Muslim Leadership: past, present, future

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Introduction

Within hours of the Prophet Muhammad's death, Abū Bakr is reported to have stood before the partially incredulous and entirely panic-stricken community. "O people! For those of you who worshipped Muhammad," he said, "know that Muhammad is dead; those of you who worship God – know that God is Living [and] does not die." He then is reported to have recited a single āyah from the Qur'ān, a verse originally revealed after the Battle of Uhud, when the Prophet's mortality had been demonstrated by his first battle injuries:

> *Muhammad is nothing but a messenger; the [other] messengers have passed away before him. If, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? He that turns about on his heels will not do the slightest harm to God, but God will reward all who are grateful [to Him]. (3:144)*

A few days later, Abū Bakr again stood before the community, this time as their emerging yet contested leader, the first proclaimed "deputy" or successor of the Prophet, and he said, "I have been given authority over you, but I am not the best of you. If I act rightly, then aid me; if I act wrongly, then set me right." So began the first attempt to lead, guide, and manage the community in the absence of the Prophet.

As the years unfolded and the nascent empire expanded, the political and moral concerns of the leaders became more complex, and the community began to experience serious divisions, even bloodshed, between brothers and sisters within the ummah (community). In the midst of this, ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib – the beloved first cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, believed by many to have been among the very first to have embraced Islam – assumed his place as the fourth and final of the "Rightly-Guided" successors of the Prophet. Inheriting a broken and divided community, yet taking courageous steps to restore unity and right many wrongs, ʿAlī authored what might be called the first treatise on leadership within Islam. In the course of his detailed instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar, his newly appointed governor of Egypt, ʿAlī wrote:

> *...let the dearest of your treasuries be the treasury of righteous action. Control your desires and restrain your soul from what is not lawful to you, for restraint of the soul is for it to be equitous in what it likes and dislikes. Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your subjects. Be not in face of them a voracious animal, counting them as easy prey, for they are of two kinds: either they are your brothers in religion your equals in creation...grant them your pardon and your forgiveness to the same extent that you hope God will grant you His pardon and forgiveness. For you are above them, and he who appointed you is above you, and God is above him who appointed you. God has sought from you the fulfillment of their requirements and He is trying you with them...*

See that justice is done towards God and justice is done to the people by yourself, your own family, and those whom you favor...

Incumbent upon you is to recall the just governments, the excellent customs, the sunnah [example] of our Prophet – may God bless him and his household and give them peace – and the obligations [promulgated] in the Book of God, which preceded you among those of earlier times. Take as the model for your action what you have observed us to perform of them, and strive in your utmost to follow what I have instructed you in these my instructions...[1]

In the absence of a prophetic leader, invested with revelation and a unique vision of the ultimate goal and how to attain it, what does religious leadership mean for Muslims? In this essay, we seek to explore the concept of religious leadership in Islam, its various manifestations in history and at present, and its many challenges, those that are perennial and those that are specific to the contemporary period. It must be noted at the outset that this exploration is both preliminary and selective, for the topic is too vast to be effectively treated by a single scholar and in one general essay. More, the reader should know that my approach here bridges the academic and the personal, for, although I am an Islamic Studies academic by training and profession, I also have the privilege and the burden of serving the Muslim community in a leadership capacity. So, in addition to the sheer academic value of these questions, I see them as essential for anyone seeking understand, inform and guide his/her own work as a Muslim religious leader and teacher. The reader will also note the special attention consistently given to the ultimate objective or "end" (telos) for which Islam exists, an attention I feel is central to all leadership roles in Islam, and this gives rise to the ever-present question of how the religious leader can or should function as a facilitator or instrument of that supreme end.

I. The Prophetic Leader as Instrument for Attaining the Supreme Goal (*telos*) of the Tradition

While many conceptualizations of leadership have emerged throughout Islamic history, any discussion of religious leadership in Islam must begin with the prophets, for they are believed to be the quintessential educators and leaders of humankind, i.e., those through whom God, the ultimate source of all knowledge and guidance, teaches humankind "that which they did not know." Qur'ānically, this process of Divine education is understood to lead humankind out of the darknesses of ignorance, arrogance, barbarism, oppression/injustice, and environmental exploitation (to name a few) and into the light of truth, illuminating the civility, humility, social justice, environmental responsibility, and other qualities of a true believer. Even beyond these virtues and qualities, prophetic leadership promises to take humankind from the darkness of supreme debasement into the light of its ultimate realization, identified as the complete restoration and realization of humankind's innate nature (fitrah) or "best form," which is mystically anchored in the Divine qualities and illumined by being in the Divine presence. In essence, prophetic leadership hinges upon facilitating the return journey to God for each and every person. While the Qur'ānic illustration the prophetic mission as a process of leading humanity

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from darkness into light are too numerous to recount here, a few passages help give us a feel for the power of the comparison.

> *In essence, prophetic leadership hinges upon facilitating the return journey to God for each and every person*

Alif, Lām, Rā'. [Here is] a Book which We have revealed to you, in order that you might lead the people out of the darknesses and into the light, [lead them] by the leave of their Lord to the Way of the One Exalted in power, worthy of all praise! (14:1)

O people of the book... There has come to you from God a light and a clear book by which God guides to the ways of peace [and security] all who seek His good pleasure, [light and a book by which] He brings them out of the darknesses and into the light, according to His leave, and guides them on a path of right guidance. (5:15-16)

God is the guardian Lord of those who believe; He brings them out of the darknesses and into the light. The patrons of those who consciously reject and oppose faith are the evil ones. They bring [their followers] out of the light and into the darknesses. Such are the companions of the fire, in which they abide forever. (2:257)

The prophets, then, are those unique leaders who, by virtue of their privileged experience of theoretical revelation (wahī), are able to comprehend the ultimate purpose or end for which humankind was created. More, by virtue of their practical wisdom and the practical revelation that manifests itself in laws, practices (acts of worship), and prohibitions, they are enabled to lead humanity along this path of individual and collective perfection, this path of gradual realization of that supreme goal for which humankind was originally created. In most ultimate terms, this end is signified by heaven, the "paradise" of the reunion with God, but it also refers to the stations along the way; including the establishment of a society marked by social justice, the winning of spiritual knowledge and insight, the gradual manifestation of the virtues and the appropriation of the Divine qualities insofar as they are attainable by imperfect and contingent beings.

While some of these prophet-leaders – including Moses, David, and the Prophet Muhammad – are known or believed to have engaged in armed struggle and combat in the course of their prophetic mission, their primary power to lead has ever been understood to have flowed from the compelling truth of their message, the certainty of their conviction, and the personal charisma of their characters. Thus, the prophetic model of leadership always highlights the importance of speaking the language of their people, of understanding both the potential and the limitations of their flock, and of being able to persuade them to arise and strive for the horizon of their ultimate potential.

