

TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY OF THE INSTITUTION OF KHILAFAT

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Through his prophets and scriptures, Allah guides humans from time to time as to how they should conduct their lives. It is incumbent on all believers to not only act upon this divine guidance but to also share this guidance with people around them and to pass it down to coming generations. The challenge is to ensure that the guidance is passed on to new generations and nations without any contamination and distortion. These crucial objectives call for a strong organization, which in turn, demands a potent and revered leadership. In Islam such a leader is called a Khalifa.

The power of the institution of khilafat is twofold: temporal and spiritual. In view of the magnitude, the sanctity, and pervasiveness of the mission assigned, the Khalifa is elected for life. He is bound to consult with the representatives of the community in matters of vital importance but the final decision in such matters rests with him alone. Nothing overrides his authority as long as he operates *within* the framework of Islamic Law. To comprehend the tremendous administrative authority vested in this one man, one needs to grasp the ambit of the *responsibilities* he is charged with, which, as briefly discussed above, are to preserve and spread the guidance revealed through the prophet.

To fully comprehend the powers and responsibilities of the Khalifa, one should grasp the source of Khalifa's power, his mandate, the nature of his authority and how he is expected to exercise his authority. Another point to note is that his administrative authority is limited to running the operations of the religious organization.

SOURCE OF KHALIFA'S POWER

CHOSEN BY ALLAH

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْقَاسِيُونَ

Allah had promised to those among you who believe and do good works that He will surely make them *Successors* in the earth, as He made Successors from among those who were before them; and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them; and that He will surely give them in exchange security and peace after their fear: They will worship Me, and they will not associate anything with Me. Then who so is ungrateful after that, they will be the rebellious. (Surah Al-Nur / Ch. 24, Verse 56)

This verse embodies a promise that Muslims will be vouchsafed both spiritual and temporal leadership. The promise is made to the whole Muslim nation but the institution of khilafat will take a palpable form in the person of certain individuals who will be the Holy prophet's successors and the representatives of the whole nation. The promise of the establishment of khilafat is clear and unmistakable. Thus, the khilafat is a blessing that is only vouchsafed to such people as tread on the path of righteousness.¹

The verse also connotes that the Khalifa is chosen by Allah whereas seemingly it is the people who elect him. How can these two facts be reconciled?

Imagine the passing away of a messenger of God. How does a community feel? What was the condition of Muslims when Prophet Muhammad^{sa} passed away? How did Ahmadis behave on the demise of the Promised Messiah^{as}? The believers turn to Allah with utmost devotion and pray fervently to seek His help and guidance in choosing Prophet's successor. Allah listens to the prayers of His true and humble servants and in keeping with His promise guides them to choose the most righteous one as their Khalifa.

The appointment of the Khalifa thus is not the doing of the people. It is Allah's doing. People act only as instruments in the manifestation of God's will. They only cast their votes. It is just as a farmer plants the seeds but it is Allah who causes them to sprout and grow.²

“Also, consider this example: If you have a plate containing an orange, a banana, an apple and a pear. Someone told you to select a fruit from that plate for your father. You could have made your own selection and presented it to your father, but instead you went to your father and asked him: ‘Father, which fruit do you want?’ The father said: ‘I want the apple.’ Thus, you went and picked up the apple and presented it to him. Who then made the choice? Is it you who picked it up? No! It is your father who made the choice...So, it is Allah Who makes the choice and it is He Who appoints the Khalifa but seemingly the choice is made by people.”³

MANDATE OF KHILAFAT

The verse cited above says that Allah blesses those who do good works with the institution of khilafat. A question may be asked why the community needs the khilafat when it is already righteous. The verse answers this question by pointing out that doing good works does not necessarily translate into the establishment of

1 The Holy Quran with English Translation and Short Commentary, edited by Malik Ghulam Farid, p. 772

2 http://www.alislam.org/library/links/appoint_God.html

3 http://www.alislam.org/library/links/appoint_God.html

religion. For example, after the Promised Messiah^{as} passed away, he left a very righteous community but that community needed the guidance by the institution of khilafat to become capable enough to spread the message of Islam to the corners of the world. It is through the establishment of Khilafat that the message of Promised Messiah^{as} has been carried to corners of the globe. More importantly the presence of the Khalifa serves as a constant reminder to believers not to deviate from the way of the righteous.

