

Islamic world



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Abstract.

Early Islamic writing deals extensively with the concept of leadership. The lineage of the legitimate leader, his role in holding the Muslim community together, his duties and responsibilities and the ideal qualities of a ruler are all explicitly stated. The unconditional obedience and loyalty of Muslims to the ruler is also emphasized.

Islam and Leadership.

Early Islamic history is replete with detailed depictions of Muslim leadership during the nascent phase of the religion, when enlightened leadership was crucial to fostering Islamic growth. Most early Muslim works, even when centered round the life of the Prophet Muhammad, or other significant events in Islamic history, touch upon leadership, and emphasize that authority comes from Allah and belongs to those of noble lineage: “ of princely stock” (al-Mulk, as cited by Darke, 1960), or belonging to the house of the Prophet Muhammad: his “ blood relations” (al-Tabari, 923. Battle of Karbala). The right of succession is also clearly delineated, to avoid dissension in the community. In general, the conceptions of leadership are mainly concerned with the importance of keeping the Muslim community together, the obligation of the community to obey the leader, and the qualities and duties of a good leader.

The primary requirement of Islamic leadership is the unity of the community. The objective of a leader is to ensure that the Islamic kingdom “ will endure and increase day by day” (Darke, 1960). This is relevant in the early days of Islam, when the threat of schisms and factions rising and leading to the “ split up into factions” (Ishaq, 632) of the newly-found community was very

real. God's command to his caliphs is to confirm Islam, " consolidate its sway ---- and strengthen its ties" (al-Tabari, 923. Letter of the Umayyad Caliph).

The unity of the believers is essential for the survival of the new religion, and the leader is urged to foster communal bonds and guard against any dissension. It is clearly stated that " a community can be saved only if it has a head who can unite it" (al-Tabari, 923. Letter of Uthman), and warnings against discord and schisms are repeatedly given.

Islam ensures the obligation of the community to obey the leader by explicitly stating that the authority of the leader comes directly from God, and commands, " No one contests the rights of the Caliph" (al-Tabari, 923. Letter of the Umayyad Caliph). Obedience to the caliphate is equated with obedience to God's will and is held out to be the path to happiness, well-being and God's blessings in this life and after. " God gave him power and dominion --- and made all the world subject to him" (Darke, 1960): this acknowledges that the leader's authority over the people has been vested in him by God, and his role is that of ' the Messenger of God.' Absolute obedience is commanded and challenging the authority of the leader merits punishment from God himself. It is out rightly declared that the leader " is all powerful" (al-Tabari, 923. Letter of the Umayyad Caliph). Thus, the authority of the leader and his right to the complete allegiance of the people is unequivocally established.

The Muslim ruler is responsible " for the efficient conduct of affairs spiritual and temporal" (Darke, 1960). The dispensation of justice, the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure, the protection and advancement of the common good, and above all, the consolidation of the rule of Islam, are considered to be the paramount duties of a good ruler. The qualities of the

king range from “ comely appearance, a kindly disposition, integrity, manliness, bravery, horsemanship, knowledge” (Darke, 1960. Rules for Kings), to devotion to God and to the practice of Islam. The ideal king is one who possesses “ good judgment, sound religion, abundant manliness, and a knowledge of the proper management of affairs” (al-Tabari, 923. Letter of the Umayyad Caliph). The leader is “ guided by his forefathers --- (and follows) the well traced road of piety” (al-Tabari, 923. The Accession Sermon).

The early Islamic writings extensively delineate the various aspects of leadership. The Muslim leader is of the lineage of the Prophet, is the spiritual and temporal head of his people, exercises the authority vested in him by God himself, and appoints his successor. He is a man of utmost virtue and skill, is responsible for the common welfare and considers the unity of the ummah to be paramount. All Muslims are obliged to give him their complete allegiance and obedience. The leader is the protector of Islam and its adherents.

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