And We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves… (41:53)

Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic recitation ("qur'ān") in order that you may contemplate/understand. (12:2)

One of the most thought-provoking and elegant depictions of the Islamic conception of prophecy comes to us from an unexpected source: the political philosophy of Abū Nasr al-Fārābī, a Muslim of Turkish origin who, in the ninth century,

C.E., made his way to Baghdad in order to study Greek philosophy within a circle of Nestorian Christians, who became for him the intellectual link between the "Alexandrian" philosophical tradition of Greek thought and Islam. As he endeavored to reconcile the insights and systematic rigor of Greek philosophy with the Islamic understanding of prophecy and revelation, he was forced to contemplate the question of philosophy's relevance for prophecy and prophecy's relevance for philosophy. This gave rise to his insightful formulation of the prophet-philosopher king, the embodiment of his answer.

The prophet is able to express timeless truths in time and in the language of his/her people

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Believing that the intellect was the most divine-like aspect of human nature, al-Fārābī saw philosophy – the active pursuit of wisdom and true knowledge – as the intellectual journey from the world of multiplicity into the unity of Truth, Reality, the Divine. The true philosopher thus journeys beyond all linguistically and culturally anchored conceptions of the truth, indeed even beyond language, in his/her quest to know the Truth as it truly is ("kamā huwa"). While there may be community support and beneficial teachers along the way, this quest is ultimately a solitary and arduous one. Prophecy, on the other hand, is the process by which this singular Truth beyond all language and conception – comes to make itself known to ordinary people (non-philosophers), most of whom require language, images, easily-grasped conceptions, and parables to connect with

and be guided by this ultimate Truth. The prophet is thus the unique individual who – by God's self-disclosure – is able to express timeless truths in time and in the language of his/her people. Images arise to give appropriate expression to their corresponding realities in the world beyond time, beyond physicality, beyond language. The prophetic "act" is thus an act of imaginative translation, an act that mobilizes a community to seek what is beyond their immediate horizon, an act that persuades individuals to seek something beyond their current knowledge and frame of reference.

Question:

Can al-Farabi's theory of religions as "translations" of the one truth find an echo in other traditions?

When these two factors – the sanctified, Divinely-illumined intellect and the sanctified, Divinely-illumined imagination – are present in the same person, the result is one of the great law-bringing prophets of history: a Moses or a Jesus or a Muhammad – a person who can intellectually "see" the telos or supreme goal with the certitude and clarity of normal vision in daylight, a person who can "see" the practical steps to get there, a person who can translate, consciously or unconsciously, this goal into words and images that are both understandable and compelling to his/her people, a person who can support and guide this journey by bringing forth a Divinely-sanctioned law, complete with proscriptions and prohibitions and voluntary practices. In short, this is a person whose presence in the world reveals a Divinely-guided way of life in a form

uniquely suited to his/her people and their moment in history.

For al-Fārābī, then, the plurality of religions does not reflect plural and competing truths; on the contrary, it speaks to the various "translations" of the one Truth that have come through various law-giving prophets at various times, in different cultures and with differing circumstances. While al-Fārābī himself does not make an explicit Qur'ānic connection here or anywhere in his writings, the Muslim reader might:

We have appointed a [different] law and a way of life for each of you. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has given you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will reveal to you [the truth about] all that in which you differ. (5:48)

While all of the prophets, named and unnamed, are believed to embody this spirit of Divinely-illumined leadership, Muslims (al-Fārābī included, we assume) look to the prophet Muhammad as their primary model for this kind of leadership.

Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is God's messenger and the seal of the Prophets. And verily God has full knowledge of everything. (33:40)

As the Qur'ānically-identified "seal of the prophets" (khātam al-nabiyīn), Muhammad is understood to verify, renew, and clarify the essential message of all of God's prophets, and, according to mainstream Muslim thought, his identification as the "seal" signals the finality of his prophet hood, coming at the end of a long line of messenger-teacher-leader prophets, sent to every nation throughout history.

The Qur'ān explicitly extols the Prophet as a model for believing men and women to follow, and so the question of religious leadership in Islam must ever be rooted in his life example:

Indeed, in the messenger of God you have a beautiful role model for anyone who looks with hope to God and the Last Day and remembers God abundantly. (33:21)

It is important to note here that the leadership exemplified in the "beautiful role model" of the Prophet Muhammad was a completely integrated and comprehensive leadership: encompassing the religious, spiritual, and moral realms, to be sure, but also the political and cultural aspects of life. While some have sought to deny the political nature of his leadership in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is no denying that his biography includes the sealing of political bonds among his followers as well as between them and other tribal, ethnic, and religious groups, the conducting of war and the negotiation of peace, the re-conceptualization of good manners and healthy habits... all in addition to his instruction in matters of religion and spiritual guidance of those around him. Thus, as an archetype for religious leadership, his example sets a very high and comprehensive standard for subsequent leaders of the Muslim community.

Question:

Is comprehensiveness of leadership an ideal for all religions? Are there fields that ought to be excluded from such comprehensiveness, even if they were part of an earlier model of leadership?

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II. A Typology of Leadership in Islam (preservation, restoration, realization)

What is the fundamental purpose of a leader? Religious preservation? Is there more? Does religious leadership include the political preservation and management of the community, as we see in the cases of Abū Bakr and 'Alī, and indeed in the Prophet's own example? What are the essential qualities and responsibilities of a Muslim leader? To whom is the leader accountable? To God? To the community? To both? Are there different types of leadership in Islam?

With the almost universally held Muslim belief that Muhammad's Qur'ānic identification as the "seal" of the prophets means the "last" of the prophets, Muslims have had to conceptualize their leadership within the boundaries set by a final and unchangeable revelation. Understandably, then, we see at least three types of leaders emerging: those who act as the preservers and protectors of the community and prophetic legacy (the early Caliphs, traditionalist scholars and jurists, dialectic theologians); those who act as the spiritually informed restorers of the "authentic" prophetic legacy (the scholar-saint mujaddids/renewers); and those who work within and through the prophetic legacy to guide the faithful to some experience or vision of the supreme end – God (the Divinely-inspired Īmām, the mystic shaykh, the messianic renewer or mahdī). While these dynamic elements – preservation, restoration, and realization – often overlap in the careers of individual leaders, they can nevertheless be considered individually.

The Preservers, Enforcers, and Defenders of Tradition: The Caliph, the "Keeper of Public Morality" (al-muhtasib), the Jurist, and the Dialectical/Dogmatic Theologian

We see three types of leaders emerging: those who act as the preservers and protectors of the community and prophetic legacy, those who act as the spiritually informed restorers of the "authentic" prophetic legacy and those who work within and through the prophetic legacy to guide the faithful to some experience or vision of the supreme end – God

The Caliph

After the death of the prophet in 632, the emerging leaders were most concerned with preserving the legacy and carrying out the vision that Muhammad had bestowed upon them: first and foremost, the ummah – this revolutionary concept of a community that transcended blood and class and gender – had to be preserved; the sacred revelation of the Qur'ān had to be preserved and studied and taught; as the Muslim armies spread the dominion of Islam north and south, east and west, the religion of Islam had to rise to the challenge of shaping an empire and a civilization. Preservation, consolidation, and protection thus dominate the earliest notions of leadership we see emerging in Islamic history.

