

## LEADERSHIP TRAITS-AN ISLAIMIC PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** *Great leadership is unique form of art, requiring both force and vision to an extraordinary degree. The attribute of leadership has been sought far more than any other attribute. Some view it as a gifted quality while others see it as an art that can be acquired. History provides ample examples to see the effects of leadership and that of great leaders, not only on battle field but also at the national level. The importance and requirement of an effective leadership has increased manifold considering the modern and perceived future battle fields. It is believed, that future battles are going to be technology intensive, short lived requiring quick decision making, more lethal and with an enhanced canvas that would not only include conventional but unconventional means as well. Coupled with such a battle field, threats confronted to national security will also be complex and more dangerous. To counter such an environment, the leadership should be equally strong enough to effectively take on these challenges. Notwithstanding the challenges of present or future, the basic principle for any leader remains to be that he must have a great vision, strong enough to inspire others to follow him. The fundamental quality of leadership to inspire others can be applied at any level, starting from a group of few individuals to complete nation. Being Muslims, we believe that Islam is a code of life encompassing every aspect through fundamental sources of Quran and Sunnah and this should, in principle, include leadership aspect as well. It is, therefore, imperative to view this important subject from Islamic perspective and find out how it addresses modern day challenges. This paper discusses the Islamic concept of leadership and essential leadership traits as espoused by the teachings of Quran and Sunnah.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Islamic Leadership, Leader qualities in Islam, Muslim Leader.*

### Definition and Concept of Leadership

A variety of definitions of Leadership can be traced from the books and quotes of different leaders and thinkers. Two such definitions are being covered here to set the foundation for further discussion: -

Leadership is depicted as the "*process by which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of followers in an effort to reach organizational objectives*". This definition stresses upon voluntary participation without any forced change. The followers must share and understand the leader's vision with conviction and clarity.

Second definition of leadership distinguishes it from the more routine processes

associated with management: -

Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor which binds a group together and motivates it toward goals. Management activities such as planning, organizing, decision making are dormant cocoons until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guides them toward their goals.

The above definition of leadership stresses that a leader is more than just a manager. Leading and managing are not the same things. Warren Bennis, a leadership expert, summarizes the distinction between leadership and management as follows: -

"The difference between managers and leaders is fundamental. The manager administers, the leader innovates. The manager maintains, the leader develops. The manager relies on systems; the leader relies on people. The manager counts on control; the leader counts on trust. The manager does things right, the leader does the right thing.

### **Concept of Right and Wrong Leaders**

The central idea of leadership definitions remains quality of a leader to inspire his followers for the task or goal he has set forth. Task or goal can either be positive or negative, in other words right or wrong. When we discuss the leadership aspect in the light of Quran, it becomes evident that Quran lays clear distinction for everything i.e. it is either right or wrong, where right is the virtue and wrong is evil. Same holds good for leadership as well. Right leaders lead their nation to ultimate success and wrong leaders lead their people to ultimate failure. Successful people in the light of Quran are those who will be given the reward of paradise. Allah (SWT) mentions in the Quran: -

*"The people of Hell and the people of Paradise are not equal. The people of Paradise are the successful. "(59:20)*

At another place Allah (SWT) mentions the ultimate success as seeking His pleasure. He says in the Quran: -

*"Allah has promised to the believers, male and female, gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they shall live forever, and good homes in gardens of eternity. And Allah's pleasure is above all. That is the supreme success." (9:72)*

Quran gives examples of right and wrong leaders to draw pertinent lessons. Quran mentions the story of Prophet Musa (PBUH) and Pharaoh in detail and at many places.

Pharaoh a leader and king of Egypt eventually led his nation to doom and destruction i.e. into hell fire on the Day of Judgment. Allah (SWT) mentions in Quran: -

*"And We sent Musa, with Our signs and with clear proof, to Pharaoh and his group. So, they followed the command of Pharaoh, while the command of Pharaoh was not right. He will lead his people on the Day of Judgment, and make them descend into Fire. And it is the evil descending place." (11:96-98)*

On the contrary Quran also gives examples of right and successful leaders. Quran says while mentioning the story of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH):-

*"When his Lord put Ibrahim to a test with certain Words, and he fulfilled them, He said, "I am going to make you an Imam for the people." He said, "And from among my progeny?" He replied, My promise does not extend to the unjust." (2:124)*

