

Fast 21: Qualities for leadership – 1

- According to the Quran, Muslims must choose worthy people as their leaders and they must do justice. In Study 16 the following verse has already been quoted: “Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice. Surely Allah instructs you with what is excellent” (4:58). By “trusts” (*amānāt*) are meant positions of trust. The Holy Prophet has explained the word “trust” (*amānat*) as meaning the affairs of state:

“When the trust (*amānat*) is wasted, wait for the doom. People asked: How will the *amānat* be wasted, O Messenger of Allah? He said: When government (*amr*) is entrusted to those unworthy of it, then wait for the doom.” (Bukhari, h. 6496)

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ "إِذَا
ضُيِّعَتِ الْأَمَانَةُ فَانْتَظِرِ السَّاعَةَ". قَالَ
كَيْفَ إِضَاعَتُهَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ "إِذَا أُسْنِدَ
الْأَمْرُ إِلَى غَيْرِ أَهْلِهِ، فَانْتَظِرِ السَّاعَةَ"

- In the verse which follows, the Quran says:

“O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is best and more suitable to achieve the end.” (4:59)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا
الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي
شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ
وَ أَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ﴿٥٩﴾

This deals with obedience to the appointed rulers. Muslims must obey Allah and His Messenger first of all, and then those who hold authority in their community. In case of disagreement with those in authority, the matter should be settled with reference to Allah and His Messenger, i.e., the teachings of the Quran and the example of the Holy Prophet. Islam does not allow absolute obedience to any ruler, leader or person in authority. The Holy Prophet made this clear by saying:

“To hear and obey the authorities is binding, so long as one is not commanded to disobey God; when one is commanded to disobey God, he should not hear or obey.” (Bukhari, h. 2955)

السَّمْعُ وَالطَّاعَةُ حَقٌّ، مَا لَمْ يُؤْمَرْ
بِالْمَعْصِيَةِ، فَإِذَا أُمِرَ بِمَعْصِيَةٍ فَلَا سَمْعَ وَلَا
طَاعَةَ

- A leader should be a tried and tested person, with a record of sacrifices:

“And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain commands **he fulfilled them**. He said: Surely I will make you a leader of people. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the wrongdoers, said He.” (2:124)

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۗ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۗ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

Abraham was chosen by Allah as a leader of mankind after he had been tested and tried, and proved his faithfulness to Allah’s commands. Only such a person can be an example to others and be in a position to ask others to obey the law. Also, Allah here has ruled out that Abraham’s descendants could be leaders merely because of being his progeny. They can only qualify for leadership if they also pass the same tests and trials that he did. Thus any kind of hereditary leadership or rule by family dynasties, whether political or religious, is disallowed in Islam.

- Leaders, even the highest of them, are required to obey God and follow the law even more so than the ordinary people. In the Quran the Holy Prophet is told to say:

“I am commanded to be the first of those who submit. And do not be of those who set up partners (with Allah). Surely I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the chastisement of a grievous day.” (6:15)

قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أكونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ قُلْ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٥﴾

The Holy Prophet is “the first of those who submit”, not only because he was the first member of the Muslim nation, with whom it began, but also because he is the first and foremost, and ahead of all others, in obeying any commandment of God. He obeys the law first, and then asks others to obey it. He has fear that if he were to disobey God, he would be punished. Of course, any such disobedience is hypothetical in the case of the Holy Prophet, but it is mentioned to convey the absolute nature of the principle that no one, however high, can disobey God with impunity.

- The Holy Prophet’s opponents wanted him to change his revelation to something in favour of their beliefs. The Quran said in regard to this:

“And if We had not made you firm, you might have indeed inclined to them a little; then We would have made you taste a double (punishment) in life and a double (punishment) after death, and then you would not have found any helper against Us.” (17:74–75)

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ ثَبَّتْنَاكَ لَقَدْ كِدَّتْ تَرَكُنْ
إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا ﴿٧٤﴾ إِذَا
لَا دَفْنَاكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ
الْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا
نَصِيرًا ﴿٧٥﴾

Thus no Muslim leader, in negotiation with whomsoever, may agree to accept terms which he knows to be against the revealed teachings of Islam. No Muslim religious leader, for acquiring popularity or pleasing some authority, may issue a ruling or give an interpretation which he knows to be against the Quran.