While there is much historical learning and unlearning to be done as we take up the question of the Caliphate, it should be noted from the outset that this model of leadership remains very contemporary, if only as an imaginative symbol for the dream of becoming one community again, the dream of transcending the artificial divisions of the nation state and of post-prophetic sectarianism, the dream of reclaiming a place of unity, prominence and empowerment on the global stage, the dream of Islam rising again and becoming a leading force in global affairs. While there is thus a restorative dimension to the collective dream of the caliphate, the Caliph has never been, essentially, seen as a restorer of the tradition or the community. Rather, he has ever been seen as an office of preservation, protection, consolidation, and continuation.

Amidst the shock and panic that immediately ensued the Prophet's death in 632 of the Common Era,[2] a small group of his early converts and close companions rushed to break up a meeting of the Medinese Muslims (the "ansār"), who were already preparing to elect a leader of their own to protect their interests in the face of the Meccan Muslims (the "Muhājirūn"), especially those from the elite and powerful Meccan tribe of Quraysh. That middle-of-the-night encounter led to the spontaneous and rather unexpected affirmation of Abu Bakr, one of the Prophet's earliest converts and closest friends, as the emerging leader of the Muslim community or "ummah." The term that was used for this newly-conceived position was "khalīfah" – a Qur'ānic term that properly refers to the role that Adam assumed as the "vicegerent" or deputy of God on earth, a role subsequently ascribed to David, all the prophets, and, ultimately, to each human being. This term thus awards

responsibility without sovereignty, for God is understood to be the ultimate sovereign of the world and of all creation.

And [remember] when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to make a khalīfah on earth," and [when] they said, "will you make on it one who will act corruptly and shed blood on it, while we glorify you with praise and hallow you?" He said, "I know what you do not." (2:30)

Bearing in mind that this term may have been invoked more simply and casually to mean simply "successor" by the first caliphs, their conscious use of this term alerts us to many intriguing possibilities, including the recognition that the Prophet's successor would never be able to rival the Prophet's leadership (especially not in his unique role as law-giving / revelation-bringing prophet), and also the rather understandable desire to justify this somewhat haphazard development by awarding it a Qur'ānic title, thereby establishing an enduring connection between this hasty invention and the timeless, unshakable "Book of God." While there remains some question that the immediate successors of the prophet may have been more innocent in their use of this term, there is no question that the Umayyad caliphs (emerging after 661 CE) used this title as a way to justify their religious authority.[3]

Getting back to the days immediately following the death of the Prophet, as the community gradually came to accept the decision taken by a small group that fateful night, the concept of the Caliphate took root. Initially, this "office" was filled by close companions of the Prophet, four to be exact, all of them from the Quraysh tribe and all of them enjoying a

reputation for piety and for long, faithful, selfless service to the Prophet and to Islam. Without getting too entangled in details, the basic criteria for their widespread acceptance as "Rightly-Guided Successors" or "Vicegerents" of the Prophet combined elements of religious meritocracy, tribal lineage, their reputations for fair-mindedness, and age (the older the better). That said, the evolving system was far from perfect, and the institution was ever troubled by controversy and dissent, even in its purest moments.

With the tragic assassination of 'Alī, the fourth of these "Rightly-Guided Caliphs," in 661, the "Caliphate" was seized by Mu'āwīya, a powerful and cunning Muslim governor of Damascus who hailed from an old elite and very powerful clan within the Quraysh; he refashioned the Caliphate into a hereditary dynasty for himself and his posterity. Thus began the "Umayyad Caliphate," which oversaw the most dramatic expansion and consolidation of a unified Islamic empire, stretching from Spain in the west to the Indus valley in the east within fifty years of Mu'āwīya's seizure of the Caliphate.

During these years of the co-opted Caliphate, we can see the almost complete separation of religious leadership from political leadership. In the lives and legacies of the first four caliphs (pre-Umayyad), their leadership was more integrated, involving religious, ethical, and political leadership. In this way, their "Caliphate" struggled to preserve the integrated nature of the prophetic model. The Umayyad caliphs, however, were more often known for their debauchery than for their piety, and so the community began looking to others for religious and spiritual guidance, even as they

implicitly went along with the politics of raw power. Leaving political preservation of the state to the Caliph and his army, the new religious preservers assumed the form of traditionalist scholars of Qur'an and prophetic tradition, scholars of the composite "science" of Islamic Law, and scholars of the emerging science of dialectic theology, by which orthodoxy could be demonstrated and defended in the face of heresies and competing religious claims. In spite of this growing separation between political and religious preservation, a theological validation of the Caliphate as the quintessential Islamic form of governance wove itself into the fabric of mainstream Sunni theology, as we can see in the classical Sunni authority, Abū'l-Hasan al-Mawardī (d. 1058 CE / 450 AH), who saw the Caliphate as something obligatory for the community.[4]

> Question:
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> As we remember institutions and forms of leadership of old, do we recall them as pure ideals or in the complexity of their, at times, problematic historical reality?

The Keeper of Public Morality (al-muhtasib)

In addition to those occupied with the political preservation of the community and the transformation of the prophetic legacy into a stable and expanding society, classical Islam saw the need for a religious leader who would stand in the marketplace among the common folk and compel them to observe that which was religiously required by way of justice and fair play, modesty in dress and behavior, observance

of religious obligations (such as the daily prayers), policing the prayer leaders and preachers in order to ensure that proper doctrine was being promulgated in the mosques, etc. We might classify such an authority among the preservers of tradition by way of his active enforcement of all that is commanded by the tradition and his active prosecution of anyone engaging in prohibited acts.

The Jurist and the Dogmatic Theologian

While al-Fārābī never came to represent the religious mainstream within Islam, there are many ways in which he gave voice to mainstream Muslim conceptions. One of these concerns the nature of leadership when the Law-giving prophet-philosopher is no more. After the passing of such a rare, Divinely-guided individual, al-Fārābī identifies the main concerns and chief tasks that fall upon the community: "the royal craft of kingship," by which the "voluntary actions" and "positive dispositions" that lead to happiness are promulgated and enforced (see above); the task of preserving the Prophetic legacy, especially the Divine Law, and applying it to the changing situations of history and circumstance, and the task of protecting the prophetic legacy from destructive influences, both from within and from without. So, in his words,

Jurisprudence (fiqh) is the art that enables man to infer the determination of whatever was not explicitly specified by the Lawgiver, on the basis of such things as were explicitly specified and determined by him; and to strive to infer correctly by taking into account the Lawgiver's purpose with the religion he had legislated for the nation to which he gave that religion.[5]

As for the "art" or "craft" (fann) of dialectical, dogmatic theology (al-kalām), he writes,

