

# Shura

## Mutual Consultation

by Adam Hani Walker, UK

## Introduction

The Institution of Khilafah is the purest manifestation of the Islamic state in the absence of a Prophet ﷺ. At the heart of this spiritual and temporal body is the Khalifah who, as has been expounded by Hadhrat Shah Wali Ullah رحمته الله تعالى<sup>1</sup>, receives Divine inspiration from almighty Allah which is then pumped throughout the body of the Ummah. This beautiful process has been described to us by the Promised Messiah (as) through a vision he received<sup>2</sup>,

*'I saw in a vision that God's bounties travel in the form of light to the Holy Prophet, on whom be the peace and blessings of Allah, and are absorbed into his chest and proceed thence in numberless tubes whereby they are communicated to every deserving person according to his share'*

Islam is a practical religion and therefore, in order to properly function, the institution of Khilafah is comprised of many authoritative bodies and individuals all working to facilitate the implementation of the Khalifah's instructions. One such institution is that of Shura or Majlis-e-Mushawara which enables the Khalifah to assess, and address, the ever diversifying and expanding opinions and needs of the Ummah.

## What Does Shurah Mean?

Shura (شُورَى) is an Arabic word which literally means consultation<sup>3</sup> and as a basic Islamic principle calls upon Muslims, usually under a system of proportional representation, to gather and, through debate, forward formed opinions to the Khalifah which they feel are for the betterment of the Ummah. Defining the linguistic and rhetorical features of the word Shura, Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II رضي الله عنه writes<sup>4</sup>,

*"شاور (consult) is derived from شار which means, he gathered or extracted honey from the comb, and separated it from the wax [...] شار عليه means, he gave him advice; he offered him counsel. شاوره means, he consulted him, he sought his opinion of advice; he discussed with him in order to find out his opinion. مشورة means, good counsel or consultations. شورى means, mutual consultation (Aqrah)"*

There is clear mention of Shura in the Holy Qur'an which, amongst other definitions, outlines it as a method by which consensus can be achieved thus preventing ideological deadlocks which ultimately lead toward sin and disunity, for almighty Allah surely says<sup>5</sup>,

((وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ))

*“And those, who hearken to their Lord, and observe Prayer, and whose affairs are decided by mutual consultation, and who spend out of what We have provided for them”*

Explaining this verse Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II رضي الله عنه says that it sets out the principle of governance for which the temporal Islamic state is to be based upon. Writing in his Tafsir-ul-Kabir Huzur رضي الله عنه notes<sup>6</sup>,

*“This verse lays down شوری (mutual consultation) as the basic principle which should guide Muslims in the transaction of their national affairs. This simple word contains the nucleus of a representative form of government of which the West is so proud. The Khalifa or Head of the Islamic State is bound to take counsel with the representatives of the people when he is to take a decision of vital national importance.”*

When studying the life and example of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم it again becomes clear that consultation is an absolute must. The Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم never shied away from consulting his companions, and even the opponents of Islam, on a variety of issues. Hadhrat Aisha(ra) is reported to have said<sup>7</sup>,

*“The Holy Prophet was most solicitous in consulting others in all matters of importance”*

This despite the fact that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم did not require the advice of those around him, he was the best of the decision makers amongst almighty Allah’s blessed creation and most importantly was guided by almighty Allah. Commenting on this Baihaqi رحمہ اللہ تعالیٰ beautifully writes<sup>8</sup>,

*“Certainly Allah and His Messenger did not stand in need of the advice of anybody, but God has made it (the seeking of advice) a source of mercy for men. Those who hold consultation will not stray away from the path of rectitude, while those who do not are liable to do so.”*

In essence, an individual who is a member of the process of Shura is a trustee and has an obligation to dispatch that trust with due diligence. During the battle of Badr the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم sought the consultation of his companions regarding the strategic placement of the army. On taking the advice of Ibn Al-Mundhir رضي الله عنه and other companions the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم decided to alter his strategy and set up camp at a different location. There are countless other examples of Shura during the life of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم some of which will be later highlighted.

