**Concept of leadership in Islam:**

The essence of the Seerah is the exercise of power and authority to achieve the divine purpose, and this is linked to leadership. Allah says twice in the noble Qur'an:

"He it is who has sent the Prophet with guidance and the Deen of Truth so that it may become dominant over all other systems, however much the mushrikeen may be averse to it" (Al-Qur'an 9:33, 61:09).

To make Islam dominant again, Muslims will have to acquire power by repeating the method of the noble messenger of Allah; i.e. following his Sunnah (life-example) and Seerah. Even when he was without power in Makkah, the Prophet was the leader of the small group of Muslims, over whom he exercised authority. After the hijra (migration) from Makkah to Madinah, he established the Islamic state and became its ruler. The Prophet thus combined in his person the authority of the messenger, head of state, and commander of the army. The Seerah, therefore, offers an important lesson in leadership, an essential pre-requisite for transforming any society into an Islamic state. This process of transformation is the quintessential model for all Muslims as they struggle to transform their societies.

With the end of the Prophet's mission on earth, Prophetic history as well as Prophetic leadership also came to an end (33:40). Muslims must now choose their leader according to the guidelines provided in the Qur'an and as exemplified by the Seerah. We, therefore, need to ask what the requirements for leadership in Islam are; who qualifies to be leader; how and by whom he is chosen; and what his duties and responsibilities are.

**Divine and Popular legitimacy**

In his paper on the Seerah, Mohammed al-Asi has identified three key concepts for leadership: legitimacy, authority and power [3]. The Islamic concept of legitimacy needs further elucidation because it differs fundamentally from other systems. In Islam, there are two types of legitimacies: divine and popular. While most other systems consider popular legitimacy (that is, the will of the majority) as the only determining criterion, Islam requires divine legitimacy (that is, legitimacy acceptable to Allah) as an essential pre-requisite. Divine legitimacy is acquired when the leader obeys Allah and the Prophet; only then is he entitled to people's obedience (Al-Qur'an 4:59). Divine legitimacy thus forms the basis for popular legitimacy. Leadership in Islam must have both divine as well as popular legitimacy; without the first, it cannot have validity; without the second, it remains unfulfilled.

As divine legitimacy is bestowed by Allah subhanahu wa ta‘ala Himself, it follows that all Prophets had **divine legitimacy**; but not all of them, however, acquired popular legitimacy. The Qur'an tells us that only a few Prophets became rulers: **Yusuf, Daud**, **Sulaiman** and **Muhammad**, upon them all be peace. Other Prophets delivered their message but the people to whom it was addressed refused to accept it.

Popular legitimacy does not automatically follow from divine legitimacy. It invariably requires a period of struggle but in order for it to be valid, it must be underpinned by divine legitimacy. It also needs emphasizing that the divine message is not implemented in a vacuum; it requires an audience, that is a society, for its actualisation. When it is not enforced or enforcible, the mission remains incomplete. In this sense, the mission of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was the most successful because he achieved control over a territory where the laws of Islam were fully implemented. The converse is equally true: if the Prophetic message is not fully implemented in society, it remains incomplete. Similarly, popular legitimacy without divine legitimacy is unacceptable and is considered a rebellion against the commands of Allah.

We must now turn to the requirements for leadership in Islam in a more general sense, and the qualities a person must possess to become a leader as well as the tasks he must perform.

The Qur'an highlights an important aspect of Islam's concept of leadership. After successfully completing a number of tests, Prophet Ibrahim is given the glad tidings that he has been appointed Imam (leader) of all the people. "What about my progeny?" asks Ibrahim. "My covenant does not include the dhalimeen (oppressors)", comes the divine reply (Al-Qur'an 2:124). An important point emerges from this dialogue: an oppressor is not fit to be leader of the Muslims, regardless of what other qualities he may possess. Implicit in this ayat are two other points about leadership: to be legitimate, it must have divine sanction and, Islam rejects the concept of hereditary leadership; each person must qualify for it on merit.

Man in the generic sense is Allah's khalifah (vicegerent or representative) on earth (Al-Qur'an 2:30; 6:166; 38:26). This immediately imposes certain constraints on him; he is not free to act as he chooses nor must he submit to the wishes of any group, be it a majority or an influential minority; he must act only to implement Allah's laws on earth. There is thus a fundamental difference between the Islamic concept of leadership and that of other systems where aspirants to high office often say and do what the people want irrespective of their merit.

The Prophetic hadith that even if three Muslims are on a journey, they must choose one as leader, emphasizes the importance of leadership. Whenever the Prophet left Madinah, he would appoint someone as leader in his absence [4].