This verse, clearly lays down the mandate of khilafat. The mandate of khilafat is not to build empires and seek worldly glory but to keep the love of Allah burning in the hearts of the members i.e. they worship Allah alone and they do not associate anything with Him. This indeed is a great responsibility that Allah has placed on the shoulders of the Khalifa.

NATURE OF AUTHORITY

KHALIFA & STATE

Khalifa's main role is the spiritual welfare and guidance of people. He is a head of a religious organization and his administrative authority is limited to the running of that organization. However, when the governance of the state comes in then according to Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II^{ra} the Islamic system of government separates the institution of khilafat from state, meaning that there will be a Head of State who will take care of political, social and economic matters. The system of khilafat will be a parallel structure whose sole job will be the spiritual welfare of people and to provide guidance to state. In other words, the Khalifa will act as a guide to state and will not administer the state.

Why were the Khulfa-e-Rashdeen the heads of Islamic State, supreme commander of Islamic armies and chief justices of the judicial system? The explanation could be that the realities of the modern world are different from what they were 1400 years ago. The concept of state has taken root in the modern world and the operations of the government have become enormously complex. Thus it is appropriate that the Khalifa does not become directly involved in state affairs. He however does play the role of a guide and ensures that affairs of state are conducted in keeping with the spirit of teachings of Islam.

KHALIFA ADMONISHES AND GUIDES

The Khalifa regulates and administers community affairs. He has the authority to make decisions that affect the moral welfare of the community. However, his responsibility is to admonish not to coerce.

To a North American mind, thanks to the media, the idea of religious leader (particularly of Islamic faith) conjures up images of Taliban-like person whose understanding of Islam least to say is far –removed from reality. Islam does offer guidelines and does outline some restrictions as to how individuals should navigate their daily lives but it does not advocate compulsion. For instance, Allah says in the Holy Quran:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

*There is no **compulsion** in religion. Surely, the right way has become distinct from error; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. And Allah is All-Hearing. All-Knowing (2:257)*

In this verse, Allah emphasizes that religion should not be imposed by force. Individuals are free to make choices but the choices have consequences. If the individual follows the path shown by Allah, the consequences will be positive.

Now if individuals are free to make choices, then what is the role of Khalifa? The role of Khalifa is same as that of the prophet and that is to admonish as the Holy Quran says:

فَدَاكِرٌ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُدَكِّرٌ

Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an admonisher; (88:22)

KHALIFA CONSULTS

Khalifa is advised by the Holy Quran to consult.

وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

...and consult them in matters of administration; and when thou art resolved, then put thy trust in Allah.

Surely, Allah loves those who put their trust in Him. (3:160)

Hadhrat Umar^{ra}, as the Khalifa, in one of his early sermons appealed to his followers in the following terms:

“In running the state, you are my partners. Help me with your sound advice. If I follow the right path laid down by God and His Prophet, follow me. If I deviate, correct me. Strengthen me with your advice and suggestion”.⁴

His appeal clearly illustrates two principles: the authority of Khalifa is circumscribed by Islamic Law and the Khalifa makes his decision based on mutual consultations.

Hadhrat Abu Bakr^{ra} after becoming Khalifa said these words: “O People, I have been indeed appointed over you, though I am not the best among you. If I do well, then help me; and if I act wrongly then correct me”⁵.

KHALIFA & POWER OF PRAYERS

The Khalifa having been chosen through the Will of Allah holds a special place in the sight of Allah. As such he is accorded a distinct status as to the acceptance of prayers. Since he is to help individuals and society to internalize the attributes of Allah, the granting of such special favor to the Khalifa only makes sense. Ahmadiyya community is fortunate in this regard that they not only see but experience these wonderful phenomena in their everyday life. Allah listens to Khalifa's prayers and assists him against all challenges. Take the example of the Khalifat-e-Ahmadiyya. It has faced many obstacles and conspiracies designed to wipe out Jama'at.