## **“All Governments Belong To Allah”**

Before delving further into the subject of Shura it is important to first set the boundaries and restrictions of Shura. It took one of the most painful lessons in history for mankind to learn that Consultation is not applicable in situations where Allah (swt) has clearly set out His will. The lesson learnt was so great that Allah (swt) has left it as a reminder for all time in the Holy Qur’an<sup>9</sup>,

((ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ الْغَمِّ أَمَنَةً نُّعَاسًا يَغْشَى طَائِفَةً مِّنْكُمْ وَطَائِفَةٌ قَدْ أَهَمَّتْهُمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ يَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ ظَنَّ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَقُولُونَ هَلْ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ قُلْ إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ كُلَّهُ لِلَّهِ يُخْفُونَ فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ مَا لَا يُبْدُونَ لَكَ يَقُولُونَ لَوْ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ مَا قُتِلْنَا هَاهُنَا قُل لَّوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ لَبَرَزَ الَّذِينَ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَتْلُ إِلَى مَضَاجِعِهِمْ وَلِيَبْتَلِيَ اللَّهُ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحَّصَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ))

*“Then after the sorrow, He sent down peace on you - a slumber that overcame a party of you - while the other part was anxious concerning their own selves. They entertained about Allah wrong thoughts of ignorance. They said, 'Have we any part in the affair?' Say, 'Verily the affair wholly belongs to Allah.' They hide in their minds what they disclose not to thee. They say, 'If we had any part in the determination of the affairs, we should not have been killed here.' Say, 'If you had remained in your homes, surely those on whom fighting had been enjoined would have gone forth to their death-beds that Allah might fulfil His decree and that He might test what was in your breasts and that He might purge what was in your hearts. And Allah knows well what is in your breasts;”*

This verse is a reference to the battle of Uhud and the group of hypocrites which became anxious at the dangers ahead of them and wanted to dictate to the Holy Prophet (saw) how the battle should have been fought. They ultimately broke off from the army and remained in Medina throughout the duration of the battle being more concerned for their own safety than defending Islam. Explaining the significance of this verse the Promised Messiah (as) has written<sup>10</sup>,

يَقُولُونَ هَلْ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

*In this verse the word Amr means administration and governance. This verse sets forth the thinking of those who had said: Had we any share in matters of governance, we would have so planned that the trouble that was encountered in the battle of Uhud would have been avoided. In reply to them God Almighty said:*

قُلْ إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ كُلَّهُ لِلَّهِ

*Tell them all governance belongs to Allah. They were admonished to obey the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) in all circumstances. This verse has nothing to do with choice or compulsion. The reference is to the thinking of some persons that if they had been consulted they would have proposed something different. God Almighty admonished them that the matter was not one for consultation but was a Divine commandment.*

It should thus be clear in our minds that whilst Shura plays a key role in Islam, it can never be used as a tool which abrogates a Divine commandment of almighty Allah.

## Shura And Khilafah

As mentioned at the beginning, this process serves as an integral feature within the institution of Khilafah. Highlighting this point, Hadhrat Omar رضي الله عنه went so far as to say<sup>11</sup>,

”لا خلافة الا بالمشورة - There is no Khilafah without consultation“

The natural evolution and development of any state dictates that eventually its’ grip expands over people of diverse societies and cultures. It is not the purpose of Islam to suppress or eradicate regional diversity but rather to ensure that whilst each Muslim has a right to enjoy their own heritage, culture and tradition they should not contravene the Sharia (*Islamic Rule of Law*). This was illustrated by one of the greatest Islamic jurisprudents, Hadhrat Imam Al-Shafi’i رحمه الله تعالى, who was known to sometimes vary his edicts from land to land. The dilemma thus faced by the Islamic State was how to constructively ascertain the collective and representative opinions, advice and proposals of the Ummah. The answer to this is as set out in the below verse of the Holy Qur’an in which Muslims are instructed to consult with one another by way of Shura<sup>12</sup>,

((وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ))

”And those, who hearken to their Lord, and observe Prayer, and whose affairs are decided by mutual consultation, and who spend out of what We have provided for them“

This certainly represents the core principle of Shura but there are also other benefits to this great institution of mercy. The following are some of these benefits as have been laid out by Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II رضي الله عنه<sup>13</sup>,