**Leader or ruler?**

It may be appropriate to clarify the difference between a leader and a ruler at this stage. While the two are often used interchangeably, they are not the same. A leader has certain inherent qualities quite independent of any office he may hold. These include both qualities of personal character (taqwa ) and the ability to motivate others towards the realization of specific goals or objectives. Inherent in this is also the assumption that his leadership is accepted by the people; he has not imposed himself by physical force or other coercive means. Similarly, his authority is not dependent on any office he may hold. The ruler's authority, on the other hand, is linked directly to his office; without it, he may be powerless and, therefore, quite ineffective. Examples of this kind abound everywhere in the world today. Thus, a monarch, president or a prime minister may not necessarily be suited for the job but each derives his authority from the office he holds.

In nature, there is a hierarchy based on power. The dictum ‘might is right' applies in the jungle, but human beings also frequently resort to it. Islam, on the other hand, regulates power differentiation so that it does not lead to injustice in society. This is crucial because the holder of office exercises power and authority over others which can easily lead to abuse.

**The role of a leader**

Allah sent a chain of Prophets with revelations to transform humanity from a state of jahiliyya to one of islam (submission to His will). Allah says in the noble Qur'an: "I have not created the Jinn and Ins(human beings) except to worship Me" (Al-Qur'an 51:56). Human beings must, therefore, live according to the laws of Allah. This can best be done in the framework of the Islamic state, the natural habitat of Muslims. If the Islamic state does not exist, it becomes the duty of Muslims to strive to establish one. Since every Muslim is part of the Islamic movement, it is the duty of the leader to guide it to establish the Islamic state.

Let us elaborate this point through a metaphor. Suppose we consider the Islamic movement to be a diamond in its raw form; the leader in our metaphor is the master craftsman whose task is to shape this raw material into the best end-product -- the Islamic state and an Islamic society. While the diamond-cutter cannot improve the quality of the original material, the leader of the Islamic movement faces no such constraints. The Islamic movement has the potential to improve; the leader can bring out the best in it by constant exhortations, education and training. The role of the leader is not only to demonstrate his own qualities but also to bring out the best in those whom he leads. His job is to transform society by leading the Islamic movement to fulfil its divinely-ordained mission. This is best demonstrated by how the noble Messenger of Allah tranformed the society in Arabia. Steeped injahiliyya, the people were brought into the light of Islam (Al-Qur'an 65:11); they were inspired and motivated by the Prophet to reject the established order and struggle to establish the Islamic state. Once the state came into existence, the companions were prepared to defend it with their wealth and with their lives (Al-Qur'an 61:11).

**Personal qualities of a leader**

We have already seen from the Qur'anic ayah above (Al-Qur'an 2:124) what disqualifies a person from becoming a leader. We must now examine the qualities a person must possess in order to qualify for leadership in Islam. Some of these are enumerated in the ayah in which Allah addresses the Prophet:

"It was by the mercy of Allah that you (O Prophet) were lenient with them, for if you had been stern and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So forgive them and seek mercy for them and consult with them in the conduct of affairs. And when you have resolved [on an issue], then put your trust in Allah. Lo! Allah loves those who put their trust in Him" (Al-Qur'an 3:159).

A number of points are highlighted: a leader must be **kind, compassionate**, and **forgiving** towards those whom he leads. If he is harsh with them, they will abandon him. He must also consult them but once a decision has been made, Allah then commands that no weakness be shown and the policy be pursued with singlemindedness of purpose, determination and courage.

A good example of this occurred prior to the battle of Uhud. When leaders of the Ansar realized that the decision to go out of the city to fight was contrary to the wishes of the Prophet, they wanted to reverse it. The Prophet, upon whom be peace, however, felt that once it was decided, they must abide by it. He also reminded them that they must obey the Prophet, only then will Allah grant them victory [5]. This episode emphasizes the importance of the leader being resolute and the people being obedient to him. Qualities of mercy and forgiveness by the leader are stressed in other ayaat of the Qur'an (9:128; 15:88).

Imam Ali, the fourth khalifah, in discussing the qualities of a leader said:

"O People! You know that it is not fitting that one who is greedy and parsimonious should attain rule and authority over the honour, lives and incomes of the Muslims, and the laws and ordinances enforced among them, and also leadership of them. Furthermore, he should not be ignorant and unaware of the law, lest in his ignorance he misleads the people. He must not be unjust and harsh, causing people to cease all traffic and dealings with him because of his oppressiveness. Nor must he fear states, so that he seeks the friendship of some and treats others with enmity. He must refrain from accepting bribes when he sits in judgement, so that the rights of men are trampled underfoot and the claimant does not receive his due. He must not leave the Sunnah of the Prophet and the law in abeyance, so that the community falls into misguidance and peril." [6]

Based on the foregoing, we can identify the following **qualities for leadership**:

**Knowledge and Hikmah (wisdom, insight);**

**Taqwa ;**

**‘Adl (Justice) and Rahmah (compassion);**

**Courage and bravery;**

**Shura (mutual consultation);**

**Decisiveness and being resolute;**

**Eloquence;**

**Spirit of self-sacrifice;**

**Sabr (Patience).**

We will discuss these in more detail a little later but first let us consider how a leader emerges in a Muslim society.

