

KHUTBA

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English

Binding *Shura*

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, informed his companions that in later generations a political system "*khilafa*" similar to the political system of the Rightly Guided Caliphs "*al-khilafa al-rashida*" will one day return to rule the Muslim nation.

One of the main features of the era of the four rightly-guided caliphs was that justice prevailed in all spheres of life and in all its forms: individual justice, social justice, economical justice and political justice.

In the field of politics, the Companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, learned from their teacher the importance of *Shura* in collective decision making. They understood from his leadership, during the first 13 years in Makkah and the following 10 years in Madinah, that a matter of general concern to Muslims must be discussed and debated before taking an important decision which affected the Muslim community in Makkah, or later on the Muslim state in Madinah, as such consultation was crucial for reaching a common vision and extracting from *Shura* members the best views and ideas that enable reaching the best collective decision.

On many occasions this process took place despite the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was divinely-guided by the revelation he received from Allah (SWT) through angel Gabriel. He made it clear to them that public matters which were not revealed to him were open to suggestions, ideas and debate. Individual *Shura* for example took place before the battle of Badr in selecting the suitable camping location for the Muslim army, and an expert opinion by Al-Hubab ibn Al-Munzir convinced the Prophet, peace be upon him, to change their location in order to benefit from the water of the well at Badr, and deprive the enemy from this valuable resource.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, went even one step further by going against his own personal preference on the day of Uhud, that of remaining in Madinah to fight against the enemy, because the majority opinion of his companions was to go outside Madinah and confront the enemy at Uhud.

When 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab was chosen as the second caliph, he made it a clear policy not to make any important decision related to the Muslim community or state except after presenting the issue for collective consultation and debate. This is why he kept most of the Prophet's companions near him in Madinah, and did not give them permission to travel to distant lands, so that they would contribute to collective public consultations, as he would gather them before making any important decision to benefit from their views.

In selecting the third Caliph, the decision was initially entrusted by 'Umar before his death to a committee of six men from among the Prophet's Companions who were the most qualified candidates for the post. Their mandate was very clear, to reach consensus on who among them was to become the new Muslim ruler. After a process of mutual consultation which lasted several days, the committee agreed on choosing 'Uthman ibn 'Affan as their caliph. This decision was announced in public at the Prophet's mosque in Madinah in what is today similar

to a general referendum, and the crowds confirmed the nomination of 'Uthman as the nation's chosen caliph.

Benefits of Binding *Shura*

Among the other main benefits of collective *Shura* is allowing the group, community or nation to see the issue under discussion from different angles, and therefore making a more informed decision by taking into account all factors, constraints, threats and opportunities and making the best use of people's contributions and ideas. Another benefit of *Shura* is the personal involvement of all people in the decision-making process which makes them more motivated and convinced when their opinions are taken into consideration and therefore more positive and willing to implement the decision at the time of implementation.

During the last 14 centuries, there have always been two main traditional opinions among Muslim scholars on whether *Shura* is binding or non-binding in collective decisions affecting Muslims. At a minimal level, non-binding *Shura* is better than no *Shura* at all, but its benefits and blessings are incomplete, as what is the point of joining a *Shura* process and spending time and effort if people know that the majority opinion won't be binding?

Binding *Shura* allows the community to reach a win-win situation, as not only does it encourage all people concerned to voice their opinions and points of view so that the collective decision taken benefits from all ideas, but also it is a win-win scenario, compared to the win-lose scenario of dictatorships or non-binding *Shura*, as all opinions have a chance for success, and the best opinion is objectively chosen, which will automatically turn out to be in the best collective interest of all the community.

In modern politics, public *Shura* and consultation in selecting representatives in the form of free and fair parliamentary elections is bound to produce the best candidates whom people trust, as long as there is no fraud or corruption involved in the election process. One suggestion in the second phase would be for members of Parliament to select from among them a smaller number of people who would represent the "Upper House". This small committee of say 7 people should be dedicated members in both houses, and their leader would be the country's leader, after his nomination is confirmed by Parliament and by referendum through a public vote.

Such a consultative process would produce leaders who are freely elected by the people, and would lead to success and unity in a win-win process for all, as all parties would be winners when the people are free to nominate their representatives, and the people's deputies would be free to elect the upper House and the country's political leader. In such a fair and transparent system, no feelings of injustice would be felt by people, and all members of society will be working to achieve the same objective: the well-being of their society, country and *Ummah*.

Shura is indeed much broader and more sophisticated than democracy. In today's context, it could be achieved through a decentralized political process where people directly nominate their representatives as independent candidates, starting from the level of local elections all the way up to the highest level of national parliamentary elections. If it is considered beneficial for the nation to institutionalize this process through political parties, that would also be feasible.

The Future of *Shura*

The Rightly-Guided Caliphs were elected as successors to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who was chosen by Allah (SWT). In order to return a *khilafa* similar to the Rightly-Guided *khilafa* today, we need to do the reverse process, start from the foundation and go upwards, following the main law for change in society described in the Qur'an in *Surat Al-Ra'd*, (chapter 13), where Allah states that He does not change the conditions of a people until they change what is in themselves.

The pre-requisites needed for success are freedom of opinion, freedom of people to select their representatives, elimination of all forms of cheating, bullying and pressure in order for people to be free in choosing the best candidates, in a new spirit of searching for the best public interest, not personal interests. It is a Muslim's fundamental right, as well as his responsibility, to participate in as many aspects of the community's life as possible, and to be proactive to improve conditions in his community and country.

To optimize the benefit of such participation, *Shura* training is needed for effective team-work in all collective matters at all levels, starting from the family and school levels for children, and clubs and university levels for the youth, and companies, associations and institutions for professionals and employees, and finally political parties, local councils and parliament at the highest political level.

The wide spread of such *Shura* training will eventually lead to the creation of a culture of *Shura* among Muslims which is essential for success in implementing *Shura*-based systems where real freedom prevails, which lead to the emergence of the most qualified leaders who benefit from the best ideas of people to implement the optimum alternatives for society that lead to the best public decisions.

Without a culture of binding *Shura*, dictatorships will continue for many more decades and socio-economic stagnation will prevail in Muslim countries, as little progress can be achieved for a true revival of the Muslim nation and its civilization without real freedom and *Shura*. Time to get started, and binding *Shura* is the right way forward.