1. *The Khalifa or the Amir comes to know the views of his followers.*
2. *He is helped in arriving at a correct decision.*
3. *Representative Muslims get an opportunity to think about, and take a personal interest in, important State affairs, thus receiving most useful training in matters of administration.*
4. *The Khalifa is enabled to judge the mental and administrative capabilities of different individuals, which help him to assign the right work to the right man.*
5. *It enables him to know the aptitude, aspirations and tendencies as well as the moral and spiritual condition of the different members of his community, and thus he becomes enabled to effect an improvement, wherever necessary, in his people.*

The institution of Shura is therefore not something to be taken lightly; it is a living and evolving entity which performs a key function in sustaining certain aspects of the Islamic State. As illustrated in the original definition of the word Shura, it should be

apparent that whilst Shura means the drawing of ones opinion and advice by means of consultation it does not make the general, or even unanimous, consensus of the Majlis-e-Mushawarah binding on the Khalifa. In the Holy Qur'an (3:160) almighty Allah has made it clear that, whilst consultation must be sought, the final decision is to be taken by the leader (*in the case of this ayah the Holy Prophet ﷺ*) and, as with everything in life, the ultimate trust is left with almighty Allah.

There are countless examples of the non-binding effect of Shura in both the rule of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the Rightly Guided Khulufah. During the battle of Badr the Holy Prophet ﷺ accepted the merciful advice of Hadhrat Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه regarding the treatment of the prisoners of war and rejected the advice of the other companions. In signing the treaty of Hudaibiya the Holy Prophet ﷺ rejected the overwhelming consensus the companions present. After the death of the Holy Prophet ﷺ the order to dispatch Hadhrat Osama bin Zaid رضي الله عنه as the leader of the Muslim army was issued by Hadhrat Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه against the opinion of the majority of the companions. One of the first orders of Hadhrat Omar رضي الله عنه as a Khalifa was to remove Hadhrat Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه from his position of authority despite him being the favored choice of the companions. It must be noted that whilst it is right and proper to say that the Khalifah is not bound by the collective opinions of Majlis-e-Mushawarah, in practice, it is very rare for a Khalifah to decide against the proposals of Shura. However, when a difference of opinion does arise one should understand the Divine nature of Khalifah and have trust in almighty Allah that His appointed and guided ruler is sound in judgment.

In another place in the Holy Qur'an (3:160) almighty Allah establishes that not only is it a duty to consult members of the Ummah but it is also permissible, and even preferable, to consult people who have transgressed in some way<sup>14</sup>,

((فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ))

*“And it is by the great mercy of Allah that thou art kind towards them, and if thou hadst been rough and hard-hearted, they would surely have dispersed from around thee. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them, 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.”*

This verse refers to situations in which the Holy Prophet ﷺ consulted the opponents of Islam on matters regarding the state and most specifically to his ﷺ consultations with the hypocrites of Medina. The beginning of the verse illustrates that such consultation is necessary and demonstrates the great kindness and

beneficence of the ruler, here displayed par-excellence by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Once again, we find almighty Allah illustrating two key concepts surrounding Shura being Allah's Mercy and that the ultimate decision on all matters is to be left in the trust of Allah (swt).

## **Shura & Modernity**

Contemporary Islamic writers on the Islamic State and Islamic Social Policy such as the late Mohammad Asad and Tariq Ramadan have spent much time emphasizing the vital role which Shura plays within an ever evolving Ummah. They explain that the process of Shura is a means for allowing the Islamic Law (*Sharia*) to sensibly evolve, offering solutions to new issues which Islam has not previously encountered. Asad states that Shura caters for the <sup>15</sup>, “...*continuous temporal legislation of our social existence.*”, and when describing the institution of Shura in general terms Tariq Ramadan describes it as <sup>16</sup>, “...*the space which allows Islam the management of pluralism*”.

The basic function of Shura which they allude to has been already investigated in this article, but in short the institution of Shura here takes on a new role in the modern and ever evolving technological age. With great social, technological and medical advancements arise new challenges which can be evaluated through the process of Shura. For example, there is a great desperation within the Muslim world of today to address the social dangers of the internet to Muslim children which can in some cases threaten their safety, modesty and very belief system. Using the mechanism of Shura such issues are brought to the forefront and debated by a proportional representation of the Ummah.