### **Islamic Concept of Leadership**

Having established the concept of right and wrong leaders, let us see what Islam offers us as the concept of leadership through its two major sources i.e. Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Quran identifies leadership as a sacred trust which should be given to those who are deserving or capable of holding it. Quran says: -

*"Surely Allah commands you to deliver trusts to those entitled to them, and that when you judge between people, judge with justice. Surely, excellent is the exhortation Allah gives you. Surely, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing." (4:58)*

Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has described everyone to be a leader in whatever capacity he is. He says in one of the narrations: -

*"Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband's home and children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is a guardian of the property of his master and he is responsible for it. Surely, every one of you is a shepherd and responsible for his flock."*

Two important cardinals emerge from above mentioned references, i.e. leadership is a sacred trust that should be given to the capable or deserving one and that everyone is entrusted with the responsibility of being a leader in some capacity. And what is desired of a leader is that he will obey Allah and His Messenger in all his matters.

Quran mentions: -

*"Say, Obey Allah and obey the messenger..." (24:54)*

### Attributes of a Muslim Leader

After discerning the concept of leadership in its broad terms, an endeavor has been made herein to identify certain key characteristics of a Muslim Leader. Dr. Allama Iqbal regards a Muslim Leader to be of high value both in mundane and spiritual aspects. He says: -

Nighe Buland, Sukhan Dilnawaz, Jaan Pursoz

Yehi hae rakht e safar meer e karwaan ke liye

**Translation: -**

High ambition, winsome speech, a passionate soul

This is the entire gear for the leader of a Caravan

Following are few of the attributes: -

• **Taqwa.** The foremost requirement in a Muslim Leader after his faith is his 'taqwa' or God Fearing attribute. Allah (SWT) has laid much emphasis on this important attribute for all the Muslims and for a leader it has to be much greater than others. Allah (SWT) says in Quran: -

*"Whoever obeys Allah and His messenger and has awe of Him and observes Taqwa for His sake, then such people are the victorious." (24:52)*

At another place Allah (SWT) says: -

*"Surely the noblest of you, in Allah's sight, is the one who is most pious of you. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (49:13)*

Taqwa enables a person to be God conscious and he is aware that every action is being watched and gauged accordingly. It urges a Muslim Leader to carry out his accountability and make necessary corrections accordingly. A Muslim Leader with such a precious attribute will invoke Allah's Blessings and help in all his efforts that will make him victorious as highlighted in above mentioned verse.

**Knowledge.** Another very important attribute that a Muslim Leader must possess is his knowledge of both mundane as well as religious subjects. This attribute will enable him to lead his followers effectively. Given the rapidly changing battle field and its related complexities, a leader with a thorough knowledge of latest

developments will only be able to lead his men successfully. Quran again guides us on this important leadership trait through an example of Bani Israel and their demand to a Prophet of their times to make dua to Allah, the Almighty for appointing a king or leader for them under whose leadership they could fight. The Prophet then tells that Allah (SWT) has selected Talut as a king for them. They objected on his leadership because he was not wealthy. Prophet told them that wealth was not a criterion in choice of leadership. He told them Talut deserved to be a king because he was having knowledge and power. The incident has been described in the following manner: -

*"Did you not see a group from the children of Israel after Musa when they said to their prophet: Appoint for us a king, so that we may fight in the way of Allah... Their prophet said to them: Allah has appointed Talut as a king for you. They said: How could he have kingship over us when we are more entitled to the kingship than him? He has not been given affluence in wealth. He said: Allah has chosen him over you and has increased his stature in knowledge and physique, and Allah gives His kingship to whom He wills. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing." (2:246-247)*

Thus knowledge and his physique or power enabled Talut to be a chosen leader over others. A reflection over message of Quran reveals that there exists a very strong linkage between knowledgeable and God Fearing people as described in Quran: -

*"Only those of His slaves fear Allah who are knowledgeable" (35:28)*

The attribute of knowledge has a very close relevance to present day's environment specially once seen the complexion and diversity of security threats confronting the country. Knowledge will guide the leader to the right path or direction enabling him to correctly comprehend a situation and accordingly take correct decision. The physique or power enables him to be mentally, psychologically and physically strong enough to bear and face the challenges audaciously.