**Emergence of a leader**

A person is thrust into a position of leadership both by circumstances as well as by his ability to motivate and lead others towards the realization of a particular goal. When a group of people accept this vision, it creates a movement for change. The leader, however, must first articulate the vision and demonstrate the ability to turn it into action by aligning performance with vision to create a climate of success for the realization of the stated goal. Islam is radically different from other systems in that it discourages the practice of seeking leadership; if a person desires it for power and glory rather than serving the people by implementing the divine laws, he is not fit to occupy it. In a well-known hadith, the noble messenger of Allah has said that he who seeks leadership is not fit to assume it [7]. On another occasion, he advised his companion, Abdur Rahman as-Samurra not to seek a leadership position, for if he did, he would receive no help from Allah which is only given to those who do not hanker for positions [8]. If seeking leadership is discouraged, it may be asked: what is the mechanism whereby a person is identified/chosen for leadership? The answer lies in the tasks a person performs that propel him into leadership position.

These may be enumerated as follows:

Articulate the goal or vision clearly and demonstrate his personal conviction for it;

Inspire a group of people to follow it;

Evaluate the prevailing situation accurately and devise appropriate strategies for dealing with it, including surmounting problems, difficulties, etc.

Initiate, guide, direct and control change towards the desired goal;

Ensure continuous cooperation of the movement;

Continually expand the movement to strengthen it;

Inspire members of the movement to such a degree that they are prepared to fight and even die for the cause;

Provide satisfaction so that the members feel their mission has a noble purpose.

Let us return to examine the personal attributes required for leadership as exemplified by the noble Messenger of Allah, upon whom be peace.

1. **Knowledge and Hikmah**

In numerous ayaat of the noble Qur'an, Allah says that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, was given both knowledge and hikmah (wisdom) (Al-Qur'an 2:129; 62:05); the two are not the same. Almost anyone can acquire knowledge through study and hard work but hikmah comes only through an inner enlightenment and by seeking sincere guidance from Allah. hikmah is the ability to apply knowledge to a particular situation to bring about the most desirable outcome. The noble messenger was given both knowledge and hikmah because Allah had appointed him for a great purpose in life. hikmah is also essential for a Muslim leader because he is responsible for the well-being of the Ummah (Muslim community). He has to deal and negotiate with hostile powers as well as make decisions that directly affect the community.

There are many instances from the Prophet's Seerah where his hikmah achieved results that his followers were unable to see immediately. The most striking example is illustrated by the Treaty of Hudaibiyya in the sixth year of the hijrah. Some 1400 Muslims led by the Prophet were prohibited by the Quraish from entering Makkah to perform Umrah. The conditions stipulated in the treaty appeared on the face of it to be detrimental to the Muslims and even such close companions as Umar ibn al-Khattab were unable to understand their true import at the time, yet it was the Prophet's great hikmah that brought about the treaty whose benefits soon manifested themselves [9].

2. **Taqwa**

Islam lays great stress on taqwa (humility; being conscious of Allah's presence and fearing Him at all times) not only for the leader but for every believer. It is the only criterion by which people are judged in Islam (Al-Qur'an 49:13). For a leader, it is even more important because the power and authority he acquires can easily make him arrogant. While taqwa is much more than being humble, it is among the many meanings of the term. Humility is especially important for a leader since he is entrusted with the affairs of the community. Not seeking a leadership position is part of taqwa. We see from the Seerahof the Prophet, upon whom be peace, that his personal honesty and integrity had already earned him the title of al-Amin (the trustworthy one) in Makkah even before being commissioned as Prophet. Similar modesty and humility were apparent in the conduct of the Khulafa ar-Rashidoon (the four rightly-guided successors).

In his first speech as khalifah of the Muslims, Abu Bakr Siddiq proved himself an ideal of modesty and humility. There was total absence of the kind of arrogance one finds in modern-day rulers when they assume power. They proclaim their own virtues and the great feats they will perform. Abu Bakr Siddiq's attitude was totally different. He said:

"I have been appointed as ruler over you although I am not the best among you. I have never sought this position nor has there ever been a desire in my heart to have this in preference to anyone else... If I do right, you must help and obey me; if I go astray, set me aright... Obey me so long as I obey Allah and His Messenger. If I disobey them, then you have no obligation to follow me" [10].