## **The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community**

Continuing the theme of modernity it is prudent to study the excellent implementation, and benefits, of the institution of Shura found in the Ahmadi model. This institution can be found at the very core of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community being only second in importance to the institution of Khilafah. This is illustrated in the following authoritative structure of the Community<sup>17</sup>,

1. *Khalifatul Masih*
2. *Majlis-i-Mushawarat (consultative body)*
3. *Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya (central Ahmadi council for looking after the affairs of the Ahmadiyya Group)*
4. *Tebrik-i-Jadid (special fund to be used in schemes to promote the Oneness of God, the dignity of Mohammad ﷺ, and the promotion of Islam), Anjuman Ahmadiyya (national administrative bodies)*
5. *Waqf-i-Jadid (special fund to be used to promote missionary and reformative aspects of the Ahmadi community); and*
6. *Local Anjumans (local administrative bodies).*

What concerns this article is the Majlis-e-Mushawarat, known also as Majlis-e-Shura (*consultative body*), and how it is connected to Khalifatul Masih. It officially gathers once a year and falls directly under the Khalifah with no intermediary between the two. The council consults on administrative matters relating to finance, budget, education, missionary projects and other affairs of the community forwarding its' consensus and proposals to the Khalifah.

Within the Community Majlis-e-Shurah also acts to help to preemptively resolve any prospective issue that might arise between differing parties and thus strengthen the bonds of brotherhood. In March 1908 Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I رضى الله عنه launched an initiative called Majma-ul-Akhwan (an Association of Brothers) where he رضى الله عنه published several guidelines for the implementation of this proposal with the second one being<sup>18</sup>,

*“Mutual consultations and prayers should be the tool of cooperation”*

An issue of great contemporary significance to the Muslim world is Islamic Reasoning (*Ijtihad*) and its' application in the modern age. Here the Ahmadi system of Shura plays an interesting role in that it encourages the use of Ijtihad in a safe and focused environment where ultimately findings are passed on to, and assessed by, the Khalifah for his final determination.

The Shura is different to a Parliamentary system in that there exists no party based system and all findings are implemented at the discretion of the Khalifah. On this matter Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IV رَحْمَةُ اللهِ تَعَالَى enlightens us as follows<sup>19</sup>,

*“In a no party system you can pick the talent from anywhere. The guiding principal in our Shura is summed up by the Islamic phrase: “do not take sides with people but take sides with the truth and the truth will emerge victorious.””*

In his book, *‘A Man of God’*, Iain Adamson precisely describes the Annual International Shura system whose basic traits can be applied to all Ahmadi Shura's, international, national and local. Adamson writes<sup>20</sup>,

*“The subjects to be decided at International Shura come from resolutions agreed as recommendations at National Shuras. All concern policy and not administrative matters. To discuss each resolution a committee is formed by members who volunteer their services because of their interest in the subject or who are nominated by the Emir of their country. The chairman of the committee then reports the findings to the full Shura. If a poll is asked for this it is by show of hands. When the view of Shura has thus been obtained the Khalifa, after deliberation and perhaps more questioning announces his decision. He may accept the advice completely, he may accept some of it and vary other portions, he may appoint a sub committee to investigate the matter more closely and report back as soon as possible. If however he believes that the proposal is not in the true interest of the movement or that it contravenes some tenet of Islam then he will explain his reasons and reject the suggestion completely.”*



As is the case with any institution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community the Majlis-e-Mushawarat has been codified so as to make the process clear and unambiguous to all and prevent possible manipulations of the system. The rules for the International Shura are as follows,

- a) *Subcommittee members are nominated by the National Amir of each country. Although, subject to National Amir's consent, a delegate may volunteer himself to serve in a subcommittee.*
- b) *The Jama'at proposing an item included in the Agenda must have a delegate as a member of that subcommittee.*
- c) *A subcommittee member cannot oppose the recommendation of the subcommittee unless the Chairman of the subcommittee acknowledges the dissent and registers the member's right to oppose the recommendation during the subcommittee's meeting.*
- d) *The recommendations of the subcommittee supersede the original proposal.*
- e) *An amendment to the proposal can be presented during a session of the majlis-i-shura only in writing. Verbal amendments are not acceptable.*
- f) *Any delegate who wishes to express an opinion on any item under discussion must raise his hand when Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih so invites and register his full name and the Jama'at. Once this list has closed, delegates who did not register their own names when so invited are then not authorized to speak on that matter. If a previous delegate has broadly addressed the matter he wanted to cover, a delegate may withdraw his name.*
- g) *When invited, delegates must be as brief as possible and restrict themselves to the item then being discussed. This helps save the precious time of all delegates.*
- h) *Speakers must only address the Chair and they must never deride any other speaker.*
- i) *A poll is always conducted by show of hands only. There are no secret ballots. No one is allowed to abstain. Everyone must vote either for or against the motion.*
- j) *Since the proceedings are recorded and transcribed from these proceedings, whenever one speaks he should identify himself and the Jama'at he represents.*
- k) *Separate arrangements are made for ladies and a limited number of visitors. Ladies do not participate at the subcommittee stage, but their contributions during the full Council (General Body) discussions are always welcomed. Visitors participate as observers and are not allowed to speak or vote.*
- l) *The delegates obtain permission from the Chair before leaving any session of the Shura.*

