

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTIVATING LEADERS.

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The significance of cultivating leaders

God Almighty said in the story of the daughter of Shu'ayb, describing Moses to her father (peace be upon them both): "One of them said, 'O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy.'" (Qur'an 28:26). With this profound statement, the discerning daughter of Shu'ayb encapsulated the criteria for selection and delegation, embodying many human virtues. This phrase has remained a beacon and legacy throughout different eras and times, serving as a succinct guide for leadership formation.

It is no wonder that it is said, "The most perceptive of people are three: the daughter of Shu'ayb, the wife of Yusuf's master, when she said, 'Perhaps he may benefit us,' and Abu Bakr when he chose 'Umar as the leader of the believers."

The qualities of strength and trustworthiness continue to be paramount in selecting leaders and officials for demanding and serious tasks. It is not an exaggeration to say that our nation has suffered from a dire need for competent leaders who perform their

duties with sincerity and dedication, lifting the community from the depths of weakness.

Therefore, I do not overstate it when I assert that one of the most crucial and urgent steps we must diligently pursue today is the creation of capable leaders. We need to cultivate strong and trustworthy individuals who can bear the burdens of this era, navigating between the throes of weakness and the factors of resurgence for this Muslim nation. Neglecting this endeavor prolongs failure, setbacks, and despair.

No two rational people who have witnessed this nation's calamities would dispute that the lack of wise leadership has been a primary cause of prolonged suffering and missed opportunities for liberation. We have seen this in the Arab Spring revolutions and numerous other events.

The number of noble leaders is few, and amidst the deluge of Westernization and its chronic ailments targeting the core of societies, which destroy the youth, dampen aspirations, and threaten innate purity, the danger is magnified. We do not live in a calm environment but face continuous hostile campaigns aimed at our most precious assets—our faith and belief, which are the sources of our strength and renewal.

Today, the Muslim nation doesn't lack manpower, natural resources, strategic location, or glorious history. It even possesses sufficient

awareness to achieve a renaissance. However, it desperately needs capable leaders with strength, trustworthiness, indomitable will, and unwavering resolve to lead the masses to victory and empowerment.

Unfortunately, the enemies of this nation have recognized the importance of this factor, dedicating their methodologies and programs to producing loyal leaders for their causes and goals. Thus, they also target our leaders and symbols. Whenever a prominent leader emerges among us, they deploy their agents to imprison him or resort to direct elimination or character assassination. The leader lives under the watchful eyes of the West and the schemes of its agents. The threat extends even to children in their schools and families, killing dreams in their infancy and turning them into terrifying nightmares.

Simultaneously, we observe the weakened role of the family in preparing leaders from a very early age. Thus, there remains an urgent need to alert the Muslim family—the fundamental unit of society—about its primary responsibility to create leaders who can transform defeat into victory and turn weaknesses into strengths, providing a sufficient pool of leaders to meet the long and ongoing battles of the nation, where this nation first and foremost offers its sons as leaders in sacrifice.

We will outline below the fundamental markers necessary for achieving the decisive and crucial goal of creating sincere leaders. The absence of such leaders is the greatest threat to the nation in a conflict that will extend to the Day of Judgment.

For those who argue about difficult circumstances and weak means, the rich history of this nation with its illustrious leaders, who emerged from the womb of weakness and oppression, suffices to refute their low spirits and discouragement. Despite obstacles and plots, they changed the course of history with their remarkable victories, resurrecting the Muslims anew. It is enough that this nation does not accept humiliation nor bows to anyone but God, destined to rise and stand tall.

Ubay ibn Ka'b reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Give glad tidings to this nation of splendor, exaltation, religion, victory, and empowerment on earth" (Ahmad, with a strong chain of narration).

Reflect on the words of 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) when he said, "I complain to Allah of the strength of the evildoer and the weakness of the trustworthy," both of whom do not represent the ideal Muslim. 'Umar also once said to his companions, "Wish." One of them said, "I wish this house were full of coins to spend in the way of Allah." 'Umar said, "Wish again." Another said, "I wish it were full of gold to spend in the way of Allah." 'Umar then said, "But I wish it were full of men like Abu 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah, Mu'adh ibn Jabal, and Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, whom I could appoint in the service of Allah." This highlights the importance of replicating exemplary leaders within the nation. Indeed, one man can be worth an army, an institution, or a company.

The primary references are the Qur'an and the Sunnah:

Hearts find life in the Qur'an and Sunnah; through these divine revelations, energies explode, strengthening the heart and fortifying actions.

Thus, the journey always begins with contemplating the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and acting upon them. The Qur'an includes models of leadership and measures to achieve victory and elevation. The more the heart is preoccupied with the verses of Allah, the more He grants it triumph. This is a blessing that the sincere wise people compete for.