There was a group of people who felt that Imam Ali should have been the khalifah instead of Abu Bakr Siddiq. In an attempt to exploit this, Abu Sufyan went to Imam Ali offering to bring out 10,000 armed men in his support if he so desired. Imam Ali's reply is instructive:

"What you have said reflects your open enmity to Islam and the Muslims. I do not want any help from you. All Muslims are brothers to each other; only the munafiqun cut each other. We consider Abu Bakr to be fit for this position otherwise we would not have let him assume it" [11].

Because of his taqwa, Imam Ali refused to encourage anyone or anything that would appear to promote his personal interests or act in any way that might lead to fitna (sedition) in society.

3: ‘**Adl and Rahmah**

'Adl (justice) and Rahmah (compassion) are two other essential characteristics a leader must possess. Justice without compassion leads to tyranny, while compassion without justice creates anarchy. A leader needs to maintain a careful balance keeping the overall good of society in mind (Al-Qur'an 5:08; 4:135; 7:29). In Madinah, the Prophet ordered the hand of a thief to be cut. Some Sahaba(companions) thought the punishment would not be carried out because the person was a distant relative of the Prophet. When he heard this, the Prophet, upon whom be peace, assured them that if his daughter Fatimah had been guilty, even she would not have been spared. He then reminded them that earlier communities had been destroyed because they had one law for the poor, and another for the rich [12]. The same concern for the poor and the oppressed was the reason for his participation in the "Hulf al-Fudool", a pact he entered into in Makkah before his Prophethood. A trader from Yemen was cheated out of his fair due by a powerful Makkan merchant. The Yemeni proclaimed his plea in the Ka‘ba. A group of notables, among them al-Amin, vowed to restore his right and thereafter that of anyone else who was wronged [13]. Justice, therefore, is a fundamental precept of Islam; even more so for a leader because it is part of his responsibility to maintain balance in society. Injustice invariably leads to turmoil and conflict. At the same time, justice must be tempered with compassion. An Islamic leader must combine the two in his personality.

4. **Courage and Bravery**

Those who lead are expected to set an example by showing courage and taking calculated risks. Courage and bravery, important for everybody, are essential attributes for a leader. People must see their leader as someone who is not afraid to face danger. Only by doing so can a leader inspire others to perform great feats. In the battle of Badr, for instance, the Prophet was clearly taking a great risk. That this was inspired by Allah is true but the odds were such that it appeared to be a complete mismatch. The Quraish of Makkah not only had far greater numerical superiority (three to one) they were also heavily armed. An ordinary leader would have demurred from such confrontation. The Prophet's exemplary courage and bravery not only inspired his followers but also changed the course of history. Badr highlighted the Prophet's courage, as well as the commitment of Muslims. The expedition to Tabuk (9AH) was fraught with just as great a risk. There, 30,000 Muslims marched across the desert in scorching heat to confront a Roman army of 100,000. It was the example of such courage and bravery that established a pattern for future generations to emulate. Throughout the Prophet's life, Muslims faced much larger armies but charged with iman (faith-commitment) as well as following the personal example of bravery, courage and wisdom of the Prophet, they emerged victorious. Similarly, it was the Prophet's courage and bravery in the battle of Hunayn (8AH) that saved Muslims from a near-defeat and routed the enemy. We saw similar courage demonstrated by the late Imam Khomeini when Iraq invaded the fledging Islamic state of Iran in September 1980; and by the people of Afghanistan when the Soviets invaded in December 1979. In recent days, the Hizbullah in Lebanon and the Chechens in Ichkeria have demonstrated similar courage against great odds.

5. **Shura**

Shura (mutual consultation) is a Qur'anic command (3:159; 42:38); the Prophet himself regularly consulted his companions on all important matters. It is even more important in the case of Muslim leaders. The most outstanding example of the Prophet's Shura occurred on the eve of the Battle of Uhud (3AH). While he was of the opinion that the city should be defended from within, the majority wanted to go out and fight. The Prophet accepted this; he did not impose his own opinion. There is an important lesson here: the followers' trust and confidence is gained if their opinion is respected. That the majority opinion ultimately turned out to be wrong was not used to point accusing fingers. The Prophet used the opportunity instead to instill discipline and to impress upon them the importance of following instructions of the leader whose abandonment had led to the Muslims' defeat despite their initial success in battle. People can be inspired to make sacrifices only if they feel that their opinion is respected and that the leader does not merely dictate to them. In the Battle of Ahzab (5AH), the suggestion of the companions to dig a trench as a defence mechanism worked well for the Muslims.

