

Qura'nic Ethics and Spiritual Leadership

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Abstract

This article focuses on Qur'anic Ethics and different aspects of spiritual leadership which contribute to a common concern for a moral dimension of leadership. It also highlights that what are the sources of our knowledge of right or wrong and motives which move an individual to perform them. The purpose of this research is to emphasize on traditional ethical leadership which remains largely unexplored. It may provide an opportunity to researchers for leadership criteria and leaders to improve their effectiveness. As evidence the Leadership characteristics of 'Umar bin al-Khattab, Theory of Servant Leadership and Spiritual Leadership are examined. This qualitative research carried out in more formal construct development and validation process, including the present literature reviews and fundamentals of Seven-points are used to compare the Spiritual as well as Servant Leadership.

The uniqueness of Qur'anic Ethic lies in giving the religious basis to the moral conduct of mankind. Secular Ethics, on the other hand, starts with psychological constitution of human mind. The obligations laid on human being as a social entity lies in the prosperity and wellbeing in this world only. The Qur'anic Ethic signifies the basic assumption of true faith in a personal God (Allah) while morality as emphasized in the Holy Qur'an is the attempt of each faithful i.e. individual, by all measure to approach and seek guidance from Almighty Allah in all spheres of its life. Qur'anic ethics in broader terms is narrated by orientalist as Islamic or theistic Ethics which is solely based on doctrine that God is an ultimate Unity without any shade of intermediate

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crossings which the Muslim scholar's term as *Tawfīd-e-Tanzīh* (Pure existence) "in spite of the apparent phenomenon of multiplicity which is surrounding us everywhere yet the main fact is the Ultimate Unity behind all this diversity". What is the nature of this Unity? Dialectic basis of this argument has two facets. The first one known as Pantheism, which advocates that this unity is purposeful but impersonal, and it could be identified in nature. However, It is difficult to imagine how such a depersonalised unity, can influence man in determining the ways of God dealings with man. The second view of this unity is theistic, which is the legacy of Hebrew tradition. The first great exponent of this view was Abraham. According to Qur'an, Ibrahim (May peace be upon him) is a man who is steadfast in his faith in Allah, who does what He orders him to do unhesitatingly, however paradoxically it may appear to be, who readily believes in His promises. Qur'an refers to his total submission. When his Lord said to him, submit you to me, he said I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.¹ Therefore Qur'an describes him as a friend of Allah and as the Leader of mankind.² He was an institution in his own personality,³ a single soul fighting with the people who don't believe in the above mentioned unity and anxious to establish the Unity and authority of Allah. As quoted by the Holy Prophet PBUH "Create in you the attributes of Allah"⁴ is the highest ideal of religious ethics and all the ideals of moral conduct, therefore, follow as a necessary consequence from this. In the following hadith, Prophet Muhammed (May peace be up on him) urges the Muslim leaders to be servant leaders: "Verily, each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for the wellbeing of his flock."⁵ The servant leader must have a sense of sincere dedication for the wellbeing of the people, only after that he should perform the duties as a leader. According to a hadith reported by Imam Bukhari in his *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* which is narrated by 'Ali (May Allah is pleased with him), the Prophet (May peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Obedience (to somebody) is required only when it enjoins the spirit of goodness and benefit for all."⁶ The well-known saying of the Prophet Mohammed (May peace be up on him) that the leader of a nation as per its job description is to serve those whom he is leading (*sayyid al qawmi khādimuhum*).⁷ Islam emphasizes the concept of leadership that Sovereignty belongs only to Allah, and Muslims are

ordered to obey the Prophet and those in authority: "O you believers! Obey Allah and obey the apostle and those in authority among you."⁸ According to the teaching of Qur'an, Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) would consult with his followers in worldly matters thereby establishing an example for the future generations to display the importance of "consultation" so far as the solution of problem is concerned. This is the practical application of the Qur'anic injunction "Forgive them and pray for them, and take counsel with them in all matters of public concerns."⁹ This is a major policy narrative for the conduct of a state viz-a-viz its people and the neighbouring states as well.