The Role Model and the Methodology:

We cannot create leaders without a role model and a methodology. There is no superior role model or more magnificent methodology than that of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. This necessitates that his biography be disseminated, studied, and adhered to in every conceivable manner, extracting its intellectual, educational, political, social, economic, and military meanings to inspire greatness, strength, and soundness of means and objectives, and for correction and enhancement. The biography of the chosen Prophet, peace be upon him, is replete with connotations of leadership and impressive models in every domain and circumstance. He emerged from the heart of ignorance to institute the towering state of Islam with unparalleled genius, resonating throughout

history and remaining astonishing to this day. His eminence as a leader extended beyond his noble self; it included his policies and methods in cultivating, correcting, and refining leaders among the honorable companions, may Allah be pleased with them. He would select a young individual and entrust him with significant tasks, whether safeguarding secrets, delivering messages, or leading armies, in numerous situations that cannot all be conveyed here but pulse with beauty in the life of our Prophet, the best of humanity, peace be upon him. No role model rivals to him, nor can any example rival him.

Thabit reported from Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, who said: "The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, came to me while I was playing with the boys. He greeted us and sent me on an errand, which made me late returning to my mother. When I arrived, she asked, 'What kept you?' I said, 'The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, sent me on an errand.' She asked, 'What was his need?' I replied, 'It is a secret.' She said, 'Do not disclose the secret of the Messenger of Allah to anyone.

" Anas then said to Thabit, the narrator of the hadith: "By Allah, if I were to tell anyone, I would have told you, Thabit" (narrated by Muslim).

Studying Models of Leaders in Islamic History:

Beginning with the Companions to our modern era, a Muslim must be acquainted with the stories of Muslim leaders from an early educational stage, according to their intellectual level. This study should progressively deepen and expand in detail until solid conclusions are drawn, benefiting from these magnificent spirits. For instance, the military academies of the West have devised specific curricula dedicated to the genius of Khalid ibn al-Walid, the Sword of Allah, whose military strategies are studied with great attention and care in Europe and America. He is renowned for his famous saying, "The minds of men are on the tips of their pens, not on the tips of their spears."

How can we neglect this heritage by occupying the generation with Hollywood's fictional heroes when we possess real models of heroism that can be inspired by their personalities, performances, and genius? The heroes of this nation are numerous, and how astonishing are the biographies of its leaders.

From Theory to Practice:

To cultivate leaders, it is insufficient to merely accumulate adequate knowledge of leadership arts, the lives of leaders, their characteristics, and their strategies. Rather actual training and field practice are essential. Conducting leadership development courses for various age groups and levels has become a necessity in our time.

This entails assigning leadership tasks, crisis simulations, physical training, and everything related to strengthening the heart, mind, and body. Attention must be given to correction and development to help participants attain proper knowledge and practice of leadership art.

These courses can be offered in familial units, neighborhood, city, town, community, and even on a broader scale within the Islamic world level. Subsequently, small-scale leadership projects for emerging leaders can be provided and monitored.

Providing the Means for Genius and Overcoming Obstacles

It is essential to provide the means for the brilliance of future leaders. We cannot expect exemplary leaders to emerge if we neglect the factors that contribute to their development. This includes fostering a spiritual and moral environment, providing libraries and educational resources, and adopting sound educational methods that aim to create leaders. Additionally, it is crucial to eliminate obstacles such as trivial distractions, harmful company, and discouraging environments, even if it requires relocating or finding companions who share the same dream and purpose.

This does not imply that life will be easy; lessons of patience, deprivation, hardship, and trials are inevitable. However, the goal is to close the avenues of temptation and weaken their influence, guided by the words of Allah: "And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them,

desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect" (Al-Kahf: 28).

Essential Qualities in a Leader's Character:

Indeed, it is challenging to detail all the noble qualities that should be instilled in future leaders, but I will briefly summarize them as follows:

Honesty and Integrity:

Honesty is a crucial and fundamental trait for cultivating leaders. Raising future leaders to be honest with themselves and others, in both word and deed, is a cornerstone that admits no deception or compromise. Honesty is the essence and spirit of all actions and behaviors, and it brings only good. An honest person cannot be unjust, even when wronged. The foundation of all virtuous ethics is honesty, which leads to integrity, generosity, courage, justice, chivalry, and all other commendable qualities and noble virtues.

Integrity, on the other hand, is the restraint of strength, necessitating trust. Its absence is a grave calamity. The Prophet ﷺ warned us about the traits of hypocrites, saying, "The signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he breaks it; and when he is entrusted, he betrays" (Sahih al-Bukhari).

This highlights the importance of integrity in a Muslim's life. Reflecting on the biography of the Prophet ﷺ, one finds that before his prophethood, he was renowned for these two essential and noble qualities: honesty and integrity. This contained profound wisdom and lessons. The Prophet ﷺ said, "He who does not fulfill his trust has no faith, and he who does not keep his promises has no religion" (Sahih al-Jami').