The art of Dialectical theology is a positive description that enables man to argue in the defense of the specific opinions and actions stated explicitly by the founder of the religion, and against everything that opposes these opinions and actions. This art is also divided into two parts: one part deals with the opinions, and another deals with the actions. It is different from jurisprudence. For the jurist takes the opinions and actions stated explicitly by the founder of the religion and, using them as axioms, he infers the things that follow from them as consequences. The dialectical theologian, on the other hand, defends the things that the jurist uses as axioms, without inferring other things from them. If it should happen that a man is able to do both, then he is both a jurist and a dialectical theologian...[6]

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So we see, here very briefly and superficially displayed, some of the key kinds of leadership devoted to the preservation, enforcement, ongoing application and defense of the tradition stemming from the prophetic legacy. Without this kind of leadership, the tradition would cease to exist in any meaningful form, and the prophetic legacy, with its clear identification of the ultimate goal and the step-by-step process of reralizing it, would pass away. These leaders thus play absolutely crucial roles, roles that demand expert knowledge of the Divine Law and the external aspects of the prophetic legacy, the ability to win the backing of the state and trust of the majority, the sharpness of mind to produce compelling arguments to denounce and discredit competing,

"heterodox" interpretations (as well as other religions) and the sharpness of tongue (oratorical skill) to deliver those arguments in the public sphere.

Restorers play a crucial role in reminding the established elites that the tradition itself is not a god, not an end in itself

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The Restorers and Renewers of Real Religion: the scholar-saint renewer (al-mujaddid),

According to one prophetic tradition, every century would see the rise of a religious "renewer" within the Muslim community. This signals a self-conscious awareness that the preservation and enforcement of tradition are not enough, that it is possible for the community to preserve the outer aspects of the prophetic legacy while missing the core content and intention of that legacy. We thus find a prominent list of scholar-saint radicals over the centuries who have argued for the wholesale renovation of the status quo and the restoration of the "real" tradition, even in times when Islam has been politically supreme, with Islamic institutions flourishing. One such "renewer" was Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d.1111), a prominent theologian-jurist-mystic who lived at what many consider to be a "golden age" of Islamic learning and yet argued that real religious knowledge had been forgotten, indeed had effectively died.[7] Condemning the celebrity scholars who had been co-opted by power and prestige, he railed against the Muslim leaders – the 'ulamā' or so-called "heirs of the prophets" – who had all but forgotten their sacred "trust" of guiding the community to their ultimate realization in God. Instead, they went for wealth and status and public displays of their brilliance and learning. So, calling also for a radical remapping of the Islamic religious sciences, al-Ghazālī grimly diagnosed a situation where law and power and reputation and privilege had completely clouded the ultimate concern of the faith. He thus sought to make way for the one science that he believed was quintessential to Islam: the teleological "science of the way of the afterlife" – the science of guiding hearts to God, the ultimate origin and end of all.

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Such restorers play a crucial role in reminding the established elites that the tradition itself is not a god, not an end in itself. They seek to recapture the essential vision and ultimate concern of the prophet-founder and use that vision and concern to call for the radical reshaping of the established status quo. Such renewers need to have a very strong sense of personal religious insight and conviction, expert religious knowledge, especially knowledge of the ultimate purpose or goal of the religion, courage to speak against the status quo and prevailing religious elite, charisma and persuasive power.

Question:

Is the tension between external forms and interior intention a feature of all religions, and therefore a challenge to all leaders?

The Agents of Realization: the Divinely-Guided Imām, The Mystic Shaykh

The Divinely-Guided Imām

If the Caliphate represents a political dream and a longing within the hearts of contemporary Muslims, so too does the concept of the Imamate, but on an even greater scale for the minority who uphold it. For the dream of the Imam can be translated as the longing for an almost messianic transformation that will not only unify and consolidate the community but will fully restore Islam to its true state and fill the world with Divinely-inspired justice in preparation for the return of Jesus, son of Mary. The longing for the imam is thus a comprehensive dream of preservation, renewal and restoration, and realization, a dream in which every faithful person can see and experience the ultimate objective insofar as it is possible.

While the vast majority of Muslims came to accept the power plays of the elite and their outcomes, and so went on with the business of conquest, trade, preserving and spreading the religion, and just getting on with life after Mu'āwiya and his family took control of the Caliphate, a smaller group of idealists can be seen standing against the tide. These Muslims, proclaiming the unique qualities of the Prophet's descendants and unwaveringly insisting upon the unique ability and right of these descendants to rule over the ummah, came to be called the "group" or "shī'ah" of 'Alī, the Prophet's younger first cousin, beloved son-in-law, and the last of the "Rightly-Guided Caliphs." In the wake of Muhammad's

prophecy, true Islamic leadership, they argued, flowed from 'Alī and, through him, to the Prophet's direct male descendants. These Divinely chosen descendants, they believed, were uniquely blessed and Divinely supported individuals who alone were able to fully grasp the truth of Muhammad's revelation and guide the faithful to the supreme goal to which the revelation pointed.

The quest for God and the quest for true knowledge and wisdom are synonymous in the Islamic spiritual traditions

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Known as the "Imamate," this model of leadership radiates the promise of fully integrated leadership, for the Imāms are understood to be the rightful rulers – spiritually, religiously, politically – of the Muslims. History, however, unfolded in an unexpectedly tragic way, with the third Imām – Imām Husayn, the younger grandson of the prophet – being murdered on the field of Karbala and with the Imāms subsequently adopting a position of political quietism as they continued to serve the community as spiritual, religious, and moral guides.

Effectively, then, we see that here, too, religious leadership begins to separate from politics or worldly leadership. More, the hope of an integrated, prophetic ideal gets deferred to the end of history, when it is believed that the Imam will emerge to assume his rightful place as the eschatological precursor of Jesus. Until that occurs, the community must hang on and persevere, and so it falls upon the scholars,

especially the scholars of the legal dimensions of the faith, to preserve the teachings of the Qur'ān, the Prophet, and the Imams, and to guide the community by the light of these preserved teachings. If ever a chance opens for the religious elite to re-engage the world and establish a government, as happened in the 1979 Iranian revolution, then the faqīh – i.e., the specialist in law – will be supreme. This concept of "the Guardianship of the Faqīh" (wilāyat-i-faqīh) was at the very heart of Ayatullah Khomeini's vision.

> Question:
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> In Muslim history, the ideals of political and spiritual leadership have become separated. Was this development unavoidable and what would this suggest for the relations between religious and political leadership?

If such an opportunity is lost or never comes, then, as in the case of what became known as Sunnī Islam, the scholars – the jurisconsults and experts in the Prophetic traditions and the traditions of the Imams – are left to take on the mantle of religious preservation while the political powers go their own way.

