

Why Islam? Because Islam works. Last week we spoke about the importance of Consultative Decision Making – Shura, which is a practice advocated by Allahﷻ Himself and practiced by Rasoolullahﷺ throughout his blessed life.

Allahﷻ considered Shura so important that He revealed Qur'an about it.

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا  
رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

*Shura 42: 38 And those who answer the Call of their Rabb [accept Islam], and establish As-Salat, and who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation, and who spend of what We have bestowed on them.*

I always marvel at how Allahﷻ mentions elements of conduct along with Ibaadah: Salah and Zakat. This shows us that Islam is not merely a set of prayer rituals but a complete way of life in which everything we say or do has the potential to benefit us in this life and earn rewards for us in the Aakhira. Allahﷻ defined us by how we conduct our affairs. He listed the characteristics of the Believers and said that they are:

1. Those who answer His Call i.e., accept Islam
2. Establish Salah
3. Conduct their affairs by mutual consultation (Shura Baynahum)
4. Spend from what Allahﷻ has given them

This shows us how important Shura is and how blessed because it is something that Allahﷻ ordered and called it a characteristic of Muslims.

Today I want to teach you how it is done and two important tools to ensure that it happens effectively. Let me state again that the primary purpose of Shura is two-fold: To keep hearts together and strengthen team cohesiveness and to ensure that the best possible decision is taken, leveraging the diversity of competence and experience on the team. I want to reiterate that Shura is not about the leader and whether he is capable or not. It is not about his or anyone else's ego. It is about ensuring that at the end of the process, everyone feels included, respected, and acknowledged. Here is how it goes:

**Who should be a member of the Shura?** This is the fundamental question and perhaps the most important. Just getting a group of people together and calling them 'Shura' is ridiculous. The Shura must have people with the skills and experience necessary to deliberate on the matter at hand. Selecting members for the Shura is therefore the first and most important matter to decide on. Enthusiasm is not a substitute for competence. People get appointed based on rank, age, gender, or willingness. All are unsuitable criteria for appointment to the Shura. Competence and experience are the only two criteria that you should consider. Incompetent people will ensure that the Shura fails and with that will fail your trust in the entire process. NGO's most commonly have Shuras which fail because most people in their management bodies are elected because of popularity, not competence. Wise

leaders coopt people with the skills and experience into the Shura to help take good decisions. Get experts and listen to them.

**Selecting the Leader:** The Shura must have a leader. This can be the formal head of the team, family, or organization. Or it can be someone selected to lead that particular Shura meeting. This may happen in a case where the selected person is the one who is most concerned with the outcome, as in the case of helping someone choose a career or spouse. Or in the case of a decision relating to a subdivision of an organization where that decision is to be implemented. The Leader is usually called 'Ameer' or 'Faisal'.

**Leader's Attitude:** Be open to suggestions and ideas, especially those that may be different from your own. Never enter a Shura with your mind already made up. That is suicide and it will destroy the trust that the others have in you. People can make out that you are not really interested in anyone's opinions and that your mind is already made up and they will not participate when you ask for ideas, because they know that you are wasting their time.

**Leader: Action:** State the goal clearly and concisely in not more than one simple sentence of 4-5 words. If you cannot express the goal in this way, it means that you are not clear about the goal yourself. Spend time on this to ensure that you are clear about the goal and can express it concisely and powerfully. Then describe the situation, challenges, strengths, and

weaknesses that must be dealt with to succeed in achieving the goal. Speak openly and frankly. If you are secretive and do not share all the information you have, you cannot get good suggestions. And when people discover later that you had not shared your knowledge frankly, it will destroy their trust in you and damage your standing, authority, and relationship with them. Remember the GIGO Principle – Garbage in, Garbage out.

**Leader: Seek suggestions:** Once you have stated the goal and shared all relevant information about challenges, constraints, resources, and strengths, ask people for suggestions. It is a good idea to ask everyone, but you do not have to, if you are pressed for time. When I must choose, I always choose not to ask those who I trust the most and with whom I have the closest relationship. Most leaders that I have spoken to, told me that they do the same. Not being asked for an opinion is often a sign of high trust. Be sure to ask those who are likely to have critical information and those who have the potential to cause discord later, if not asked. People with nuisance value must be dealt with. If you don't include them in the discussion, they can create a lot of noise in the system which can disrupt smooth functioning.

