

SUMMER IMMERSION

PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP



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SESSION 3

Dealing with Difficulties

- A foundational principle of Islam is that Allah tests His prophets and their followers. This concept is explicitly detailed in the Qur'an and is evident throughout the lives of all the prophets.

- Allah said:

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried? (29:2)

- In his scholarly works on the Seerah, Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi emphasizes that trials are designed to strip away negative traits while cultivating essential virtues. This concept is known as Tasfiyatun Nufus (The purification of the self).
- Trials act to remove:
 - Arrogance (Al-Kibr)
 - Showing off (Ar-Riya)
 - Love of the world (Hubb ad-Dunya)
 - Love for power/status (Hubb al-Jah)
 - Trust upon people
- Trials act to cultivate:
 - Sincerity (Al-Ikhlas)
 - Patience (As-Sabr)
 - Humility (At-Tawadu')

- Trust upon Allah (At-Tawakkul)
- Honesty (As-Sidq)
- Significant accomplishments are built through trials. Through adversity, Allah purifies the soul and fosters absolute sincerity.
 - Both the Prophet (ﷺ) and his early followers were subjected to trials, which ultimately served to strengthen and purify their devotion.
 - The first fifty years of Islam saw unity. However, as leadership transitioned to hereditary succession under figures like Yazid ibn Muawiyah, subsequent generations faced division.
 - This instability is often blamed on a decline in the community's core sincerity, especially when compared to the earliest Muslims who survived severe boycotts, poverty, torture, and exile.
 - Trials expose insincerity. While comfort makes everyone appear dedicated, true sincerity is revealed only during hardship.
 - The truly sincere Companions remained steadfast and loyal to the Prophet (ﷺ) and his mission despite hardship during the Makkan period.
- Through every hardship, Allah was shaping the Prophet (ﷺ) for a greater purpose.
 - Difficulties were not meant to break the Prophet (ﷺ), but to purify and prepare his heart for the heavy responsibility of his mission.
 - Despite hardship, the Companions remained steadfast with the Prophet (ﷺ) throughout his mission, recognizing their ultimate goal of Paradise.
 - The Companions understood the true value of their sacrifices, and it was through these very hardships that great leaders emerged among them (e.g. Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman etc.).

- Leadership in the path of Allah requires a five-step personal development process:
 - 1. Purification
 - 2. Preparation
 - 3. Exposure
 - 4. Responsibility
 - 5. Empowerment
- Trials and hardships serve to cleanse and strengthen the faith of true believers.
 - Allah tells us:

وَلِيُمَحِّصَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَيَمْحَقَ الْكُفْرِينَ

And that Allah may purify the believers [through trials] and destroy the disbelievers. (3:141)

- Allah has outlined His plan to make the oppressed ones leaders ultimately replacing tyranny with justice.
 - He said:

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ

And We wanted to confer favor upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors (28:5)

Offers From Quraysh

- The Prophet (ﷺ) endured trials from the very inception of his mission. To persuade him to abandon his cause, the Quraysh tempted him with wealth, leadership, status and influence, all of which he firmly rejected.
- This example teaches leaders that core values are non-negotiable, and that as we achieve greater success, our principles will inevitably be tested.
- True leaders know how to adapt their strategies when circumstances shift while fiercely protecting their non-negotiables.

- For Muslims, our ultimate non-negotiables are fixed. A believer's absolute non-negotiables are defined by Allah, not by any worldly leader.
- This serves as a reminder that success can be a leader's greatest temptation, and many have fallen because of it.
 - For example, when we align with those who hold different values opposing to Islam, it puts our core values and faith at risk.
- Leadership begins to erode the moment principles are compromised. True leadership requires unwavering integrity, even in the smallest daily choices and regardless of the person or situation.
 - While many will try to derail our path and disrupt our mission to spread Islam, we must always remember that our ultimate purpose is to please Allah. The greatest misstep is compromising that purpose.

Developing People

- Beyond the revelation itself, the greatest marvel of the Prophet's mission was his exceptional ability to develop people.
- As a leader, he transformed everyday individuals into visionary Companions, an achievement that highlights his extraordinary capacity for human development and character building.
- Despite his initial hostility before Islam, the Prophet (ﷺ) saw profound potential in Umar ibn al-Khattab, who went on to become one of history's greatest leaders.
 - This exemplifies the "law of the mirror"— the ability to recognize someone's underlying greatness even when they are on the wrong path.