Moreover, Allah has made the neglect of trust a sign of the Last Hour. It is recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari that Abu Huraira, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "While the Prophet ﷺ was in a gathering speaking to the people, a Bedouin came and asked him, 'When will the Hour be?' The Prophet ﷺ continued his talk. Some of the people said that the Prophet ﷺ had heard the question, but disliked it. Others said that he had not heard it. When the Prophet ﷺ finished his speech, he said, 'Where is the questioner about the Hour?' The Bedouin said, 'Here I am, O Messenger of Allah.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'When trust is neglected, then wait for the Hour.' The man asked, 'How will it be neglected?' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'When authority is given to those who do not deserve it, then wait for the Hour.'"

Generosity and Courage:

A generous soul is beautifully selfless, never withholding from those around him, even if the gift is just an idea. Generosity requires courage; thus, a true warrior is distinguished by his generosity and bravery. You will not find a genuine warrior who is miserly, for how

can one who offers his most precious possession, his life, withhold anything less?

Cultivating courage in oneself means fostering patience, steadfastness, and the resolve to pursue beneficial endeavors while warding off harmful ones. The brave servant is guided by faith in divine decree and the certainty that what has befallen him was never meant to miss him, and what has missed him was never meant to befall him. The essence of courage is remembrance of Allah. One can train oneself to acquire courage by engaging in public speaking and delivering lectures in various forums. The exercises for developing courage vary according to different fields; there is courage in battle, in speech, in enjoining good and forbidding evil, and in expressing one's opinion.

Consider the poet's distinction between bravery and recklessness:

"Opinion comes before the bravery of the brave;

It is the first, and bravery is the second.

When they combine in a noble soul,

She reaches every lofty place."

Thus, courage is the soundness of judgment.

Strength and Patience:

Strength encompasses both physical and mental abilities, the fortitude of the soul and the body, which are fundamental elements of leadership. Allah says, "He has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature" (Al-Baqarah: 247).

Patience is also a crucial characteristic of leadership. It involves enduring the demands of work, facing hardships, overcoming defeats, surprises, and losses, maintaining solidarity with colleagues, and accepting advice. A leader cannot be imagined without the trait of patience.

Patience, as agreed upon by righteous predecessors, has three aspects: patience in abstaining from disobedience to Allah, patience in obeying Allah, and patience with the decrees of Allah.

Allah says, "And We made from among them leaders guiding by Our command when they were patient and [when] they were certain of Our signs" (As-Sajda: 24).

The degree of leadership a servant attains is proportionate to his patience and certainty. Leadership cannot be bought with wealth or acquired by force; it is a grace from Allah upon His servant, attained through piety, knowledge, calling to Allah, patience, and certainty.

Ability to Plan and Solve Crises:

With these qualities, leaders distinguish themselves by acquiring skills, managing crises, exercising wisdom, solving problems, adapting to difficult and even suffocating circumstances, and meticulously planning every step. This does not diminish the leader's generosity or performance.

Consultation and the Art of Relationships:

Allah says, "And their affairs are [determined by] consultation among them" (Ash-Shura: 42). A wise leader must listen to the opinions of others and seek their counsel, as our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did. Consider Allah's words to His Prophet: "For Allah is sufficient for you. He is the One who supported you with His help and with the believers" (Al-Anfal: 62).

Allah has made the path to victory clear, beginning with sincere devotion to Allah alone and unity with the believers.

A leader must devote his worship to Allah and foster good companionship with the believers, maintaining their unity. These qualities stem from mastering the art of relationships with people, characterized by noble conduct, fairness, and humility before Allah, quelling any pride and arrogance. The journey continues with

reliance on Allah, symbolized by the invocation: "O Ever-Living, O Sustainer, by Your mercy I seek help; rectify for me all my affairs and do not leave me to myself even for the blink of an eye."

The Ability to Rectify and Bear Responsibility for Mistakes:

A leader must possess the qualities of submitting to the truth, acknowledging mistakes when they occur, and hastening to rectify them. We are in dire need of a mindset focused on correction and dedication to remedying errors, rather than evading responsibility and engaging in futile justifications that yield no tangible results.

Knowledge in Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Fields:

A leader cannot assume a leadership position without acquiring a sufficient level of religious knowledge that enables him to make informed decisions. This does not absolve him of the duty of consulting scholars and strengthening ties with them. Additionally, a leader must possess scientific knowledge relevant to his field of work, whether in administration or other domains of leadership, as well as cultural insights, including geography, natural phenomena, and current events. The wealth of historical knowledge is particularly vital for future leaders, offering strategic insights and lessons that can streamline decision-making processes and contribute to sound judgment.

Whose responsibility is leadership development?

