

## Spiritual Dimensions of Leadership

**Respected Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Nations, Esteemed Professors and Honorable Governors and Friends:**

We live in difficult times and the world is seeking answers to the rising tensions and conflicts proliferating all over the world. How can we best address these conflicts requires not only knowledge of the situation, experience in resolving conflicts but also spiritual leadership.

During the Middle Ages a British knight returned to the castle one evening after a long, hard day of battle. He had led a band of knights whose armor was dented, their helmets were crooked, and their feather plumes were broken off. Their horses were limping and the knights were so exhausted that they were falling to one side of their saddles. The king saw them coming and went to greet them.

“You look terrible. What has befallen you?” He asked the leader.

The leader of the knight straightened himself and said, “Sire, we have been battling on your behalf all day, fighting hand to hand combat defeating other knights, and burning down the town of your enemies to the West.”

“You’ve been doing what?” asked the astonished king. The knight repeated his statement louder and slower to make sure the king heard it.

“But I don’t have any enemies in the West.” cried the king.

“Oh, said the knight, and after a thoughtful pause, “Well, I think you do now”.

To be an effective leader requires not only knowing *how to* do something but what to do and why. We must know whether it is the right thing to do. And for that spiritual leadership and moral guidance is required. From my perspective leadership requires two aspects a) first we should know our true self and become true human being and second b) serving others.

In order to be an effective leader it requires we have knowledge of our true self. True and effective leadership comes when we understand our connection to the Higher Power call it by any name you like, God Allah, Jehovah, that created sustains and guides all creation. I would like to take a moment here and see some of valuable lessons from the life and sayings of Prophet Mohammad and what real Islam is about.

In one of the most famous of Hadith the Prophet says, “He who knows himself will know his Lord.” What does this mean in practical terms; It means we spend time developing the inner characteristics, behaviors, and habits of mind and heart of a true human being. This means we are willing to confront the hard realities of our own existence and answer the basic question of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going.

Let us look at the life of Prophet Mohammad. We know even before he began receiving the revelations from the angel Gabriel he would regularly go to the cave at mount Hira to meditate to spend time with Allah. In time he became highly respected for his trusty worthy nature and ability to resolve conflicts. He became known as *Al Amin* or the trusted one. His word was gold and his integrity unquestioned. What he thought, he said and what he said he did. He was a man of integrity who was without hypocrisy and

pretense an integrated and true human being. This is the first and essential quality of a true leader. This quality of integrity is conspicuous by its absence in today's leadership. We have to ask ourselves why no one trusts politicians anymore.

My own spiritual teachers Sant Kirpal Singh Sant Darshan Singh and Sant Rajinder Singh have all said why is it people these days not follow their leaders. Because they see their lives do not match their rhetoric. They say one thing and do another. They preach one thing from the pulpit but live in a different way. They have not entered their own hearts engaged in self analysis and connected themselves to the spiritual power within themselves. They are in short still under the dictates of what in Sufism is called the *nafs* or animal ego. This is what the Prophet called the *soul which commands to evil*. The characteristics of such a person are lust for power, insatiable greed, pride, uncontrolled ego. Overcoming these tendencies in ourselves is the first real step in true leadership and Prophet Mohammad called it the *Jihad al Akbar* or the greater struggle. Truly speaking how can we root out the injustice in the outer world if we have not rooted out the injustice within our own selves? First let us take out the mote in our own eye and then we can see the speck in the others eyes. Example is better than precept. "True leadership is a product of deep and ongoing self analysis and knowledge of the higher Reality."

A second characteristic of true leadership and one that is sorely lacking in today's world is forgiveness born out of compassion. One example from the life of Prophet Mohammad is worth noting here. After years of struggle and final victory the Prophet returned to Mecca victorious. According to Bedouin culture and tradition the victor had the right to kill all the remaining males and sell the women and children into slavery. He did neither. Instead he granted amnesty to all those who had sought his own destruction and even attempted to murder him. We have to ask ourselves who leaders are ready to do that today? He understood that the first step to peace is forgiveness. We can not break the cycle of violence through repeated acts of violence. In the end violence only breeds more violence. The **Qur'an** exhorts us,

*Forgive those who wrong you;  
Join those who cut you off;  
Do good to those who do evil to you.*

Another Hadith of the prophet makes clear how far we should go in forgiving others, "O son of Adam, so long as you call upon me and ask of me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam were your sins to reach the clouds of the sky and were you then to ask forgiveness of Me I would forgive you."

We often do not read our scriptures with an open mind. Instead we use our scripture to promote our own political or religious agenda.

Becoming a true leader is about becoming a true human being. Leadership is arises out of our deep spiritual growth and service to others. The role of a leader and servant cannot be separated. It is by serving others that we earn the right to lead them. We may act as leaders, but we must be servants to lead meaningfully. How is this possible? Those who are spiritually aware see the same power enlivening all creation. They see all as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Prophet Mohammad like all spiritual teachers saw that reality in himself and in others. If we can bring these two great qualities into our leadership today

we will see the world change. First integrity born out lived truth. And second forgiveness leading to true service to others. He was a servant first.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share some thoughts on this important topic today. I would like to congratulate the organizers for their thoughtful program and wish it continued success in its endeavors. Blessings and peace upon all of us. In the words of a great Sufi Poet and Spiritual Master Sant Darshan Singh;

*Life is not a dagger stained with the Blood of Hatred  
It is a branch filled with the flowers of love and compassion*