**Justice.** Another important facet of a Muslim Leader's personality is his capability to deliver justice even against heavy odds. Injustice leads to inequality thus affecting the motivation of men for undertaking any assignment. Allah (SWT) has laid much emphasis on this aspect in Quran. He says; -

*"Surely, Allah commands you to deliver trusts to those entitled to them, and that, when you judge between people, judge with justice." (4:58)*

Even the prophets were also guided and told the importance of this important aspect of leadership. In an incident of Prophet Dawood (PBUH), Allah (SWT) mentions in

Quran that he gave a decision in favor of first party without listening to the opinion of the other party in one of the disputes. Allah (SWT) corrected Dawood (PBUH) at that point and guided him that he should listen to the opinion of second party in future as well. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was also very conscious and uncompromising in the aspect of delivering justice. His action of not changing his decision in the case of a woman belonging to an affluent tribe caught in a theft case despite efforts of intercession is a known example. However, his reply to the interceder in that case is a beacon for the leaders of all times. This has been reported upon in the words as under:

*"When it was dusk, Allah's Messenger (PBUH) stood up and gave an address. He first glorified Allah as He deserves, and then said: This injustice (intercession in favor of a thief) destroyed those before you that when anyone of high rank committed theft among them, they spared him, and when any weak one among them committed theft, they inflicted the prescribed punishment upon him. "*

All above mentioned examples clearly emphasize the importance of justice that a leader must be able to deliver while dealing with his men. Dispensation of justice has a dual effect in a way that it, on one hand increases the confidence of men in their leader for getting their rights and on the other hand, it creates the desired deterrence in a society against crimes. Men will willingly follow a leader who is just in his dealings.

**Compassion.** Another important attribute that Islam lays emphasis on, is the compassion or kind heartedness of a leader. Though, it may sound strange to many given the experience and exploitation of such a quality of any leader by the under command. But the reality is that compassion fetches those dividends which are not possible, otherwise. Quran again provides us insight into this important character trait of any leader. While discussing the kindheartedness of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Allah (SWT) mentions in Quran; -

*"And We have not sent you but as mercy for all the worlds."(21:107)*

At another place in Quran it has been mentioned that Prophet's kindness was a binding factor for his companions. Allah (SWT) mentions as follows: -

*"So, (O Prophet) it is through mercy from Allah that you are gentle to them. Had you been rough and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. "(3:159)*

The afore mentioned verse is a clear testimony to the fact that Prophet's (PBUH) kind heartedness kept the people together and this produced such results which no one could have ever imagined in those times.

**Tawakkul.** A leader must place all his trust in Allah's help and should know it clearly that without Allah's help, he will not be able to achieve any glory. However, one must keep in mind that tawakkul involves complete preparation for the task or battle followed by placing trust in Allah. One must not get a wrong and misconstrued meaning of tawakkul that it is synonymous to inactivity or complacency with reliance only on dua. Quran again guides us unto this important leadership trait as under: -

*"Consult them in the matter and, once you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah. Surely, Allah loves those who place trust in Him."(3:159)*

A practical example of tawakkul is the Battle of Badr, where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after making all preparations for war, made supplication for invoking Allah's help. It has been narrated by Ibn e Abbas that: -

*"On the day of Battle of Badr, the Prophet said, O Allah! I appeal to You (to fulfill) Your Covenant and Promise... "*

Hence, a leader must know the true meaning of tawakkul and know how to invoke Allah's help in the times of trepidation.

**Bravery.** A leader has to be brave and mentally strong. The opposite version is simply unacceptable. If we look at the personality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) we find that he was the bravest of his times. It has been reported upon by Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) that: -

*" Whenever the fight grew fierce and the eyes of fighters went red, we used to resort to the Prophet (PBUH) for succor. He was always the closest to the enemy. "*

**Conclusion:** While modern and future security environment is perceived to be much more complex, lethal, demanding and challenging for leaders at all tiers; the message of Islam and Quran provides a wholesome solution to this situation. Attributes appended in this article are just a few, many more can be reflected upon through the study of Quran and Sunnah. It is always easy and more beneficial to study a model that provides a wholesome picture of all such attributes and we can find such a model in the personality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). By studying his personality and his life leaders at all tiers can get true guidance and practical manifestation of Quran injunctions. As has been described by Allah (SWT) in Quran: -

*"There is indeed a good model for you in the Messenger of Allah for the one who has hope in Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah profusely, " (33:21)*

## ENDNOTES

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