The responsibility for developing leaders falls on every mother and father, every educator, every family, every school, and every community, institution, project, and nation. Dedicating time and effort to this cause will yield blessings that cannot be achieved through neglect, underestimation, or dereliction of duty. Earnestness signifies sincerity and diligent effort bears fruitful rewards.

Divine Assistance

Regardless of the availability of material conditions and diligent efforts, we cannot aspire to produce wise leaders without Allah's companionship and success. We reflect on the following verses: "We gave him judgment and knowledge" (Yusuf: 22), "And I bestowed upon you love from Me so that you would be brought up under My eye" (Taha: 39), "Do not fear, indeed, you are superior" (Taha: 68), "Do not fear being overtaken and do not fear" (Taha: 77), "We will strengthen your arm through your brother and grant you both supremacy" (Al-Qasas: 35).

This is Allah's favor, which He bestows upon whomever He wills. Therefore, drawing near to Allah should always reside in a repentant heart, remaining the leader's provision for the journey to the end of the path.

Allah says, "And We have already written in the Book [of Psalms] after the [previous] mention that the land is inherited by My righteous servants" (Al-Anbiya: 105).

Otherwise, the law of substitution awaits, for Allah's laws favor no one.

Sincere Islamic Leadership:

Many references provide practical guidance for leadership development in the West, but we seek to cultivate Muslim leaders who are devoted to their faith and the causes of their Ummah. The criterion for the acceptance of deeds in Islam is based on sincerity to Allah and adherence to His Shariah, embodying the essence of truthfulness and integrity. Sincerity to Allah is mirrored by truthfulness, while adherence to Shariah parallels strength.

Allah may grant success to the sincere even if their strength is lacking, but strength without sincerity offers no hope for salvation in the hereafter, even if it achieves apparent success in this world.

This does not preclude the use of strong individuals in leadership, as Ibn Khaldun noted. He discussed two approaches: employing competent yet untrustworthy individuals or prioritizing the trustworthy but less competent. He favored the former, arguing that

measures could be taken to curb their corruption, whereas an incompetent individual offers no utility.

Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: "I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, will you not appoint me [to a position of authority]?' He struck my shoulder and said, 'O Abu Dharr, you are weak, and it is a trust. On the Day of Resurrection, it will be a cause of disgrace and regret, except for one who takes it up with a full sense of responsibility and fulfills what is entrusted to him.'" (Muslim)

The Greatest Threats to Leadership:

The greatest threats to leadership development include the rise of deceitful ambitions, the infiltration of personal desires, and bribery—corruption found in every society. Leaders are also threatened by their own ambitions, chronic love for power, arrogance, injustice, and moral decay. Additionally, persistent bad counsel and the absence of righteous advisors pose significant risks.

Leadership is a responsibility not to be given to those who chase after it, as they fail to comprehend its gravity. Abu Musa (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: "I entered upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) with two men from my tribe. One of the men said, 'O Messenger of Allah, appoint us to some position of authority given by Allah.' The other man said the same. The Prophet replied, 'By

Allah, we do not appoint to this position anyone who seeks it or anyone who is eager for it.'" (Agreed upon)

Leadership development that lacks a foundation in faith and morals, neglects the cultivation of skills and expansion of knowledge, and disregards accountability and correction is merely a destructive enterprise, undermining the chances of the Ummah's revival.

A Final Word on the Current State of the Ummah:

Focusing on developing competent leaders means preparing the latent strengths within every nation. The strength of any nation lies in the strength of its leaders. History has shown that no nation is stronger than the Muslim Ummah, which has produced exemplary leaders under extraordinary circumstances, driven by faith to achieve remarkable feats.

In our current era, we need a heightened awareness of leadership development, requiring an understanding of contemporary life, the maladies of Westernization and postmodernism, the consequences of colonization and dominance, and the prerequisites for success and victory. Learning from mistakes is essential for future leaders to craft effective strategies and provide comprehensive solutions, rather than merely identifying symptoms or being surprised by unforeseen challenges that threaten the strategic reserves of the Ummah.

I do not believe the Ummah lacks trustworthy or capable individuals, but it needs to place the right people in the right positions, spread the ethos of preparation and diligence, and effectively harness and refine its talents.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, "An army of rabbits led by a lion is better than an army of lions led by a rabbit."

The Muslim Ummah has never been devoid of lions, both soldiers and leaders.

In conclusion, this is but a glimpse of a vast topic.

The subject of leadership development is profound, and one article cannot fully explore its depths. However, I present here a general idea and an inspiring beginning, hoping that it benefits and that we witness a greater focus on developing blessed leaders in the coming phase.

O Allah, send Your peace and blessings upon our Prophet and leader, Muhammad, and upon his family and his righteous companions.

Translated by Aya and Ameera

Original article in Arabic

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THE BELIEVERS