The Spiritual Master / Sufi Shaykh

Within the many tasawwuf (i.e., "Sufi") traditions and, more generally, within a more mystically oriented approach to Islam, the mystic sage or master or "shaykh" serves as both a model and expert guide for believers who burn for some kind of personal experience of God. Concurring

with many of William James' insights, I understand this experience to be, by definition, noetic, and this explains why the quest for God and the quest for true knowledge and wisdom are synonymous in the Islamic spiritual traditions. This perennial quest requires that a person submit to a path or process of simultaneous deconstruction and rebirth, for the ego-centric life must gradually pass away in order for the theocentric life to become manifest and stable.

For the faithful who hunger and thirst for some kind of "taste" or experience of the ultimate end, these agents of realization play a role more crucial than any other type of religious leader

This process is admittedly arduous and complicated, and the potential pitfalls and dangers are many. For these reasons, and others, the mystical path became a regulated practice in early and medieval Islam, and this has continued until today. The regulation gradually evolved into a system of lay orders – brotherhoods and sisterhoods – which gathered around the living example of a master or shaykh. In such a system, the shaykh assumes a weighty responsibility for the seeker's program of transformation and overall progress, from mundane matters (such as employment and matchmaking) to the exalted point of standing as a living link between God and the seeker.

In some of the classical discussions, we even see the seeker's "annihilation" in the shaykh as the essential prerequisite for

the ultimate goal of becoming annihilated in God. The shaykh thus serves the seeker as an agent of realization, an embodied force wholly devoted to inspiring, guiding, driving, and even carrying an individual believer home to God.

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For the faithful who hunger and thirst for some kind of "taste" or experience of the ultimate end, these agents of realization play a role more crucial than any other type of religious leader, for they stand for the essential purpose of the prophetic legacy and the ensuing tradition. Standing as they do at the heart of it all, they must exude a religious and spiritual insight that is both deep and personal; in order to serve as spiritual guides and midwives, they must radiate compassion and non-judgment; they almost always have charismatic personalities and a unique ability to impart a sense of hope and new possibility. Many also have a penetrating grasp of the human psyche, its chronic illnesses, therapeutic cures, tricks, weaknesses, and strengths. Most also possess a solid confidence and understanding of the supreme utility of the Divine law as something therapeutic, healing, and helpful as we seek that which is beyond it. Finally, most spiritual masters must be seasoned and cultivated enough to model the critical self-scrutiny and personal reform that they seek to teach.

III. Systemic, Perennial Challenges of and to Muslim Leaders

What are some of the greatest challenges Muslim leaders have always faced from generation to generation?

As is evidenced in the discussion above, the evolution of these different types of leadership throughout Islamic history speaks to many chronic challenges, including the challenge of keeping the community unified and whole in the face of crisis and competing authority claims; the challenge of preserving the integrity and unique character of the prophetic legacy as the community journeys through the centuries and traverses ethno-cultural boundaries; the chronic challenge of understanding the sacred law to be a means to an end and not an end in itself; the challenge of avoiding the many traps that come with the "professionalizing" of the study of religion, including the trap of forming a societal class of religious scholars who get accustomed to power and privilege and so resist reform.

The greatest challenge for a Muslim leader will always be the challenge of embodying the essence of the faith

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Embodying the Faith

With all this acknowledged, the greatest challenge for a Muslim leader of any time or place will always be the challenge of embodying the essence of the faith, which is the wholesale surrender and submission of the self to God, and so serving as a religious and moral model for others, just as the Prophet is believed to have done in every aspect of his existence and just as Abū Bakr, ʿAlī, and others are similarly believed to have done in the footsteps of the Prophet. In such a state, the "self" can no longer be conceived as the ego self of normal human self-consciousness; it is rather now something both less substantial and more

profound: some have spoken of it as a polished mirror for the reflection of the Divine attributes, others as a conduit for channeling the Divine qualities into the world. This certainly seems to have been intimated in Imam 'Alī's words, "grant them your pardon and your forgiveness to the same extent that you hope God will grant you His pardon and forgiveness."

> Question:
>
> Can "embodying the faith" serve as a universal definition for religious leadership?

The highest religious challenge is thus not so much something to do as it is something to be, in this case becoming diminished, humble, compliant and content with God's will, subservient to others and to all of creation, etc. In other words, the challenge is to get the self out of the way so that God can do. In all of the challenges connected to religious leadership within Islam, there is no challenge more important or more difficult than this.

> Question:
>
> Is "getting the self out of the way" a common vision for leadership in all religions?

Being Accountable to God Before All Else

Being a religious leader means sometimes going against the grain of community wants and expectations for the sake of their higher good and the good of pursuing the ultimate objective. Another way of saying this is that the leader must be clear in ranking his/her levels of accountability. The highest and most profound level is his/her accountability to God, the "judge of judges" and the ultimate concern and goal of everything toward which the leader works. This, of course, is more easily said than done, for communities and systems can place tremendous pressure upon leaders, and it is natural for people in positions of leadership to crave the approval and affirmation of the community. A powerful example of this comes from the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

After military parity was well established between his adopted city of Medina and his hostile hometown of Mecca, he led a sizeable group of Muslim companions (over a thousand, the report relates) to Mecca, where they intended to make the minor pilgrimage ('umrah) and worship God at the Abrahamic shrine of the Ka'bah. Before they reached the city, they were stopped at a place called Hudaybiyyah by representatives of the Meccans, who wanted to prevent Muhammad and his companions from entering the city. Much to the consternation of many of his companions, Muhammad agreed to postpone the pilgrimage for a year as part of a peace treaty he negotiated with a Meccan representative there on the spot. The treaty included a non-agression pact for ten years, as well as Muhammad's promise to send back any young Meccan who came to him as a convert without the explicit permission of his Meccan father or guardian. On the other side, any Muslim or resident of Medinah wanting to seek asylum in Mecca would not be sent back.

For this and other reasons, many of his companions – including 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, who would later become the second of the "Rightly-Guided Caliphs" – voiced very strong objections to the Prophet's decision, but he went ahead anyway, commanding the Muslims to abide by every bit of it. What they did not know was that Islam would spread considerably while the treaty was in effect and that, once the treaty was violated and dissolved a few years later, it gave justification for the Muslims to march on Mecca take the city without bloodshed.

This telling episode demonstrated to the Companions and to all future Muslim leaders that the Prophet, as leader, was not accountable to their wishes, no matter how strongly felt or voiced. Instead, he was bound by a higher accountability, which included the higher goods of peace, security, and the eventual winning of Mecca without violence. This rather bold and admittedly difficult element of Muslim leadership has challenged Muslim leaders of every place and time, but I think contemporary Muslim leaders are especially challenged to ponder the implications of this principle, so powerfully illustrated by the pact of al-Hudaybiyyah. In what ways are we challenged to go against the wishes of our communities in order to promote a higher good? Is being sensitive and responsive to our communities the same as being obedient to their wishes and demands? If so, then who is leading whom? In what ways does our accountability to God cause us to clash with the wishes of those we are supposed to lead? These and other questions will be dealt with in the next section.

> Question:
>
> Can leaders who participate in our discussions provide contemporary examples of going against the community for the good of preserving the ultimate objective?

