

Management and Islamic Mysticism

What distinguishes Islamic mysticism from other non-Islamic alternatives?

The distinguishing feature of Islamic mysticism is that its aim is not to remove the matter and materials from the world and human vista. Being is being, and whatever which has reality exists. In fact, Islamic mysticism interprets these realities.

Bluntly speaking, Islamic mysticism regards the material world and corporal things as a wave of the invisible world. It makes them transparent and uncovers and sees through the noumenal world behind them. Islam accepts all human instincts, be it natural or animal, but by means of harnessing them, Islam seeks to demonstrate the magnitude of the spirit and its dominion over the instincts that brings the latter into the service of human personality. Islam does not deny the existence of sexual instincts or the instinct of selfishness, which is in fact the most demanding instinct! Islam accepts the existence of these instincts; however, it adjusts the instinct of selfishness to the preservation of evolutionary nature. Thus, the human individual beholds the whole world with one nature, i.e. the conscious self which is opened to existence. This is the characteristic mark of Islamic mysticism. I discussed this issue with Professor Charles Adams from McGill University on the differences of Islamic mysticism and Hinduism.

It is said that Spinoza was once reproached, "With your pantheistic philosophy, you have degraded God and made Him become one with nature." "No, I have not degraded the Lord", he retorted, "in fact, I have upgraded this nature and revealed its concealed value and meaning."

I don't know whether this story is true or not. Anyway, we have a similar discourse in Islamic mysticism according to which whenever man is deemed to be of an evolutionary nature, it reveals the value and magnificence of matter. To put it otherwise, let us quote from Rumi, who has said:

Truly, it was you who brought together the two ends of two rings of existence.

Tell me who you are, and I will tell you what the matter and the materials mean to you. An evolved human individual considers the universe as an observatory for beholding infinity and its effusion. But if man is contented with his "natural self", he will not touch the transcendent realm of individuality and will slope into self-alienation and self-brutalization like animals, or maybe even more despicable than animals, for if a man becomes self-alienated, he would brutalize himself as he devours others when he finds them strange.

This point has not been sufficiently observed in the mystical schools that we find in

some other societies from old times. This is why we frequently come across the idea that this world is a huge pantheon when studying the literature and culture of Islamic mysticism. This is even a perspective through which one can behold infinity, as Victor Hugo says:

If one succeeds to behold infinity, one can also expose oneself to it.

This is the idea that underlies Islamic mysticism both in theory and practice.

What is an ideal management?

If you mean by ideal management the absorption of all available interests through adopting a utilitarian policy, that is not acceptable for us, although it is the best form of management in the eyes of modern technocrats. An ideal management, whether in a small business or in a large firm, or even at a larger scale involving a country, is a management that is more faithful to human principles and considers the human beings as not unconscious cogs or iron bolts and nuts of machines. Thus, the more managers are informed of lofty human emotions, sentiments, activities and phenomena, the more ideal and successful their management will be. To state the matter differently, as management cares about the wages of the workers and the employers or protects the rights of citizens, in the same way it must seriously observe their human rights. We should not separate people's ordinary rights of material life from the rights of their souls. Today we are unfortunately witness to catastrophic competition among managements for the impetuous utilization of their staffs to fulfill their managerial policies and intentions without considering the fact that the staff is not consisted of iron nuts but in fact humans!

This will remain an incurable pain if we do not adopt more humane policies for management, as beautifully depicted by Imam Ali (PBUH) in the following words:

You are responsible for anyone who is ruled by you.

It doesn't matter if you are ruling one man or billions of people; in any event, you are responsible before those whom you rule. Sadly, today we hear that economists argue that "the satisfaction of personnel is enough" without paying any attention to the value of their work and workers' life, which is gradually worn out. To put it in a nutshell, the best form of management is that which satisfies its human staff.

Of course, this is a temporary treatment and calmativie, for as long as the true rights of the staff have not been fulfilled, their satisfaction will be confined to shallow affairs as everyone naturally seeks to feed his family. Man is forced by a necessity if not compelled. With a cursory look, we will find that most of the staff is forced by the decisions that have been taken by their managers.

