

QUALITIES OF A GOOD MOSLEM LEADER

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While different sects of Islam had differing views of what constituted a good Moslem leader, all could agree that Mohammed could be used as an exemplar of all the qualities they desired. He was a pious man, leading by example, and showing both justice and courage in his faith. Yet he was not inflexible: he showed prudence when dealing with the Jews of Medina and other Moslem leaders followed his lead. He promoted loyalty and showed bravery, and those qualities together with physical fitness and sharp senses were expected in all good leaders.

To all of the Islamic sects one of the most important qualities in a Moslem leader is to follow the example of Mohammed and show piety, probity and justice. In the life of Mohammed, there were many instances of the prophet's piety and sense of justice. Mohammed was shown to lead a life not only of leadership but of prayer and charity. He taught Moslems to pray and to perform their ablutions¹. He was also shown to provide charity to the poor and urged his followers to do likewise². Moreover, Mohammed demonstrated his piety in public, despite the potential backlash from Meccan traditionalists, praying at the Ka'ba where any could see³.

Mohammed extended his piety into a sense of justice and probity in both his public and private life. When Aisha was accused, Mohammed did not believe those that lied about her, but rather turned to God for the answers⁴. Future caliphs were expected to follow his example, looking to faith in God for judgment. Aisha was proven innocent in Mohammed's eyes, and he was careful to punish with a flogging those that accused her⁵. He set a precedent in Sharia law that not only punished the guilty but protected the innocent from false accusation. Had

Aisha been guilty, however, we can be sure that he would have been as stern with her as he was otherwise with her accusers. Before her innocence was established, he isolated himself from her: clearly Mohammed and no caliph that followed should abide adultery or other sin in his house⁶.

To the Khawarij sect faith is indeed the only criterion, declaring that "Authority (*hukm*) belongs only to God⁷. Any *imam* who fails to follow the Qu'ran is unsuited to be the leader, for in Kharajite philosophy, any Moslem who sins is no longer a Moslem. This philosophy led to their withdrawing support from Ali at the Battle of Siffin. The Shia sect believed in the primacy of faith but with a somewhat different interpretation. The followers of Ali followed the words of God in the Qu'ran: "Your friend (*waliy*) can be only Allah, and his Messenger and those who have faith, who establish worship and pay the poor-due while bowing down in prayer" and believed that the possessors of authority (*wulat al-amr*) should exhibit these traits⁸. However, they believed that Ali b. Ali Talib was ordained by Mohammed to be his successor, quoting the prophet: "I charge those that have faith in God and in me [...] to accept the *walaya* of Ali"⁹. Shia texts such as al-Nu'man's *Book of Faith* reinforce this with several references to Ali's own faith and position as select of God. As Ali was the chosen successor to Mohammed, and chosen of God, so too would Ali's descendants be similarly chosen of God, and the only viable *imams*. Indeed, in the *Book of Faith*, Ali's sons Hasan and Husayn together with Mohammed and Ali are the only ones allowed to live in the mosque at Medina, the "house in a state of purity"¹⁰. We can assume from this that al-Nu'man

¹ Ibn Hisham. *The Life of Mohammed*, 112

² Qadi al-Nu'man. "The Book of Walaya." *The Book of Faith*, 18

³ Ibn Hisham. *Mohammed* 113

⁴ *Ibid.*, 497

⁵ *Ibid.*, 499

⁶ *Ibid.*, 496

⁷ al-Tabari. "The First Civil War." *The History of al-Tabari*. translated by G.R. Hawting, 100

⁸ al-Nu'man. "The Book of Walaya." *The Book of Faith*, 18

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

was extending God's selection of Ali to his sons, and thus his future descendents.

To the main sect, the Sunni, however, there were more qualities required in a good caliph. al-Mawardi writes that:

“There are seven conditions of eligibility for supreme leadership: first justice of probity with all its attributes; second, knowledge conducive to the exercise of independent judgment in crises or decision making; third, sound hearing, vision and speech so that perception could serve as a correct basis for action; fourth, physical fitness and freedom from handicaps to movement or agility of action; fifth, prudence that ensures wise handling of the subjects and able maintenance of their interests; sixth, dauntless courage in defence of the homeland and repulsion of enemies; and seventh, Notable Qurayshite descent...”¹¹

Many of these qualities are drawn from their experience of Mohammed. Certainly, Mohammed was able to show sound judgment and prudence. Despite being a religious leader, he was not determined to force conversion on other faiths of the Book: actions that may have caused irreparable harm to his new faith. When he first arrived in Medina, he forged a covenant with the Jews living there, which “established them in their religion and their property”¹². He was thus able to solidify the Moslems position in Medina. Following Mohammed's example, similar covenants that allowed the continuation of religious

practice by Jews and Christians were vital to the expansion of the Moslem Empire in the subsequent two centuries, for example in Egypt.

Mohammed was diligent in pursuing the interests of Moslems. He worked against poverty and was careful to speak in favor of paying redemption money¹³. When a tribe of Jews defied the Moslems, he was quick to form war parties and squash their revolt: it was on a war party on B. Al-Mustaliq that Aisha's name was defiled¹⁴. Future caliphs were encouraged to show the same courage and willingness to fight that Mohammed had. This bravery was considered especially important when there were many rebellions or when the Empire was stretched and had “a multiplicity of border towns”¹⁵. In other circumstances, however, according to al-Mawardi, while courage was still a requirement, knowledge and learning became more important. This was especially important when there is “popular lethargy and the proliferation of heretics”.¹⁶

To al-Mawardi, a combination of all these qualities would lead to a leader that was “the best and most excellently qualified, the one people will immediately obey and are not likely to forsake”.¹⁷ Loyalty to the caliph was fostered from Mohammed on, and the prophet was keen to ensure loyalty in his followers, for “Loyalty is a protection against treachery”.¹⁸ A caliph would understand that, who could muster the qualities of faith, learning, courage and prudence, was considered by most moslems as the epitome of a good leader.

¹¹ al-Mawardi. “On the Appointment of the Sovereign (*Imam*)”. *The Ordinances of Government.*, 4

¹² Ibn Hisham. *The Life of Mohammed*, 231.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 493.

¹⁵ al-Mawardi. *Ordinances.* 6

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6

¹⁸ Ibn Hisham. *The Life of Mohammed*, 233.