IV. Contemporary Challenges

What are some of the unique challenges confronting Muslim leaders and the entire concept of Muslim leadership today? Are our leaders adequately equipped to meet those challenges?

While the essential responsibilities and challenges of Muslim leaders remain in many ways the same, the faces of Muslim leadership and the traditional division of labor has changed dramatically. Who or what is a Muslim leader in the contemporary world? Some might immediately think of a grand ayatollah or a famous scholar of Islamic law with a website and TV program, while others might think of a politician, a Sufi shaykh (complete with elaborate headgear and with flowing beard and robes), or even a paramilitary commander of Muslim mujahidin in some part of the world. Of course, the most common (and most uncelebrated) type of Muslim leader today is the religious leader of the local mosque, the local "imam" (small "i"), who – with or without formal training – is expected, in some way, to function in all of the capacities discussed above. Such everyday Muslim leaders are expected to guard the integrity of the prophetic legacy and the tradition against harmful

compromise and distortion (bid'ah) from outside as well as inside. They are expected to be renewers in the way they challenge established behaviors, attitudes, and practices that compromise the ways in which the community can access the "real" tradition and supreme goal of engaging God. They are expected to be individual guides, mentors, and counselors who can help individuals solve their personal problems and navigate their journey to God, to happiness in both this world and the next.

In other words, the local imam is, to some extent, expected to be a jurist, a dialectical theologian, a scholar and dynamic renewer with fresh insight and inspiring vision, a spiritual shaykh and counselor, and more. In addition to the basic requirement of a superhuman array of abilities and capacities, I explore below a few of the contemporary challenges that seem most pressing today, challenges that I see facing my brothers and sisters in positions of leadership and teaching, challenges that I, too, personally face in my own teaching and community work.

Patriarchy and the Gender Question: a call for deep listening

Often in the west, Muslims in positions of authority are preoccupied with defending and preserving the tradition in the face of many questions, accusations, and challenges. The defensive posture prompts our leaders to speak (proclaim, explain, defend) much more than they listen, and this compromises our ability to look self-critically at the state of our practice and community life in the light of our ultimate objective. It also compromises our ability to

acknowledge the real insult, injury, and suffering that some segments of our community experience when the tradition is blindly forced upon them. Our sisters, in particular, have a great deal to say if only our leaders would listen, for the tradition, in many ways the product of generations of men interpreting the prophetic legacy for men, has excluded and continues to exclude their voices and perspectives and valuable contributions. Indeed, even here in my adopted home of Canada, there are many celebrated Muslim leaders who continue to discourage the sisters from even attending the mosque, let alone playing a more active role in the life of the community. And they do this with the knowledge that many of these sisters are academic experts in Islam, educated professionals playing prominent roles within the wider society, and seasoned social activists, people who should be playing active roles in solving community challenges and helping to plot the future course of the ummah.

I see this as an opportunity for all of us to stop and remember what we are here for, indeed, what Islam is here for. Far from a religion instituted for the crushing of spirits and the stifling of human potential, Islam should be understood as a vehicle for raising humanity to a higher level and helping each and every person – male and female – redefine that potential in God and God's most beautiful attributes. These qualities include knowledge, wisdom, guidance, and many other qualities that have traditionally been associated only with the male members of the community, who have had privileged access to education and leadership roles for centuries. The ummah, on the whole, has been trying to limp along with one leg for a long time, and it is time for the leaders to attend to the leg that has

been neglected, underused, and sometimes abused. How much further could we go, how much more could we do, how much richer would our religious lives be if we began disentangling the prophetic legacy from the cultural legacy of patriarchy?

> *How much further could we go, how much more could we do, how much richer would our religious lives be if we began disentangling the prophetic legacy from the cultural legacy of patriarchy?*

The Many faces and Challenges of Anger within the Contemporary Ummah

All over the world, anger is a major challenge: anger over the humiliations and degradations of colonialism, past and present, real and perceived; anger arising from perceived injustices done to Muslims in specific parts of the world; anger over the loss of tradition or the perceived threats to tradition due to immigration, modernity, feminism, materialism, globalization, colonization, etc. The greatest danger of this anger, in my view, is the pitfall of becoming so consumed in our grievances and fears, not to mention our desire to blame others for everything that is wrong with our world, that we become blinded to our own capacity to do evil. Moral blindness is the greatest danger of so-called "political Islam," which often casts America or Israel or someone else as the great Satan and loses sight of the Satan lurking within our own hearts. This makes it very difficult for contemporary Muslim leaders to raise a call for self-critical introspection and reform, a call that we

desperately need today if we are going to be a community that lives for the supreme end of entering into God's presence and living in the Divine light. It also makes it very difficult for Muslim leaders to cultivate compassion for others, especially if those "others" are perceived as having participated in crimes against Islam and Muslims. Because of our anger, we often turn away from the Qur'ānic reminder,

> *[But] it may well be that God will bring about [mutual] affection between you and some of those whom you [now] face as enemies; for God has the power to decree [whatever God wills] - and God is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful. (60:7)*

Limiting Factors: education, cultural dichotomies, community phobias,

Bearing in mind that the ultimate accountability of any religious leader is to God, Muslim leaders are held back by many factors:

One of these is education. Due to the fact that there is no standardized certification or ordination process in Islam, many religious leaders are serving the community without proper training in theology and law, not to mention in more contemporary fields such as pastoral counseling, social work, and inter-religious dialogue. As a result, our religious leaders often lack the resources and academic confidence to question traditional ways of doing things and are often left to their own devices when facing situations of domestic violence, substance abuse, depression, and other psycho-social issues.

Connected with this is the rising level of education within our communities, a factor that sometimes causes the local imam

or religious leader to suffer from a lack of community confidence. The traditional power relationship between a somewhat learned imam or religious leader and a semi-literate and very dependent congregation is not the relationship that we see today. On the contrary, today's congregations are often filled with learned women and men who are accustomed to leadership roles outside of the mosque, and they are often quite ready to disagree and/or challenge the imam on any number of religious, social, and/or scientific points. According to a recent article in Canada's daily Globe and Mail, which cites a new study sponsored by the Institute for Research on Public policy (IRPP), there is

> *...a growing divide between those who run the mosques and those who attend. Many centres are run in an autocratic manner, without input from youth or women. Now, community members want their voices heard and more accountability from directors, and they are willing to speak up.[8]*

They are also, I must add, willing to vote with their feet and simply live apart from the mainstream institutions of the faith.

The basic challenge arising from these new Muslim dynamics is the crying need for imams and religious officials to operate in a more inclusive, consultative manner. We must learn to listen more deeply to our communities and seek out the expertise and opinion of individual community members, women and men alike, whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. This is not so much a relinquishing of leadership as it is the inevitable evolution of Muslim leadership within a literate and thinking community, where gender equality, critical thinking, self analysis, and individual creativity are the norms. As individuals feel the heightened sense of empowerment and value that this style of leadership engenders, I think they will want to remain close to the mosque and even closer to the faith.