- During the early days of Islam when Umar was a fierce opponent of Islam, people remarked, "He will not become a Muslim until the donkey of Al-Khattab (Umar's father) becomes a Muslim!" However, through the Prophet's prayers and guidance, Umar's character was completely shaped and transformed into one of Islam's greatest leaders.
- In Arabic, this is known as Sina'at al-Rijal (Character building), and it should start in infancy. For example, as a mother nurses her baby, she should believe that she is nurturing a future leader of the Ummah.
- The great historian Ibn Khaldun noted that, in his view, no individual in human history achieved such a profound transformation of mankind in such a remarkably short timeframe as Muhammad (ﷺ).
- Through the Prophet's training, the Companions evolved from persecuted followers in Makkah into visionary leaders, scholars, and commanders who spread justice and mercy across the globe.
- According to Ibn Al-Qayyim, the Prophet's methodology for tarbiyah (development) represents the pinnacle of leadership and character refinement. Through the purification of hearts and the correction of morals, he transformed ordinary shepherds into capable leaders of state and government.
 - Example: The story of Umar (RA) as a Caliph
 - One day, while passing through a specific area, the Umar stopped, wept, and recalled his past as a shepherd. Overcome with emotion, he reportedly reflected on how he used to carry wood and tend sheep in that exact spot for his harsh father, Al-Khattab. Reflecting on his journey from grazing animals in the desert to becoming the leader of a vast empire, he expressed profound gratitude and awe at the grace of Allah.

- The Prophet (ﷺ) beautifully molded his Companions into resilient leaders.
 - Allah mentioned:

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves. (48:29)

- The hallmark of great leadership is the ability to build a good team. The Prophet (ﷺ) didn't merely handpick his Companions; he nurtured and shaped them into a unified force. Everyone became a vital part of the mission.
- Great leaders are defined not by their power, but by their ability to empower those around them. The Prophet (ﷺ) perfectly modeled this.
 - For example, he recognized the immense potential of youth, placing unwavering trust in Mus'ab ibn Umair by making him the first ambassador of Islam in Madinah. He later sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to Yemen and entrusted Ali (RA) with the standard of Uhud — all in their twenties.
- The Prophet (ﷺ) took ordinary individuals and shaped them into extraordinary people through tarbiyah, equipping them with iman, knowledge, and responsibility.
 - The first step to leadership growth is to learn to listen and reflect critically on oneself. Continuous growth and refinement are at the very essence of tarbiyah.
 - Tarbiyah (تربية) means to train. It originates from the root ر ب و , which conveys the concept of growth.
 - Demonstrating His immense love, Allah personally trained the Prophet (ﷺ) Himself.

■ Allah said:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ
He is the One Who raised for the illiterate 'people' a messenger from among themselves—reciting to them His revelations, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom (62:2)

- The Prophet (ﷺ) built his empire through genuine conviction, not by simply gathering people as followers. Today, however, we live in a transactional world where followers and influence are often just bought and sold.
- Many leaders focus on completing projects, great leaders focus on developing people. The Prophet (ﷺ) exemplified this principle by empowering his Companions — cultivating a generation of righteous, capable, and trustworthy individuals who became visionary leaders in their own right.
 - Example: Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah
 - When Umar (RA) asked to share what his companions desired to fill a room with, they wished for rooms full of gold and jewels to spend in the cause of Allah. Umar replied that he instead wished for a house filled with men like Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah.
 - Abu Ubaydah was renowned for his absolute integrity, humility, and unwavering dedication in the cause of Allah. Umar (RA) understood that having visionary and pious companions were the true catalysts for establishing justice and building a thriving society.
 - Example: Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas
 - He went from a teenager facing intense emotional trials when his mother starved herself to renounce Islam, to one of Islam's greatest military generals. He commanded the decisive Battle of Qadisiyyah, ultimately conquering the Persian Empire and expanding the faith across Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia.

- Today, the Ummah often falls short in cultivating core leadership virtues like patience, humility, and our connection with Allah. To be an effective leader, we must master our own personal development before we can guide anyone else.
- True leadership is measured by how many lives you positively influence. Ultimately, the capacity to lead is inherent in all of us.
 - Allah tells us:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ

You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. (3:110)

- Our highest calling is to nurture ourselves and the next generation. We do not seek to take the spotlight, but simply to serve the greater cause of the Prophet's legacy.
 - Out of over 100,000 prophets, only 25 are mentioned in the Qur'an. Out of thousands of Companions, only 10,000 are recorded in history.
 - This teaches us that great leaders do not work for glory. They strive to erase their own presence so that the cause outlasts them.
 - As long as the mission lives on and the cause remains, our names need not be remembered.