**Followers:**

1. If your opinion is sought, please give it. Don't say, "Whatever you say!" or something of that nature.

2. Say what you know to be in the best interest of the group and best for the achievement of the goal. Not something that you like or find convenient. Think about the goal and the group. Not about yourself.
3. When you finish, make Istighfaar and ask Allahﷻ to forgive you and save you from the evil of what you suggested because Allahﷻ knows and you do not know. This saves us from pride and in case our opinion is not taken, it saves us from feeling disappointed or resentful.
4. If your opinion is not sought, thank Allahﷻ for saving you from having said something which may not have been beneficial.
5. Do not insist on speaking. Make dua saying, “Ya Allahﷻ, if there is Khair (benefit) in what I want to say, allow me to say it.” If Allahﷻ wants, He will put it in the heart of the Ameer to ask you.
6. The only exception is if you have information (data, not opinion) which is critical to the issue. Then speak up and share that data.
7. Don't sit silently with critical data and allow a bad decision to be made on the excuse that you were not asked. The Leader is not a mind reader. He does not know that you have important information. And if you do not share it and things go wrong, you will be responsible before Allahﷻ. Collective responsibility is about owning your own accountability.

### **Back to the Leader:**

Consider all the suggestions and information and decide. Then make Istighfaar and ask Allahﷻ for His help. Pray Istikhara for the help of Allahﷻ

and have Tawakkul on Allahﷻ. Do not change a decision unless some critical information comes up that you did not have at the time of making Shura.

Decisiveness is a leadership quality and a hallmark of a good leader.

Allahﷻ advised Rasoolullahﷺ about key qualities of the Ameer. They are a combination of softness, forbearance, patience, and strong decisiveness. This shows that kindness and forgiveness are not signs of weakness, but strength and emotional maturity, so critical for strong leadership. Allahﷻ said:

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

*A'al Imraan 3: 159* And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you. So, pass over (their faults), and ask (Allah's) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).

Allahﷻ called the kindness of Rasoolullahﷺ, a blessing from Himself for His Beloved Messengerﷺ and emphasized its importance in team building. He advised Rasoolullahﷺ to be patient, especially with those who may exceed the boundaries of propriety, to forgive them and seek Allahﷻ's forgiveness for them and to consult his Companions while taking decisions (Shawirhum

fil-Amr). Having done that, Allahﷻ ordered Rasoolullahﷺ to decide and stay firm on his decision, placing his trust in Allahﷻ alone. This is such a beautiful, and concise description of Shura and the role of the Ameer that I want to emphasize it for us all and remind us to remember this Ayah when we are conducting our own affairs.

**Finally, and most importantly:** Whatever be the decision, the entire Shura must support the Ameer's decision, irrespective of whether their opinion had been sought or considered or not. This is the key, the make-or-break point for all decisions. Any decision is only as good as its implementation and that will not happen without the whole-hearted support of all concerned. The worst thing is for people to participate in a Shura and then speak against the decision of the Ameer on the excuse that their opinion had not been sought or accepted. Trust Allahﷻ and His Guidance for the Ameer in his decision making which happens when decisions are taken using the method that Allahﷻ ordered us to use i.e., Shura. This is the Islamic way of consultative decision making.

Now for the two tools that I promised to teach you. The first one is to remain goal focused. This is especially important if there are divergent opinions, and the discussion tends to get contentious. Draw the attention of people back to the goal. Remind them that the meeting is not about proving who is the smartest but about solving the problem using everyone's smartness. It is not about me versus you but me plus you plus you versus the problem. Success

is only when the problem is solved. Not when you have made your point, no matter how wisely or powerfully. Keep the focus on the goal at all times.

The second tool is called Active Listening. This is not only an excellent thing to practice in Shura meetings but a powerful conflict resolution tool. I have used Active Listening in management union meetings with militant communist unions and in arbitrations that I presided over with tremendous results. Active Listening forces people to seriously consider the perspective of the other party leading to an amicable and quick resolution of the issue.

For today, let me suffice to simply mention this communication tool to you. I will speak about it in detail next week.

Shura is so critically important because it is the adhesive that keeps the Ummah together. It is the means of learning to keep our focus on what is good for everyone, and it saves us from destructive selfishness. Shura keeps families together, it facilitates working through difficult decisions and results in healthy collaboration and teamwork. As in all things Islamic, we do it to please Allahﷻ and in obedience to Him. But the method is beneficial to anyone who wants to practice it, whether he is a Muslim or not. The best form of Da'awa is to show the world that Islam works for everyone.