In classical Islamic Literature, it is representing in seven fundamentals;

1. The "compulsive self" seeks satisfaction primarily in satisfying its selfish, carnal desires and its greed for power. The Qur'an defines it in elaborate terms as "the self-impelled to evil" (*nafs ammrah bi al-salbiyah*).¹⁰
2. The "conscientious self" is that which discriminates between right and wrong and resists the temptation of evil and selfish desires. The Holy Qur'an depicts this state-of- mind in these words "I call to witness the self of conscience" (*al-nafs al-lawwamah*).¹¹
3. The self of inspiration is inspired with the spiritual knowledge which follows the voice of conscience. It is mentioned in Qur'an as the "The soul of proportion and order. It is equipped with the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong".¹² This is the highest level that religion and morality has ever achieved.
4. The "soul of tranquillity" (*al-nafs al-mu'innah*) here the "tranquil cell" attains a level of presence in which conscious intimacy is possible. It is described in the Holy Qur'an as: "O soul in tranquillity, return to your Lord well-pleased as your Lord ALLAH is pleased with you".¹³ This is a state of total submission to the will of Allah Almighty.
5. The "soul of submission" then reaches the level where its desires and actions are in harmony with the ultimate reality. It accepts every moment of his life being governed by the

- supreme law of the Lord Allah. As it is described in Qur'an, "God is well pleased with them and they with God".¹⁴
6. The "soul of perfection" is a theoretical as well as a practical absolute. This perfected and complete human being is the role model for good governance and is described "Truly he succeeds who purifies".¹⁵
 7. The "soul of total submission" in its final phases becomes closer to the Universal Will. This is the stage offed attributed to great saints whose life is regarded as a profound and miraculous example of human wholeness. They are lost in Gods Will in a state of selflessness.

Farther more "the Essential Self" is that which is deeper than its thinking pattern, emotions, likes and dislikes and has no ambitions and opinion of self. The only solace it gets is in "*Dhikrullah*" i.e. the remembrances of Allah and it is the utmost priority for them. As the Qur'an described, "The Faithfull's heart is comforted by the remembrance of God".¹⁶ This Soul is a fine shadow of the spiritual self and carries the attributes of awareness, love and the will to guide the people on the course of truth and honesty. This refined self can either be a source of solidarity with other human beings or a redeemer who separate its self from the rude and ignorant social groups. Such type of readers can be the kind of people who socialize with others to inculcate in them a sprite of productive relationship. They part ways with those social groups who are totally materialistic and have no regard for the life after death. This set of people realizes its unity in the spiritual sphere and provide the behaviour model through which moral security and spiritual health is assured. Jesus Christ, (peace and blessing be upon him) Once said "The gentle (not the meek) will inherit the earth. The Greek word "gentle" also connotes a shade of meanings which may be described as "well trained".¹⁷ Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him said, "I came for the perfection of moral virtues".¹⁸ Abu Bakr, the first truly guided caliph died in 634 A.D. When he was on his death bed he discussed with the senior most companions of Prophet Muhammed (May peace be up on him) about the selection of a Muslim to lead the Ummah. So they asked him to nominate a candidate after consultation of the advisory committee. He designated 'Umar as

his deputy. Everyone approved his selection of 'Umar as their leader. 'Umar acted upon the guidelines of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed (May peace and blessing be upon him) in letter and spirit.¹⁹ 'Umar's administrative capabilities were par-excellence, the focal point there in was "Taqwā" i.e. the fear of Allah. This ultimately had a deep impact on his successors in the domain of Islamic Leadership. 'Umar's creative ideas of administration were followed by the coming generations.²⁰ His inspiring organizational and leadership skills guided his decedents in legislative, executive and administrative areas. He developed the system of keeping the record of "revenue and land measurements, the introduction of filing system, tax administration etc. for the welfare of the state."²¹

Leadership Characteristics of 'Umar bin al-Khaṣṣ described by the Arab historians and other experts of oriental studies are stated as follows:

1. 'Umar had the ability to listen and adopt logical and rational suggestions. Once in his period of rule he advised to fix maximum of 40 dinars for the dowry (which a man pays to his bride), with the order that more than this amount would be submitted to the state treasury. A woman from the listeners stood up and argued with 'Umar and recited a verse from the Holy Qur'ān that contradicted what 'Umar had suggested. Caliph 'Umar smiled and said, "The woman is correct and 'Umar is mistaken"²² and instantly withdrew his orders.
2. 'Umar as a second Caliph lead a very austere and humble life. He had no security guard or escort contingent for himself.²³ He walked freely in the streets of Medina and by his actions proved that saying of the Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) "That a true Leader is the servant of the people whom he leads".
3. Endurance and Patience: The Qur'ānic teaching clearly define patience as one of the distinguished characteristic of the servant leadership. The Holy Qur'ān elaborates this concept as thus: "And we appointed from among them Leaders giving guidance under our command so long as they observe patience and continued to have faith in Our Signs."²⁴

4. Planning and organizing: Historians and Scholars regard 'Umar as the organizer and administrator of a welfare Islamic state in the true sense. He established *Divan* that functioned as the secretariat of the state, established financial and tax systems, permanent army, the court system and a system of correspondence with the foreign states.²⁵
5. Willingness to encourage involvement of *Shūrā* (Consultation) in official matters. He was very famous for showing great respect for the “people of opinion” on issues of public concern. He was of the opinion that a decision, taken without consultation is useless.²⁶ Therefore after the victory of Iraq, 'Umar discussed with the land owners of Iraq that whether they desire to keep their lands with themselves and pay the prescribed tax or wanted to hand it over to the possessors? And then He agreed with the “majority view” of leaving the land to the owners provided they paid the required tax.
6. The voice of conscience: Once he was on a survey around the city he saw an old person (A Jew perhaps) begging for charity. 'Umar asked him why he was compelled to begging! The old man replied that he was begging in order to be able to pay his taxes and cover his other expenses. Oh My God; 'Umar sighed, took that man to his house, gave him food and then ordered to fix a financial assistance for the elderly people. Perhaps this was the first step towards old age pension.²⁷
7. Modern and creative ideas: His administrative measures crisis management and difficult situations like battles, deprivations, epidemics of infectious diseases and similar calamities, were the most modern and creative steps which he implied in His rule: these are being followed by the present day modern world. He always emphasized the managerial principles of responsibility and accountability.²⁸

The historical expansion of Islamic state consequently changed the out dated views of leadership. Greenleaf's Concept of Servant Leadership which means the servant leader is “Servant First”. It starts with the notion/feeling that one wants to serve, and then his conscience aspires

to lead to actualize his leadership faculties for the good of his people. The best way to evaluate the effectiveness of the “servant leader” is to inquire whether those whom he served are growing up as good individuals in their respective societies or not? Larry Spears refines Greenleaf’s conceptual thoughts into following ten characteristics of **“The Servant Leader”**.²⁹ Larry Spears has used the term “Spiritual Leadership” which has being further abbreviated as “SL” for the convenience of readers.

1. SL/ Listening with patience: The phenomenological method of investigation is that there is no other way of understanding the masses mind and psychology without giving them a patient hearing. Same is the case of understanding the events of social life in its true perspective. The true causes of an event that has happened earlier could only be understood when these are objectively analysed by the leader of their respective communities/organizations.
2. SL/Empathy: The leader must be compassionate and fully involved in the grievances of its people. They should be accommodative and should have the courage to listen to the criticism of the people whom they lead.
3. SL/ Healing: Every act of endurance and for aberrance in stress situations makes the leader a true servant of the people, by dint of this attitude he acts as an integrating agent to thwart fragmentation of the social setup/organization etc.
4. SL/ Awareness: Self-Consciousness and general awareness makes the servant leader stronger and helps in resolving the issues that involve social ethics, excises of power, and strengthening moral values.
5. SL/ Persuasion: True leaders always encourage the people instant of oppressing them. So they become very effective in building consensus within their respective community.
6. SL/ Conceptualization: They are inclined to think beyond day-to-day methods and support the people to strike a balance between the conceptual mode of thinking and the day-to-day working pattern to face realities of life.