6. **Decisiveness and Resolution**

A leader must be decisive and resolute. He must demonstrate such qualities at all times because a decision delayed may be an opportunity lost. The Prophet himself showed great decisiveness at many critical moments in life. Despite suffering a setback in the Battle of Uhud, he decided to go after the Quraish the following day instead of waiting for them to re-launch their offensive. It was this brilliant thinking and decisiveness on the part of the Prophet that forced the Quraish to abandon their plans to return and attack again.

Similar decisiveness was demonstrated when dealing with the Jewish tribes in Madinah -- the Banu Qaiynuqa‘, Banu Nadhir and Banu Quraidha -- after their treachery was exposed. The Banu Qaiynuqa‘ were expelled from Madinah following the Battle of Badr because of their scandalous behaviour towards a Muslim woman in public. This led to fighting between the Jews and Muslims and despite the Prophet's appeal to them, the Banu Qaiynuqa‘ refused to abide by the terms of the treaty binding them, the Covenant of Madinah [14]. They were thus expelled from Madinah. The Banu Nadhir were the next to violate the terms of the treaty during the Battle of Uhud, so they too were expelled. But despite witnessing such expulsions resulting from their coreligionists' treachery, the Banu Quraidha still broke their treaty obligations by conspiring with the Quraish to undermine Muslims during the Battle of Ahzab (5AH). After the battle was over, essentially as a result of the confederates fleeing following a siege that lasted more than a month, all the male members of the Banu Quraidha were executed while their women and children were taken captive. Thus was the Jewish menace in Madinah eliminated. Only a leader with firmness and conviction could implement such a policy.

The Prophet, upon whom be peace, advised Abu Dharr, a very close companion but weak in physique, not to seek leadership position because it is not for the weak. Those who are given such responsibility must live up to its obligations. If they fail, they violate a great trust and are answerable for it on the day of Judgement. It is clear from the Prophet's Sunnah that decisiveness and firmness are important considerations for leadership; those who are weak are not fit for it.

This may appear to contradict the requirement for Shura. How can a leader carry out his programme if he has to listen to conflicting advice and yet be decisive and firm? From the Islamic point of view, a leader is required to seek the advice of his followers but is not obliged to act upon it if his own judgement, based on Islamic values, indicates otherwise. The people, however, are obliged to obey him at all times, except when he orders something prohibited in Islam. There is no obedience inmunkar (forbidden). (hadith: Obedience in Islam is only for ma‘roof (good and upright conduct) and not for munkar [15]. Even in salat, if the Imam makes a mistake, someone from the congregation must correct him, but if the Imam continues, then the congregation must follow him.

7. **Eloquence**

A leader must be eloquent and articulate. This is required to communicate the purpose of the mission clearly and to inspire people to follow it. The Qur'an itself is the most eloquent document; it appeals both to the mind and the heart. The Prophet, upon whom be peace, articulated the message of Islam in a way that was immediately accepted by a small group of people in Makkah. Even the Quraish acknowledged that his message had merit but they opposed it because they viewed it as undermining their personal interests. When Utbah ibn Rabi‘ah went to the Prophet with offers of money, beautiful women or a position in the Makkan hierarchy, in an attempt to dissuade him from his mission, the noble Messenger gave him a patient hearing. When Utbah had finished, the Prophet recited Surah Ha Mim Sajda (Surah 41), instead of responding to his suggestions which clearly imputed ulterior motives to the Prophet. The recitation of the Surah had such an effect on Utbah that he returned to his fellow chiefs in utter humiliation, telling them to leave the Prophet alone [16]. Equally worthy of note is the Prophet's rejection of any leadership role within the Makkan hierarchy because it had no divine legitimacy. In rejecting it, the Prophet clearly saw that he and his companions would suffer persecution, but this was preferable to working within the jahili system.

8**. Spirit of sacrifice**

Simplicity and self-sacrifice are other qualities that Islam enjoins, especially for a leader because his behaviour has a direct bearing on the conduct of others. If the leader is seen to be making personal sacrifices, then the followers will make even greater sacrifices. The leader will soon lose all support if he asks others to do so but himself holds back. Similarly, he must have no personal or class interests. The Prophet, for instance, never did anything to benefit himself or his family. In fact, throughout his life, he made great personal sacrifices. Often he and his family went without food for days on end. Once when his beloved daughter Fatima asked for a servant to help with household work, he told her that he was sent to secure the akhira, not to seek the comforts of this world. On another occasion, when Umar ibn al-Khattab saw marks on his blessed body because the Prophet had been lying on a coarse mat on the floor, he asked why the Prophet denied himself even the small comforts of life when the rulers of Persia and Rome enjoyed great luxury. The Prophet's reply has been a guiding light for sincere Muslims throughout their lives: such comforts are for people who wish to cling to this dunya (worldly life).