In almost all of the situations, the worldly power of the opponents was far more superior to that of Jama'at e Ahmadiyya. In 1930s and 1950s, the Ahrari fitna conspired to wipe out Jama'at. But under the

⁴ http://www.alislam.org/ror/Nov_2007.pdf (page 48)

⁵ http://www.alislam.org/ror/Nov_2007.pdf (page 23)

guidance and prayers of Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II^{ra}, Jama'at emerged from these conspiracies unscathed. In 1974, Jama'at faced street violence. The democratically elected government of Pakistan sided with extremists and instead of helping Ahmadis robbed them of their basic religious rights. The opposition and persecution steadily got worse into the 1980s culminating into attempted arrest of Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IVth and legislated violence against Ahmadis if they chose to practice Islam. In these challenging times, it was the guidance and prayers of Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IIIth and Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IVth that ushered Jama'at into the new era of progress and expansion.

EXERCISING OF AUTHORITY

PRINCIPLES OF EXERCISING AUTHORITY

The Khalifa is required by ALLAH to exercise his authority in keeping with the dictates of righteousness.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ

*Verily, Allah is with those who are **righteous** and those who do good. (16:129)*

Allah defines righteousness in the Holy Quran in the following words:

وَلَكِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَكَلِمَاتِ الْكِتَابِ وَالتَّيْبِينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالصَّرَاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

*...truly **righteous** is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Book and the Prophets, and spends his money out of love for Him, on the kindred and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and those who ask for charity, and for ransoming the captives; and observes prayer and pays the Zakat; and those who fulfil their promise when they have made one, and the patient in poverty and afflictions and the steadfast in the time of war; it is these who have proved truthful and it is these who are truly God-Fearing. (2:178)*

As the verse indicates, Allah has set very high standards for humans to become righteous.

Is it possible for the Khalifa to exercise power in a righteous manner when history of mankind suggests that to maintain power, deception or selective honesty is a necessity? Historically, various philosophers have given various methods as to how the power holders should exercise their powers. Plato emphasizes the importance of knowledge to rule. Machiavelli stresses the need of deception for rule. For example, Machiavelli states: "For a long time, I have not said what I believed, nor do I ever believe what I say, and if indeed sometimes I do happen to tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find."⁶

⁶ Nicolo Machiavelli, in a letter to Francesco Guicciardini, May 17, 1521.

In the modern western democracies, the shades of Machiavellian strategy are visible in the leadership styles of politicians and dictators. The secret to rule in the modern world depends more on the image and style as opposed to substance. The institution of khilafat, on the other hand, is required to employ righteousness (Taqwa) when discharging its responsibilities and exercising its authority. Taqwa is a broad concept but from the point of view of governance, it means justice and equity. The Khalifa is not supposed to manipulate the public or appeal to majority. The criterion of his decision-making is *one and only one*: how his decisions will be liked by Allah. This reliance on Taqwa makes perfect logical sense given the fact that the Khalifa is representing Allah and Allah would not like to deceive people in the matters of religion. Establishing the will of Allah through deception and compulsion militates against the very attributes of Allah.

IS TAQWA A REALISTIC STRATEGY IN GOVERNANCE?

The modern mind might reject the notion that Taqwa can be a realistic strategy for the purposes of governance. However, when we look at the history of caliphate in Islam, it becomes clear that as long as Taqwa was the guide of Khalifa, Islam grew stronger and became popular with masses. If we glance at the lifestyle of Khulfa e Rashdeen and the khulfa of the Promised Messiah^{as}, it is clear that they lived a simple life which is an important prerequisite to honest governance. Despite the fact that they were chosen for life as the Khalifa, they set the examples of impressive leadership styles.

Take the example of Hadhrat Umar^{ra}. He was able to exercise his authority most effectively by living righteously. His clothes were simple. He ate simple food like his followers. He is often cited as owning just a single shirt and that too patched up. He slept on a bed of palm leaves just as his followers did. As the influence of Islam spread, Hadhrat Umar^{ra} appointed governors in different lands, but also tried to ensure that they stayed faithful and dutiful rather than getting embroiled in the trappings of power that he himself had also rejected. Khuzaymah ibn Thabit records: “Whenever Umar appointed a Governor, he wrote to him and made a condition on him that he should not ride a birdhaun (heavy non-Arab horse from Turkey or Greece), nor eat delicacies, nor dress in finery, nor lock his door against the needy”. From this we get a sense of Umar’s own stance on duty and modesty.⁷ It was based on his personal lifestyle that he could place such demands on his subordinates.