7. SL/ Foresight: The leaders use their past experiences to overcome the stress situations/difficulties of the present day scenario. They also chalk out the probabilities of difficult situations likely to happen in the future.
8. SL/ Stewardship: They are like stewards to build a trust for community and are committed to the service of humanity.
9. SL/ Commitment: leaders are committed to make the people prosperous and groom them emotionally. They are committed to the overall development of all sundry living in the social setup/ organization under their supervision.
10. SL/ Building community: They are focused on to find out resources for building up and a coherent social group/organisation etc.

Listening / hearing to the problem of people is the hallmark of servant leadership. As mentioned above the practical administrative skills of 'Umar bin al-Khattab is a relevant example of the conduct of a spiritual leader. It shows how keen and compassionate he was to the public concerns and welfare. He listened patiently and consulted them while governing them. The process of consultation and the *shura* method of 'Umar is the only mood of action for an ideal leader aspiring for good governance. In short this is the most significant feature of an Islamic welfare state, which on the one hand serves the interest of the state and it also brings forth a consensus in the distinguished social values of the masses.³⁰ Therefore, it can be safely said that spiritual leadership enhances the cohesion and integration in the social organizations, develop the individual's capabilities to become a useful social being. It creates an atmosphere of a spiritual cum worldly order which consequently brings about a consensus between the needs of the human soul and the physical requirements of an individual. The practical application of spiritual leadership thus; is the dire need of the time. The Secular or scientific approach on the other hand is one sided and knows not the spiritual/physiological of the human mind this is an enigma which requires instant solutions.

The last two centuries of human history has witnessed the worst form of Capitalism and Colonialism, separation and the cruel exploitation of non-white races an even unjust discrimination between poor and the

weak, enslavement of women, forced child labour in factories, gambling habits and the hazards of alcohol addiction and so on and so forth.

It is also true that civic sense and mundane activity is essential for the progress of a social setup but that is not all, one must at times transcend from mere mundane activity to high conceptual ideals of morality e.g., international brotherhood, dignity of humanity, respect of universal social and moral values and economic parity for all and lastly the provision of equal opportunity to express their skills and talents. Succinctly, the Qur'anic Ethics expressively contains general guidelines for all the above mentioned areas. *Shūrā* (Consult) is the main feature of the Islamic state and is the only panacea for all the ills of present day world.

It is noteworthy to study the differences found in the executive and managerial work-models while examining the role and challenges faced in the hierarchy of managerial and executive domain of a model social organization. Consequently the effectiveness of ethical or spiritual executive setup can play a vital role in transforming the society. Brown and colleagues found few key differences in the content of ethical leadership at the supervisory level. They concluded that only the spiritual leadership could tackle both aspects of human nature that is physical and psychological requirements.³¹ It will be quite relevant to mention that in the Holy Qur'an when Allah promised Ibrahim (PBUH) the spiritual leadership of the world Ibrahim (A.S) asked whether this leadership will be inherited by his descendants, Allah said that His covenant shall not be applicable to wrong doers.³¹ It clarifies that the question of moral and spiritual wellbeing is dependent upon the way man shall adopt to fulfil his moral responsibility. Qur'an says, "They were the people who passed away, what they earned by their ex belongs to them what you will do will be your responsibility"³². Qur'an declared in a verse "O people we created you from a single male and female couple and then divided you in nations and tribes so you may recognise one another. Verily the most Honourable among you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you"³³. While the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained the same verse in his last sermon on the occasion of *Fajrat al-wada'* in the following words: "That no Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab nor does

any non-Arab has any superior over Arab. Neither is superior to white nor white is superior to black".³⁴ Of course, If there criterion of superiority and respectability in the sight of Allah, it is *taqwā* (righteousness). These words despite the fact that we are all equal; however, do not block the display of an individual's skill and talents (granted to him by Allah) to excel in certain fields of activities. This will go a long way, obviously, to maintain the requisite degree of harmony in the work environments conducive to smooth working of the management process.