Not only did the Prophet personally participate in many battles but in some of the most crucial ones, members of his own family -- his uncle Hamza, and cousins Ali and Ja‘far -- were in the forefront. Hamza was martyred in the battle of Uhud (3AH) while Ja‘far was martyred in the battle of Mu'ta (8AH). In the battle of Badr, when the Quraish refused to fight members of the Ansar, the Prophet sent Hamza, Ali and Ubaydah ibn al-Harith to confront them.

There is another area in which the Islamic order is fundamentally different from the predominant secular western system today. An Islamic leader and those in positions of authority make sacrifices so that the downtrodden would have more. In the west, the elites live in luxury while exhorting the people to make sacrifices, telling them that once the rich get richer the benefits of prosperity will trickle-down to the poor. In other words, the poor must wait for the rich to get even richer before the poor will get any relief. In real life, even this is not true; in many rich societies, the poor are becoming poorer. In the US, for instance, which has the largest economy in the world, there are more than 35 million poor people; 20 million children are without medical care [17]. In fact, the poor in the US are poorer than the poor in some of the poorest countries of the world. Islam condemns any system which allows such disparities; it wants people at the top to make sacrifices so that those at the bottom can have more. Ostentatious living is specifically discouraged; Islam enjoins its adherents to "Eat and drink [of what Allah has provided you] but do not be extravagant" (Al-Qur'an 7:31). Similarly, it rejects gross inequalities in society which lead to conflict and ultimately violence.

We also find the same kind of simplicity practised by the Khulafa ar-Rashidoon. Abu Bakr Siddiq took a small portion from the Bait al-Mal for his family's upkeep because he had to give up his own business when he became the khalifah. On his deathbed, he instructed his family to return to the Bait al-Mal whatever was left of his possessions. It was this example which prompted Umar ibn al-Khattab to say that he had left a very difficult legacy for his successors to follow. During Umar's Khilafah, theSahaba wanted to increase his stipend from the Bait al-Mal but he flatly refused despite the Islamic domain having extended far and wide and having acquired great riches. Similarly, Imam Ali led a very simple life. A beduin once found him shivering in a worn out sheet because he could not afford to buy a better cloth to cover himself in. Such examples of self-sacrifice abound in the early history of Islam. These leaders never ordered anything that they did not practise themselves. They were always conscious of the Qur'anic command:

"O you who are divinely committed! Why do you say that which you do not practise yourself. The worst of you in the sight of Allah is he who says that which he does not practise" (Al-Qur'an 61:02-3).

It was only when Muslim rulers, especially during the period of mulukiyyah, abandoned these principles that they became separated from the people and eventually lost all trust leading to the defeat of Muslims and the loss of power.

9**. Sabr**

Sabr (patience) is another quality essential for a leader. Impatience will simply drive his followers away. In the face of immense persecution in Makkah, the Prophet not only showed great patience himself but he also counselled his followers to do likewise. Similarly, when the Muslims were besieged in Sha‘b abi Talib, it was their sabr that saw them through. We see from the lives of such Prophets as Ayub, Yaqub and Yusuf, that they endured their trials and tribulations with great patience. Yet one needs to make a distinction between the trials one is put through directly by Allah and those that one faces at the hands of other human beings. For instance, Prophet Ayub's trial was not caused by human beings; in the case of the Prophets Yaqub, Yusuf, and the Prophet Muhammad, upon them all be peace, it was the people who tormented them. It was most critical in the case of the noble Messenger, because he not only had to endure such suffering himself but also counselled sabr to his companions who were being persecuted. An outstanding example of the Prophet's sabr was demonstrated following his suffering at the hands of the people of Ta'if in the tenth year of his mission in Makkah. When the chiefs of Ta'if set the hooligans of the town upon him, instead of seeking revenge, the Prophet prayed for their guidance.

**Tasks a leader must perform**

**1. Articulation of the vision**

Clear articulation of the vision as well as firm conviction of the leader are the primary requirements for any movement to bring about change. Those who are invited to join must know the ultimate objective. When the messenger of Allah started to deliver the message of Islam, it was clear and concise: worship of the One and only God who has no partners, and Muhammad, upon whom be peace, is the messenger of Allah; there was no ambiguity about it. It was a direct challenge to the existing order based on tribal affiliations, exploitation and an arrogant belief in self-importance. The Prophet challenged the very foundations of this system by calling for a new order based on tawheed (Oneness of God) and Muslim Brotherhood. The vision was articulated in such a way that tribal and family affiliations were not only loosened but also broken. Those who were supposed to carry on the old tradition because they would be its principal beneficiaries, became its greatest opponents. This became evident in Makkah where members of many leading families joined the new faith braving the wrath of their kindred. Rejection of the existing order was an important part of the vision. The Prophet also made clear through his own example that there could be no cooperation with the existing jahilisystem. Thus, the goal was articulated in such a way that its recipients understood it clearly and were prepared to face any challenge to defend it, including separation from their families.