Other Khulafa are also the shining examples of simplicity. Hadhrat Uthman^{ra}, despite being very wealthy lived humbly and wore ordinary clothes and ate simple food.⁸ He would purchase land and construct purpose-built markets whose rents were then endowed for the feeding of the poor.⁹ He believed that those who had been entrusted with high office should have a morality to match their responsibilities.¹⁰

Hadhrat Ali^{ra} was no different. After becoming the Khalifa, he continued to live a simple life and remained focused on the service of his community. Some reports cite that his meals consisted of a cup of milk, a piece of bread and some vegetables. He lived in a simple house just like other Muslims around him.¹¹ His focus was not self projection but the betterment of the community.

7 http://www.alislam.org/ror/Nov_2007.pdf (page 56)

8 http://www.alislam.org/ror/Dec_2007.pdf (page 39)

9 Rogerson, Barnaby “The Heirs of Prophet Muhammad”, Omar and the Great Victories, Page. 171

10 Ibid, 171

11 http://www.alislam.org/ror/Dec_2007.pdf (page 58)

When Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I^{ra} became Khalifa, he continued to live simply and used his temporal authority to alleviate poverty. For instance, under his directions, a fund was set up to provide assistance to orphans, the needy and deserving students.¹² Someone inquired Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I^{ra} “What type of conduct is needed for khilafat”? He answered “...this grace (khilafat) is attracted by the service to humanity and I have been inspired by this sentiment since my early youth. I have always been keen to serve everyone without distinction of caste, creed, country, or nationality both intellectually and practically”¹³

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II^{ra} strongly believed that the system of Al-Wasiyyat had twofold purpose: spread Islam and wipe out poverty from the face of the earth. He laid down his vision of economic equity and social justice in his speech, which is now published in the form of book, “Nizam Nau”. He used his temporal authority to initiate various schemes such as Tehreek e Jadeed and founded auxiliary organizations such as Khuddam ul Ahmadiyya and Ansarullah. These initiatives by him went a long way in promoting the spiritual as well as worldly welfare of the community.

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IIIth used his authority to introduce scheme such as Nusrat Jehan, which was designed to help Africa recover from its colonial past. Under this scheme, numerous schools and hospitals were established in Africa which continue to render a laudable service to the people of the continent and are thereby playing a great role both in the spiritual and worldly realms.

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IVth, among other initiatives, founded Humanity First. Its mandate is to alleviate poverty, suffering and ignorance around the globe through the donations and time of volunteers. Moreover, Khalifatul Masih IVth launched Muslim Television Ahmadiyya that is designed to broadcast spiritual, religious, historical, economic and social programs.

Needless to say that Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih V^{at} has effectively exercised the spiritual and temporal powers to extend the visions and initiatives of the four Khulfa into new horizons.

CONCLUSION

The extent of Khalifa’s spiritual and temporal authority is best grasped when one understands the source, mandate and nature of his authority and how Allah expects the Khalifa to exercise his authority.

The Khalifa is chosen by Allah. He is charged with enormous responsibilities. In keeping with the magnitude of his responsibilities, he is vested with vast authority both in temporal and spiritual realms. He is advised in the Holy Quran to consult before making decisions in the affairs of the community. However, in all matters, the final decision rests with him. Needless to say, his decisions should not be contrary to Islamic law. His administrative authority is limited to running the operations of the religious organization. However, his duties may include guiding the government of the state to ensure that state policies do not violate Islamic principles.

It should be borne in mind that the exercise of the Khalifa’s authority and influence are to be solely based on righteousness and righteousness alone. ▪

¹² Khan, Muhammad Zafrullah “Hadhrat Maulawi Nur-ud-Din Khalifatul Masih I, p. 195

¹³ Khan, Muhammad Zafrullah “Hadhrat Maulawi Nur-ud-Din Khalifatul Masih I, p. 199