In organizational culture, employees and the employer are supposed to have a certain degree of commitment which can only be achieved through motivation. It is an established fact that the way a manager behaves in dealing with his subordinates determines the level and vitality of their motivation and commitment to a great extent. The Holy Qur'ān also emphasises in this regard that "O prophet (PBUH) if you had been stern and fierce of heart your follower would have disappeared from around you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the conduct of day to day affairs"³⁵ This verse highlights two core modes of action; first is the compassionate and sympathetic behaviour towards companion and followers, and second, the adoption of participatory approach when dealing with them that is consultation is the most effective way of management. It is a proven fact that in the modern managerial organization these important principles play a vital role in the motivation of subordinate and inculcate in them the spirit of commitment and passions to work diligently. Success and prosperity is the outcome of that commitment. It is proposed that stronger ethical context supporting and encouraging the moral conduct should develop and maintain the establishment of ethical leadership in their organization.

It is pertinent to conclude that the ethical leadership is the most desirable aspect of modern system of governance. Academic researchers must have the opportunity to conduct research that can improve the ethical performance of leaders. Every human being has some aspirations to strive for it. More pragmatically, "leadership" scholars have always been involved in their research with aims to contribute and make it more effective. Hence Qur'ānic ethics and

effective leadership are correlated, as it always appeals to the scholars of diverse schools of thought.

Endnotes and References

¹ Al Qur'an 2:131

² Al Qur'an 4:124

³ Al Qur'an (16:120)

⁴ Islamic Scholar Software. *Sahih Bukhari* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Par Excellence Computers), Abdallah Ibn 'Umar, 3:733. Leiden E.J.Brill 1936 Vol-2, P-474

⁵ *Sahih Bukhari* (no. 5.629)

⁶ Nusair, Naim. (1986) *Arab Managerial Leadership* p.90 Musnad Ahmed (no. 13103-04)

⁷ Islamic Scholar Software. *Sahih Bukhari* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Par Excellence Computers)

⁸ Al Qur'an (4, 59)

⁹ Al Qur'an (3,159)

¹⁰ Al Qur'an (12, 53)

¹¹ Al Qur'an (75, 2)

¹² Al Qur'an (91, 7/8)

¹³ Al Qur'an (91, 27/28)

¹⁴ Al Qur'an (5, 122)

¹⁵ Al Qur'an (91, 9)

¹⁶ Al Qur'an (13, 28)

¹⁷ Nawafleh, (2000). *The Personal and Leadership Characteristics of Omar Bin Al-Khattab*, p118

¹⁸ Imam Malik, *Mu'awana*, Ch., Husnul Khluq 8. .Leiden E.J.Brill 1936 Vol-1, P-194

¹⁹ Nawafleh, (2000). *The Personal and Leadership Characteristics of Omar Bin Al-Khattab*, p24

²⁰ Kennedy, Hugh. 1986. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, p 213

²¹ Hitti, Philip, (1974). *The History of the Arabs*. p, 237

²² Shamsul 'Ulama A. Shibli-Nu'mani, Omar the Great: The Second Caliph of Islam. Vols. 1 and 2, 2nd Revision. Translated by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan.

²³ I. Faqih, (1988). *Glimpses of Islamic History* p 96, 107.

²⁴ Al-Qur'an, 32: 24.

²⁵ Nawafleh, (2000). *The Personal and Leadership Characteristics of Omar Bin Al-Khattab*, p24

²⁶ Nusair, Naim. (1986) *Arab Managerial Leadership* p.189 Yun Kyung Bae, (2012)

²⁷ Hitti, Philip, (1974). *The History of the Arabs*. p, 237

²⁸ Nawafleh, 2000. *The Personal and Leadership Characteristics of Omar Bin Al-Khattab*, p118

²⁹ Jarry C Spear (2000) *The Journal of Virtues & Leadership*, Vol. 1 Iss. 1, 2010, 25-30. p26/28 © 2013, School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship, Regent University Journal of virtues & Leadership Spears, L.C. (Ed.). (1998).

³⁰ Al Qur'an (4, 59)

³¹ Al Qur'an (3, 159)

³² Al Qur'ān (2, 141)

³³ Al Qur'ān (49, 13)

³⁴ Ibn Hishshīm, *Sīrah*, Khūbāh fī Ijāz al-Wad'ī, Source: <http://www.inter-islam.org/condex.htm>

³⁵ Al Qur'ān (3, 159)