Thus, Islam insists that the value of work of every human individual must be recognized regardless of the individual's position, be it permanent or temporary:

Therefore, give full measure and weight and do not diminish to men their things. (The Heights 7:85)

That is to say, everyone deserves to have his own due position in the society. This management needs to be realized one day in human societies; otherwise, more anxieties, fears and dark horizons will inflict humanity.

Having said these, we can now turn to the question of what an form of ideal management is. I think the more humane the motive and aim of management is, the more sublime the management will also be and the deeper the intended motive gets, the more influential and penetrating the management will prove to be among the staff. This motivational evolution proceeds up to the threshold of heavens. In other words, the managers or directorate see their staff and the scientific and practical means of management are in fact the manifestations of divine providence. Of course, I know that this is almost a far-fetched goal for humanity, but there is no other way as intelligible as this when it comes to ideal management.

A Fundamental Inquiry of the Role of Motivation in Managerial Activities in the Islamic Society and a Criticism of the Contemporary Motivational Theory

It is needless to argue that all human activities, be it talking, doing or thinking or even refusing to do something in despite of the existence of the prerequisites of that thing, are always preceded by their appropriate motives.

This necessary and self-evident principle is expressed in an abridged form as follows:

Every conscious human activity requires a serious appetite for obtaining a goal that motivates man.

The constitutive elements of this principle can be explained as follows:

- 1- The health of mental factors and natural instincts as well as the balance of external conditions, as the first factor in the preparation of the required grounds for a correct motivation play an influential role in human activities, particularly in managerial affairs. This is why one can say that those individuals who lack this condition cannot be prosperous in managerial affairs.
- 2- A conscious and free action (i.e., voluntary action) requires an understanding of the purported goal and the acceptance of its motivation as a result of which the serious will for the fulfillment of the intended goal is then created. It should be taken into consideration that when the organization under management is composed of human individuals, the manager has to be of a conscious and liberal character. The lack of these two vital items, i.e. consciousness and liberty, results in traumatic depressions in the manager, which will also derange management.
- 3- The intensity and weakness of one's will for the fulfillment of the intended goal is a function of the intensity and weakness of the motivation of that goal.
- 4- After understanding the goal and its respective motivational drive and the emergence of serious will for the fulfillment of the intended goal, the work (behavior), whether in regard to intellectual or manual form, begins to proceed, through which one can touch the intended goal.
- 5- The fulfillment of goal with which work is finished.

The Essential Task of Leaders of Moslem Societies

The essential task of leaders of Moslem societies is to inform their people of the Ultimate Telos of Life – in general – as well as its underlying motives so that they may always make their choices with consciousness and freedom in any given social condition.

The Ultimate Telos of human life consists of participation in the general cosmic movement toward Supreme Perfection via "a conscious journey into life". Every stage of this journey is heightened with the enthusiasm for the next stage due to its motivational goal. This journey is directed by human character; a character which has an eternally Supreme Perfection as its Ultimate Telos. It is in light of this Supreme Perfection that matter and meaning become united and reflect one another.

The most significant feature of a purpose-built life, which is the key to human happiness, is that regardless of the situation in which someone lives, if he is asked about the quality of his life considering the gifts and possibilities he has had access to in past and present, his answer should be, "Regarding the physical and mental gifts and pure reason and conscience with which I have been equipped, I find myself in the best possible situation insofar as if my death arrives at this very moment, I will receive it warmly, as I believe that there is an eternity where people shall be asked of their words, acts, thoughts and intentions." To put it otherwise, every happy human being has an eternal compass inside that shows him the direction in the ocean of existence.

Management in Islam has two basic conditions. Before turning to these two conditions, we will need to fathom the significance and value of management in Islam. To accomplish the latter task, we have to know that a competent manager should spot the existing gifts, ideals and possibilities in the staff and mobilize them in a harmonic fashion for the fulfillment of one or a number of goals; in other word, a manager should be a wise and conscientious man.

The Fundamental Conditions of Management

The First Condition: Having in view the ideal man as depicted in Islamic sources, we come to the conclusion that a manager who is in charge of a group of people is indeed like a sane and mature individual who manages the organs of his. This is the best possible relationship that can be imagined between the manager and the staff. It is through such a relationship that the staff can devote themselves to the objectives drawn by their manager with a free conscience.