**2. Inspire/Motivate People**

Together with a clear articulation of the vision, the leader must inspire and motivate people. Translating vision into action is an important task. The leader must turn people's indifference into interest, pessimism into optimism and motivate them to action for the realization of the goal. The noble messenger of Allah was able to motivate people who not only accepted the message but were also prepared to sacrifice their lives for it. This level of commitment was not inspired by any enticements to worldly gains; their only reward, they were told, was in the Hereafter. The Qur'an narrates the stories of many Prophets who delivered the message but their people did not accept it. When Prophet Lut urged his people to abandon their abominable ways, there was nothing wrong either with the message or with his articulation of it; yet his people rejected it. Thus, acceptance of the message is an important part of the mission. If it is not accepted, the mission remains unfulfilled.

**3. Proper understanding of the existing order**

In order to motivate people, a correct analysis of the prevailing system is necessary. It is only when people understand that the existing system is exploitative and unjust that they will be motivated to work to change it. A leader must outline an effective strategy for dealing with the prevailing order, especially in surmounting problems and difficulties that will be encountered when it is challenged. He must also indicate what he plans to replace it with. In Makkah, the Prophet rejected the unjust prevailing order; he called people to the worship of One God, to abandon killings, especially of their daughters, and to be truthful and honest in their dealings with each other. He also called for an end to oppression of the weak. The chiefs of Makkah understood the significance of such a message; it was a direct challenge to their socio-economic and political order. That is why they opposed the Prophet so vehemently. Despite great oppression and persecution, the Prophet did not directly respond to such provocations; he also urged his companions to endure their hardships with sabr. When the oppression intensified, he allowed a group of them to migrate to Abyssinia. What is remarkable about the Makkan period is that so few Muslims abandoned their faith despite such great hardships even when the Prophet had no power to prevent them from doing so. A few Muslims, who had migrated to Abyssinia, however, converted to Christianity and stayed there.

**4. Initiate, guide and control change**

A successful leader is able to initiate, guide and control change in order to achieve the stated objectives. Many movements, even those struggling for a genuine cause, are often subverted from within by agents provocateurs, or when they are forced to move too quickly because they arouse expectations which cannot be fulfilled. It is the responsibility of the leader to keep the expectations of the people within realistic limits. Prophet Musa's mission was temporarily sabotaged by Samirri in his absence even though he had left his brother, Haroon, another Prophet, in charge of the flock (Al-Qur'an 2:92-93). In the contemporary age, the Algerian Islamic movement, penetrated by agents of the military junta, has been virtually destroyed by subversive acts. The Shah's principal backer, the US, was unable to destroy the Islamic movement led by Imam Khomeini although western agents such as Bani Sadr, Sadeq Qutbzadeh and elements of the Mujahideen-e Khalq Organisation had penetrated it. The difference in the two cases must be found both in the quality of leadership as well as the depth of commitment of their followers. Imam Khomeini's was a towering personality; others paled before him. There was also much depth in the movement he led; infiltrators were unable to subvert it from within.

During the Prophet's life in Madinah, there were munafiqun (hypocrites) in the ranks of the Muslims who made every effort to subvert Islam from within but the Prophet's great hikmah overcame all their attempts. It is, therfore, important for the leader to guide and control change as well as overcome the obstacles to change to ensure the desired result. Often the difference between success and failure is predicated on the pace and direction of change. In fact, a leader himself is judged on the basis of whether he is able to bring about change that is in consonance with the vision he has articulated. A good leader is able to see an opportunity and take advantage of it to advance the cause. Great leaders often create opportunities by challenging the status quo.

