, the tradition, and the situation. As human beings they can err.

Some of the scholars are of the opinion that political leadership should not be sought by those who are interested in the position (Hawwa, 1988). Leaders can be nominated by others but are not allowed to promote themselves. This opinion is based on an incident when a companion of the Prophet (pbuh) asked to be appointed an Amir. The Prophet's response was: "O Abo Dhar, I find that you are weak and I like for you what I like for myself. Do not rule over (even) two persons; and do not manage the property of an orphan" (Muslim, 2000, 664). One may argue that Abo-Dhar's request was turned down because he did not qualify

to hold such a position. Similar response was given to others who requested to be appointed "Amirs" (Muslim, 2000). One can also argue that these requests were turned down because there was a sense that the people who requested to be appointed in leadership positions were mainly interested in occupying positions of power.

Some scholars are of the opinion that a person who has the appropriate qualifications should seek a position. They differentiate between power and leadership (Ibn Khaldoon, 1377; Beekun and Badawi, 1999). The story of Prophet Joseph (Yusuf) (pbuh) as narrated by the Quran serves as an example where a person may seek a political appointment. Prophet Joseph (pbuh) requested the Egyptian King to appoint him in the management of the crops of Egypt. Prophet Joseph (pbuh) said to the king: *"Put me in charge of the nation's storehouse. I shall manage them prudently and carefully."* (Abdel Haleem, 2005, 12:55). Prophet Joseph (pbuh) knew that he is capable of managing the storehouses of the nation prudently and carefully in anticipation of the eminent draught. He did not seek the appointment as a means for gaining power but he wanted to save the country the bad consequences of the draught. The prudence and care of Prophet Joseph (pbuh) were the right qualifications required for the job.

Beekun and Badawi (1999) point out that one is allowed to seek a leadership role in Islam "When a person sees a situation in which there is a potential crisis or a disaster, and he has the expertise required to help others in this situation" (p. 10). Many prophetic traditions emphasize the

importance of selecting the right person for a leadership position (Hawwa, 1988).

Summary

The fundamental principles governing Islamic leadership has been dealt with in the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (pbuh). Islamic leadership is considered a trust and a collective duty. The trust implies that leaders are accountable to God and to the people. Leaders are commanded to consult with their followers. The Quran and the tradition encourage the followers to participate actively in providing advice to their leader. The Quran gives examples of good and bad leadership. Good leaders seek advice from their followers and encourage them to voice their opinions freely. The leader has to have determination and perseverance.

The organizational structure started with the birth of the fledgling Muslim state. However, Omar is credited with the establishment of the first formal structured state organization. He started the registry for state income and expenditures. He divided the state into provinces and assigned governors and judges. He minted the first coin for the Islamic state and established the first Islamic calendar.

Most of the early literature on leadership focused on political leadership. However, most of the developed concepts and principles can be extended to other levels of leadership. An Islamic state is not a theocracy and the Khalifa is not a vicegerent of God. The leader is accountable to the people.