In addition to the formal system of Shura, there also exists a personal system whereby members can either arrange sittings (*Mulaqat*) with the Khalifah or write to, or e-mail, him directly and discuss any issue they feel to be of importance. This cannot be said to be an absolute form of Shura as described above but does share many of the benefits of the Institution of Shura. Commenting on the system of *Mulaqat*, with regards to the practice of Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I رضي الله عنه (*which is indicative of all five Ahmadi Khalifas*), the late Hadhrat Muhammad Zafrulla Khan رحمة الله تعالى writes<sup>21</sup>,

*"He was blessed with a regal personality, a commanding stature, and his court was open to each and everyone."*

## Conclusion

Shura is an integral part of not only Islamic Governance but also the social structures upon which society is built. In essence, the institution of Shura offers each and every individual, tribe, community, religion and nation a voice by which they can actively affect change within their wider communities. It provides a safe and proactive medium by which, through the process of give and take, new and unique issues can be assessed so as to ascertain what is best for the collective.

The real issue which faces us as individuals is how we react to, and value, this blessed institution. It is most certainly an institution gifted to us out of the Mercy of almighty Allah and we must therefore learn to respect, understand, and utilize it to the very best of our abilities.

We must never allow ourselves to forget that the Institution of Shura is a blessing upon the Ummah which is today being championed by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. It is the solution to many difficulties faced by the Muslim Ummah and we must sincerely pray to almighty Allah that He continues to shower upon us the blessings of mutual consultation, Insha-Allah. Ameen

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<sup>1</sup> Shah Wali Allah. *Izalat al-khafa 'an khilafat al-khulafa*. Vol.1, Pg.27.

<sup>2</sup> Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. *Al-Hakam*. Vol.7. 8 Feb 28, 1903 Pg.7.

<sup>3</sup> Lane Edward William. 1863. *Arabic – English Lexicon*. Williams and Norgate. Vol.1, Pg.1617.

<sup>4</sup> Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II. *Tafsir Al-Kabir*. Pg.446, Ft.442.

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Qur'an. Ch.42, Vs.39.

<sup>6</sup> *Tafsir Al-Kabir*. Pg. 2352, Ft.3629.

<sup>7</sup> *IBID*. 3:160, Pg.445-446, Ft.442.

<sup>8</sup> *IBID*.

<sup>9</sup> The Holy Qur'an. Ch.3, Vs.155.

<sup>10</sup> Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. *The Essence of Islam*. Vol.2, Pg.342; also see *Jang-e-Muqaddas*. *Ruhani Khaza'in*. Vol.6, Pg.231-234.

<sup>11</sup> *IBID*. 3:160, Pg.445-446, Ft.442.

<sup>12</sup> The Holy Qur'an. Ch.42, Vs.39.

<sup>13</sup> *IBID*.

<sup>14</sup> *IBID*.

<sup>15</sup> Asad Muhammad. 2001. *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*. Islamic Book Trust. Pg.43.

<sup>16</sup> Ramadan Tariq. 2001. *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*. The Islamic Foundation. Pg.81.

<sup>17</sup> Zirvi Dr. Karimullah. *Welcome to Ahmadiyya – The True Islam*. Pg.322.

<sup>18</sup> Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih I (ra). *Al-Hakam*. Qadian. March 10 1908. Pg.7.

<sup>19</sup> Adamson Iain. 1991. *A Man of God*. George Shepherd. Pg.114.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*. p.168.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmad Syed Hasanat. 2003. *The Way of the Righteous*. Islam International Publications. Pg.199.