The greatest danger of this anger is that we become blinded to our own capacity to do evil

A separate but closely related challenge is the cultural dichotomy that our traditional institutions and enforced community norms often perpetuate. Many of our religious leaders in the west grew up and/or were trained in non-western environments, and so the religious "expertise" and perspective they consistently bring to the community have little connection to the life of the congregation.[9] The mosque then becomes something of an island of foreign culture, causing and/or perpetuating a cultural dichotomy within the minds and hearts of the community members. It also threatens the long-term sustainability of the congregation, for our youth and our sisters are often forced out by the unwritten law to "conform or stay away." Many young Muslims simply leave, and this is as much a tragedy for the mainstream community as it is for them. The ones who keep coming often show signs of maladjustment to their home culture, where they can come to see themselves as antagonized outsiders. This does not promise a healthy future for Islam in the west, and it dos not help us live a happier, more integrated and more fruitful community life.

One of the greatest of these restricting or limiting factors for Muslim leaders is the tangible fear than currently runs rampant through the community: fear of "bid'ah" – unwholesome innovation in matters of religion – fear of departing from what we have known, what we are culturally accustomed to. Traditional scholars have pointed out that innovation, in itself, is not evil, that there are positive, enhancing innovations ("bid'ah hasanah") as well as negative, defacing innovations, but Muslims are generally afraid to embrace any and all new approaches because this fear has been so deeply drilled into our collective psyche. This makes it very difficult for Muslim leaders to think creatively about solving problems, facing challenges, and experimenting with new approaches to our religious traditions and community life.

VI. Leadership for the Future

What will future Muslim leaders need to meet the greatest challenges looming on the horizon?

Reclaiming Forgiveness as an integral Islamic tool for transformation

There can be no question that the pursuit of justice at every level is one of the essential preoccupations of the religious life. That said, we must affirm the fact that Islam, as a holistic religion, as a way of life, and as a teleological process of gradual realization of the supreme goal, is more than a conventional justice system. More, in true humility, we must allow for the fact that God's justice transcends and sometimes even defies our operative notions of justice, which are invariably punitive and tainted by

our partial perceptions of fairness and our instinctive cravings for vengeance. When we view the idea of forgiveness from such a biased and limited perspective, it looks like exoneration, and this leads to gross imbalances in our spiritual and political lives.

One of the greatest challenges for leaders is the reclaiming of forgiveness as one of the primary and most prophetic tools for personal and communal transformation

Following the "beautiful role model" of the Prophet and the luminous examples of some of his family members and companions, such as 'Alī, one of the greatest challenges for contemporary and future Muslim leaders is the reclaiming of forgiveness as one of the primary and most prophetic tools for personal and communal transformation.

We need to forgive the early companions for opening of the gates of fitnah, a condition of division and distrust and violence that continues to plague us today.

Question:

Is internal community division a problem that confronts all traditions or do some suffer from it more than others? Why?

We need to forgive past and current generations for their often unconscious cultivation and perpetuation of patriarchy

within the religion, a force that continues to victimize our sisters and compromise us all. Remembering that Muslims also have participated historically in the colonization of other societies, we must forgive the European colonial powers and so get beyond our fixation with blame and unresolved anger over the indignities done to the Muslim world. Although I realize this is controversial, I think we must even forgive some of the excesses and crimes committed in the infamous "War on Terror," excesses committed by people who have themselves been traumatized by violence and fear and propaganda and other factors. Why must we forgive? Because our anger and bitterness and overwhelming desire to blame and to demonize others are becoming life-threatening diseases, barriers blocking our path to God, the supreme end (telos), poisons paralyzing our spiritual and ethical core.

Equally important, we should reclaim and hold fast to forgiveness because this is the way of the prophets, who, in their words and deeds, have illumined the path of transformation, the true and only path that can lead us to our supreme end; and this is the way of the Prophet Muhammad and his righteous companions.10

One of the most beautiful and moving accounts of forgiveness in the Qur'ān is also a Biblical account. Called "the most beautiful of stories," the story of Yūsuf and his brothers stands apart from all other Qur'ānic chapters in that it is the only sustained narrative in the text; indeed, the entire sūrah is devoted to this one story. In essence, it is a heroic story of envy, violence, injustice, long-suffering, patience, and ultimate exaltation that climaxes with a finale of Divine and human forgiveness.

Joseph's brothers, the very same who had thrown him into a well, sold him into slavery, and lied about the entire episode to their father, Jacob, stand before his throne in Egypt. They do not recognize him until he reveals his identity.

> *They said, are you indeed Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph, and this is my brother [Benjamin]. God has indeed been gracious to us! Behold, whosoever is God-conscious and patient, God will never suffer the reward of the righteous to be lost.*

> *They said, "By God! God has indeed preferred you over us. Certainly we were sinners!"*

> *[Then] he said, "Today there is no blame on you. God will forgive [everything] for you. He is the Most Merciful of all those who show mercy.*

Liberated by Joseph's clemency and the promise of God's forgiveness, they go back to their father, Jacob, whose sight has been restored by the casting of Joseph's shirt over his face.

> *They said, "O our father! Ask [God] to forgive our sins, for verily we were sinners!"*

> *[Jacob] said, "I will seek the forgiveness of my Lord for you, for He is indeed the Oft-Forgiving, the Merciful."*

> *Then when they entered the presence of Joseph, he made a home for his parents with himself and said, "[I bid] you enter Egypt, by God's leave, with safety."*

> *And he raised his parents high on the throne, and they [all] fell down in prostration before him. He said, "O my father! This is the meaning of my vision of old! God has made it true! He was indeed good to me when freed me from prison and brought you [all] here from the desert after Satan had put*

enmity between me and my brothers. Truly my Lord is Subtle [in unveiling] whatever He wills! Verily He is the Knowing, the Wise." (12:90-100)

The brothers, now absolved, experience a total transformation of situation, and they are reconciled with their brother and are finally able to accept his privileged status without envy. Satan (the whisperer) is blamed for having inspired their evil deeds. While a case could have been made for a harsher ruling by which justice might have come close to vengeance, love and forgiveness are shown to be infinitely better, and in this light, then, we read other Qur'ānic passages stressing God's preference for forgiveness and reconciliation:

Hold to forgiveness; command what is right, and turn away from the ignorant. (7:199)

Even while the Qur'ān allows for the "law of equality" – the grim justice of exacting an eye for an eye – with the reminder that this primitive form of justice restrains people from perpetrating violence against each other so acts as a positive force in human affairs,11 it emphasizes that God has opened another, better path for dealing with situations of injury and loss, and this is the path of remission, compensation, and reconciliation. Stating undeniable preference for this second way, the Qur'ān explains that God offers it as a concession and token of Divine mercy. Other texts corroborate this, as we will see below.

