

## Chapter 9: Consultation In Islam

No doubt, through consulting with others many personal and social problems can be resolved. The combination of two thought patterns acts like the coming together of two wires of different charges which gives light to the environment.

Since consultation has a significant effect in resolving problems, the Holy Quran orders the Prophet (S) to consult with others in finding solutions:

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

***“And make counsel with them in the affair; so when you have decided, then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust”<sup>1</sup>***

In another verse, God describes the religious and faithful people in the following manner:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ﴾

***“And those who respond to their Lord, keep up prayer, who consult among themselves, and who give out (to the poor) part of what we have given them”<sup>2</sup>***

Thus, both wisdom and narrations combine to indicate the sensitive position and the significance of consultation. It is better for Muslims to make use of this great Islamic command which is the very basis of prosperity and social improvement.

The Prophet used to advise people to have consultation. He himself made use of it frequently. In the Holy War of Badr, prior to his confrontation with the enemy, he consulted with his followers:

“Tell me your views concerning the combat with Quraish. Shall we advance? Shall we confront the enemy? Or shall we return back?”

The leaders of the Muhajirin (Immigrants) and the Ansar (the Prophet's close followers) presented two differing views; but the Prophet accepted that of the Ansar<sup>3</sup>.

In the Holy War of Badr the elders believed, that they must stay in Medina in order to defend the strongholds, by throwing arrows and stones from the strongholds and rooftops of their houses. But the youth preferred confronting the enemy outside the city. The Prophet adopted the second view<sup>4</sup>.

In the Holy War of Khandaq (ditch) the Prophet convened a military council and accepted Salman's proposal of digging a ditch around the vulnerable areas of Medina and carried out his suggestion. <sup>5</sup>

In the Holy War of Taef, the Prophet, in accordance with suggestions by some of the military officers, changed the location of their headquarters <sup>6</sup>.

In the consultation sessions, it is common to express differing views. Each person tries to defend his own ideas and to condemn those of others. There must be a strong manager present who could gather all views and adopt the best view, or else such sessions would be fruitless.

Incidentally, in the first verse which was revealed onto the Prophet on the issue of consultation, God says:

﴿ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ﴾

***“As soon as you have decided, rely on Allah”.***

The purpose of such an address is for the Prophet to realize that after consultation the only authority who should decide is the Prophet who must then, in turn, rely on God.

The leader of a group, on whose instructions the consultation session convened, would accept or decline the views of a third party, which were better than his view. An example of such an act was the decision by the Prophet adopted in the peace treaty of Hudaibiyyah. He opposed the general view of his close followers and convened a peace treaty between Muslims and Quraysh, who were idolaters. And time proved that such a treaty was in the best interest of the Muslims <sup>7</sup>.

However, consultation in Islam differs completely from that carried out in democratic states, in which the ratification of laws must be carried out by the Senate or the House of Representatives. The president is the administrator who should put the laws, passed by these two legislative bodies, into force. Here in Islam the Prophet has to follow neither the majority nor the minority. It is up to the Prophet to arrive at the final decision of whether or not his decision is in harmony with the majority. Then, according to the Holy Quran, the Prophet has to rely on Allah.

It is the same issue with the second verse.

“And consultation is one of the most distinguished characteristics of a religious community.”

This would indicate that the reasoning of some Sunnite scholars, who use these verses to justify the election of the caliph through consultation, as invalid. This is because the above mentioned verses are applicable only in those communities, where the issue of leader election has been solved. Communities where such consultation sessions were convened to solve other problems that Muslims were facing. This is especially true regarding the first verse which was addressed to the Prophet who, as the leader of the Muslims, was to decide and carry out his decision.

Besides, referring to the general consensus is only applicable in those cases where the tasks of the Muslims have not been explained to them. Under such conditions, Muslims can become aware of their tasks. In those cases where their tasks have been put down, there is no need for consultation.

For this very reason when al-Habbab ibn al-Mundhir came to meet the Prophet to get permission to change the location of the army headquarters, he told the Prophet

“إن كان عن أمر سلمنا و إن كان عن الرأي فالتأخر عن حصنهم”

“If concerning this there is a special divine command we have nothing to say but if it is among the issues, where consultation is required, we think it better to change the location of the military headquarters.” [8](#)

The issue of Imam Ali (as)’s successorship after the Prophet, has been frequently confirmed by different narrations. The Prophet, on different occasions, such as Yaum-al-Dar, Ghadir Khum and even on his deathbed, has referred to Imam Ali as his successor. Therefore, why should the issue of the prophet's successor be solved by consultation?

Is this decision making not against the Holy Quran or offering views against God's decisive verdicts?

The Holy Quran refers to this incident in a verse: when Zayd, the Prophet's stepson divorced his wife (Zaynab), the Prophet married her due to God's command. This was an important issue for Muslims because at the time of Ignorance a step-son was considered a true son: marriage with the wife of one's son, or step-son, was an abominable act.

They expected the Prophet to follow their views while the Prophet had done so to break the wrong tradition of the age of Ignorance. Thus, referring to the general consensus is irrelevant when God's command is involved.

Hence, in the following verse, the Holy Quran severely condemns those who interfere with God's commands in appointing certain tasks for people:

﴿ مَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا ﴾

***“And it beholds, not a believing man nor a believing woman, that they should have any choice when Allah and his Apostle have decided a matter: and whoever disobeys Allah and his Apostle, he surely strays off a manifest straying”<sup>9</sup>***

- [1](#) . Quran 3: 159.
- [2](#) . Quran 42:38.
- [3](#) . Sirah Ibn Hisham, vol 1, p. 615; Maghazi Waqedi, p. 48.
- [4](#) . Sirah Ibn Hisham, vol. 2, p. 63. Maghazi Waqedi, vol. 1.
- [5](#) . Tarikh Kamil, vol. 2.
- [6](#) . Maghazi Waqedi, vol. 3.
- [7](#) . Sirah Ibn Hisham, vol. 1, p. 615.
- [8](#) . Maghazi Waqedi, vol. 3, p. 925.
- [9](#) . Quran 33:36.

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