**5. Sustaining movement over the long-term**

Sustainability of the movement is one of the most difficult tasks a leader faces. Initially, people may participate because their enthusiasm is aroused and they have not encountered any problems or difficulties. While this was not the case with the Muslims in Makkah for they faced numerous difficulties from the beginning which progressively got worse, yet their attachment to the faith remained strong. There were some who had to conceal their faith but the majority bore their tribulations with great patience. One of the essential qualities of a leader is that he is able to secure continuous cooperation of the group. The Prophet achieved this both in Makkah and in Madinah. In Makkah the people were persecuted, yet their loyalty was retained. In Madinah, the hosts (Ansar) were motivated to make great sacrifices by accommodating and looking after the newcomers (Muhajiroun) as well as offering protection to the Prophet. An additional challenge was to prevent any misunderstandings arising between them as a result of the sudden influx of such a large number of people in Madinah. There were trouble-makers trying to create dissension in the ranks of the Muslims. The Quraish of Makkah regularly sent emissaries to the notables of Madinah urging them to get rid of the Muslims. There were those, like Abdullah ibn Ubayy‘, who viewed the arrival of the Muslims as undermining their own leadership ambitions. The same was true of the Jews who viewed the Muslims as undermining their monopoly on religious matters. Group solidarity was, therefore, extremely important for Muslims in the face of these challenges but it was based on iman rather than on blood ties or tribal and ethnic identity. Similarly, mobilising resources to sustain the movement is another important task a leader must perform.

**6. Motivation to fight**

Any group that is not prepared to fight and, if need be, to die for its principles will not be able to survive for long. The validity or legitimacy of the message alone is not sufficient as we have seen from the life-struggle of so many Prophets. Others, such as the Prophets Zakariya and Yahya, were killed by the people. The Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was able to motivate his followers to such an extent that they were willing to make any sacrifice. In fact, it is one of the remarkable aspects of the early history of Islam, that Muslims always faced an enemy many times larger but they seldom lost a battle. The Muslims made up in motivation and dedication what they lacked in weapons and material resources. It was the inspiration provided by the noble Messenger of Allah that enabled the Muslims to achieve such feats.

**7. Satisfaction**

All activity is undertaken because it provides some degree of satisfaction. The higher the level of satisfaction, the greater the willingness of the people to identify with the mission and the greater their readiness to make sacrifices for it. Satisfaction is, therefore, an important consideration in the motivation of a group. Most leaders in the world today appeal to such notions as nationalism, race, or material benefits etc. The US, which claims to lead the west, offers its people the heady brew of "American interests." Thus, other people's interests and lives become dispensible to satiate America's greed. Worldly temptations often act as a strong motivational force. Islam does not resort to such temptations. In fact, at no stage did the Prophet offer to his followers any worldly rewards except if it advanced the cause of Islam. For instance, the Qur'an allows zakat funds to be used to free slaves or to win people's hearts (Al-Qur'an 9:60). The Prophet always told his companions that their reward would be in the Hereafter. This was most clearly demonstrated when the delegations from Yathrib came to meet him in Makkah on the eve of the hijra. Upon inquiry about what they would get in return for providing him protection and accepting his leadership, the Prophet's responded that their reward was in the akhira. So impressed were the Yathribi delegations that they proclaimed this to be entirely to their satisfaction. In Islam, the satisfaction is spiritual and moral rather than material.

**Succession**

Finally, we need to consider the question of succession. How do Muslims choose a successor to the leader when he dies or is incapacitated? While there were differences of opinion among Muslims in early Islamic history, such issues are no longer relevant today. A successor is chosen by a Shura of elders called the ahl al-hal wal ‘aqd (those who loosen and bind). This concept evolved during the period of the Khulafa ar-Rashidoon as a mechanism to choose the leader of the Muslims. The ahl al-hal wal ‘aqd are the leading personalities of society who are knowledgeable and have a proven track record of sincerity and sacrifice. They have no personal or class interests. The person who is appointed leader also does not covet such a position but is seen as most suitable for the job. Islam rejects such western concepts as democracy and party politics in which public opinion is manipulated and interest groups exert pressure to gain advantage. In the Islamic system, the willing consent of the people is obtained only after the ahl al-hal wal ‘aqd have nominated a leader. There is no such concept as the will of the majority since man is not free to make laws for himself. Everyone, the ruler and the ruled, must follow the laws of Islam. The job of the leader is to implement these laws in society because he is the most suitable for the job. Attempts by some Muslims to equate the Islamic concept of Shura with democracy springs from a lack of understanding and self-confidence. The two have little or nothing in common.

**Conclusion**

In Islam, leadership is an amanah (a trust) and the job of the leader is to discharge this responsibility to the best of his abilities. Failure to do so will render him liable before Allah on the Day of Judgement. In the Islamic system, a person does not seek leadership, it is entrusted to him because it is a grave responsibility. The candidate must be a good communicator, able to motivate and mobilise people and inspire them to rise above petty preoccupations for the sake of a higher and more noble purpose: the establishment and defence of the Islamic State. This he must demonstrate through personal sacrifice, courage and ability to keep the group focused on the goal.

The most important task of a leader, however, is to implement the laws of Allah on earth. This is the ultimate mission of man as Allah's khalifah (vicegerent) on earth which can only be achieved in the framework of the Islamic state. The Prophet's Seerah offers the best and most comprehensive guide and model to achieve this.

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