Meditating further upon these two paths or approaches to justice, it is crucial to understand that the one who has suffered injury and/or loss is given a choice: to seek justice or to seek reconciliation. In other words, the injured party is empowered to choose, with a strong word of encouragement to think seriously about God's preferred option. Forgiveness and reconciliation are thus not mandated or forced upon the injured; rather, both paths are left open. In years of working with people who have suffered loss and trauma, this point has taken on great significance for me. When a person's power has been taken from them through violence, they must regain a sense of wholeness and personal empowerment before the option of forgiveness has any meaning. In the case of Joseph, he forgave from a place of power and healing, and we see an almost identical dynamic in the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

A violation of the "Treaty of al-Hudaybiyya" (mentioned above) finally brought Muhammad back to Mecca with an overwhelming force. Mecca surrendered unconditionally, and so the inhabitants of Mecca, after years of supporting a war to exterminate Muhammad, his followers, and his monotheistic movement, were finally cornered, powerless and completely at his mercy. Fearing the worst as they watched him enter the ancient shrine town associated with Abraham, Ishmael, and Hagar, some of his most hardened enemies heard him ask, "What do you think I shall do to you now?" They begged him for mercy until again he spoke to them: "Today I shall say to you what Joseph said to his brothers: 'Today there is no blame on you.' Go, you are all free."

In the wake of this act of mercy and forgiveness, the people of Mecca enthusiastically embraced Islam, and the Ka'bah was cleansed and rededicated as "the house" of God, Allāh. The mercy and forgiveness celebrated in the Qur'ānic

depiction of God and in the stories of the prophets (esp. Joseph), became manifest in their midst, and the immediate result was the reunification of families and the forward march of an expanded and united Muslim ummah.

<blockquote>
Question:

In what way can recalling the purpose of our tradition shape our current decisions and choices?
</blockquote>

What wisdom, then, can Muslim leaders take and share regarding the transformative power of love and forgiveness? It would seem that human affairs, even in the aftermath of great injustices, offences, and many episodes of mortal combat, can only find resolution and renewal when they emulate the pattern that God has decreed for himself and celebrated in His books and His messengers. While justice always remains an option for the injured, it promises no transformation, only perhaps a grim sense of satisfaction that does not advance us toward the supreme goal. Reconciliation – when chosen freely – promises the simultaneous transformation of all parties, the injured and the perpetrator, and so unveils the power and mystery of Divine mercy, the telos, in our midst.

As leaders, we must ever ask the difficult questions, and the key question here is, for whom or for what are we striving? If for ourselves and for our own basic satisfaction, in the most mundane sense, then the pursuit of a justice close to vengeance might make sense. If, on the other hand, we are striving for God and for our ultimate objective of entering into the Divine presence and living in the Divine light, then forgiveness and transformation are our truly only hope. So shall we be led by the most mundane and emotional demands of our own psyches and communities or shall we lead in the footsteps of the prophets and guided by the light of our ultimate objective? My hope for the Muslim leaders of tomorrow is that they will choose the second, more difficult and infinitely more promising path. It may not be what the community craves, or even what we ourselves crave, for that matter, but it is the only path with teleological promise.

We thus come full circle, back to the unpopular Treaty of al-Hudaybiyyah, the pact the Prophet dared to make with those who sought his death and the extermination of his monotheistic movement. What are the contemporary equivalents we – as leaders – must face? What are the equivalents that our leaders of tomorrow will face? Both today and tomorrow, our leaders must strive to be courageous, faithful and bold enough to take the unpopular stand, the stand for universal transformation and the eternal pursuit of the telos. Nothing is as important. The Qur'ān assures us that "verily we are God's, and to God we are returning." In my view, as a scholar and as a Muslim leader, our highest responsibility is to live that return and facilitate that return for those who have placed their trust in us. Everything else is a detail.

Supplication

O Ever-Merciful God! Yā Rahmān!
O All-Benificent God! Yā Rahīm!

We testify to Your Unity
And we beg You to make us again a people of unity.
We proclaim Your mercy,
and we beg You to make us again a people of mercy.
We cry and long for the living attributes of Your Peace,
And so we beg You to make us selfless instruments of Your Peace.
We believe in the paradise of meeting You and living in the light of Your
presence;
make us a people of paradise now and always!

O Divine Guide! Yā Hādī, yaa Rashīd!
O Light of the Heavens and the Earth! Yā Nūr!

Illumine our sight so that we may see the supreme end that you have
placed on the horizon of our destinies! Illumine our thoughts and our deeds so
that we may understand and walk the path that returns us to You! Give us the
courage and wisdom and burning desire to seek You in all we do and the
steadfast mindfulness to worship You in everything we do!

O Merciful God! You sent the Prophet Muhammad as "a mercy unto all
the worlds;" inspire us to walk in his blessed footsteps so that we, too, may
become extensions of Your Mercy and Healing and Guidance and Peace and
Truth, for the good of all, for the healing of all, for the transformation of all, for
the supreme realization of all, for the unity of all.

All praise and all thanks go to You, O Lord of Loving-Kindness, O
Forgiving God, O Judge of Judges, O Most Merciful of the Merciful, O Lord of
the Worlds!

Notes

1   From "'Alī's Instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar" in *A Shi'ite Anthology*, selected with forward by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabā'ī and translated (with notes) by William Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981) pp. 68-82.

2   One of the most accessible and lucid accounts of this "moment" within early Islamic history can be found in Elias Shoufani's *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) esp. pp. 48-70. See also Guillaume's translation of Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's sīrat rasūl allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955) pp. 678 ff.

3   While there is nothing conclusive about her assertion (following that of W.M. Watt) that "one should dismiss the initial relation between the Qur'ānic term 'khalīfah' and the historical reality of the Caliphate," it is useful to see Wadād al-Qādī's "The Term 'Khalīfah' in Early Exegetical Literature" in *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Ashgate Variorum, 1999) pp. 327-346. See also "The Title Khalīfat Allāh" in Patricia Crone, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); also W.M. Watt's "God's Caliph: Qur'ānic Interpretations and Umayyad Claims" in *Iran and Islam,* C.E. Bosworth, ed. (Edinburgh, 1971).

4   See *The Ordinances of Government* (being a translation of his *al-ahkām al-sultānīyah wa'l-wilāyāt al-dīnīyah*), Wafaa H. Wahba, trans. (Garnet, 1996). It should be noted here that al-Mawardi, possibly in order to refute the competing Shi'ī vision of the Imamate, uses "Imamate" and "Caliphate" interchangeably. See p. 4 and following of the translation.

5   From al-Fārābī's "Enumeration of the Sciences," translated by Fauzi M. Najjar, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: a Sourcebook*, Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972) p. 25.

6   Ibid.

7   See his own prologue to Reviving Religious Knowledge (Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn).

8   The following discussion of forgiveness and transformation is based on the case study I crafted in preparation for the "Third Meeting of the Board of World Religious Leaders, November 2007 – Amritsar, India." The fuller paper, "Sharing Wisdom: A Muslim Perspective," can be found at www.elijah-interfaith.org.