Thus, when the people in the staff consider themselves as members of the same whole, they shall easily understand the underlying motives of the directions given by their leader. This is the only way to overcome the machinistic worldview that has changed human individuals into unconscious cogs and nuts of a machine.

Any other type of managerial relationship than this will reduce management to a purposeless and deterministic process. Moreover, we need to know that although neither one of the human organs has any independent character for itself, an

organization's staff have their own individual identity independent of those ones which the organization has given them and the management should cultivate them.

By true observation of this condition, the incumbent manager or directorate will also find life sweet and happy if they change their place with the crew.

The Second Condition: This condition pertains to the acquisition of fresh knowledge and information regarding management. As the bonds between societies, nations and masses grow larger, the vital significance of this condition becomes more evident, for these bonds which connect societies to each other require the principles and issues of management to be continuously revised and relocated in an open system. On the other hand, even if we assume that the machinistic order of life in modern societies forces the management principles and issue to be stipulated in a closed system, these societies are still inflicted with some incalculable natural factors and events that require to be managed in an open system.

Management and Its Domains of Activity

Management usually covers five areas or domains of activity:

1. Planning
2. Organization
3. Control and supervision
4. The creation and promotion of motives
5. Assessing the aforementioned four items

Management in the Islamic Society

According to human conscience, common sense and authentic Islamic sources, mankind is of an inherent dignity and honor that demonstrates his status and value. In other words, man is a type of animal who has been honored by a transcendent creator. All revealed religions and primordial schools of anthropology are unanimous on this inherent dignity of man. Man can promote this potential dignity into the desired honor and dignity –i.e. volitional perfection – through devoting himself to the quest of acquired dignity. The following holy verse of the Quran demonstrates human inherent dignity:

And surely we have honored the children of Adam, and we carry them in the land and the sea, and we have given them of the good things, and we have made them excel by an appropriate excellence over most of those whom we have created.

(The Night journey 17:70)

Thus, one can truly say that the most significant task of a manager in an Islamic society is the recognition of the fact that those individuals who work under his management have two material and spiritual aspects, both of which must be equally appreciated by him. However, since the Ultimate Telos of human life is exposing oneself to the radiations of divine unveiling, man needs to pay even more attention to the spiritual aspect.

This task has its origin in the fact that all human individuals share the same ultimate telos of life, i.e. participation in the cosmic movement toward Supreme Perfection, and no one has any preponderance to the other in this regard. To put it otherwise, there is no difference whatsoever between a manager and his employees in benefiting from an "intelligible life", as it is not so that a manager should enjoy a more interpretable life which ends in happiness while an ordinary member of the organization is to be reduced to an "intelligent gorilla" by such thinkers as Taylor! Isn't this an unwarranted insult to human dignity and honor?! Could one ever conceive a harsher humiliation of humanity than this?! This motivation (the equal right of the manager and his staff to have a decent life which requires the spiritual aspect of employees to be taken into an earnest consideration) is the most important factor that distinguishes Islamic management from other alternatives.

Having said these, one can argue that wherever this vital task concerning the spiritual aspect of human existence has not been fulfilled correctly, for "some-ones" have always been metamorphosed into "some-things". More disastrous and shameful than this humiliation is the fact that this regressive movement has been christened as civilization and its originators have been called the "heroes of intellectual evolution"!

Although the managers have found it highly embarrassing to apply "things" to "ones," they have not refused to use such expressions as "intelligent gorilla". I wish they would use "things" as it stands outside the domain of values and vices.

It is only by the fulfillment of this vital task that management can remove the shameful stigma of Machiavellianism from its face. In other words, it is merely through the observation of this task that management can deliver itself from the bondages of oppressive exploitation as it is only the belief in the value of people's souls and behaving according to this belief that can protect them from falling prey to the selfish whims of Leviathans. This vital task has been seriously highlighted by Imam Ali (PBUH) in his historical letter to Malek Ashtar:

*Acquaint your heart with love, mercy and sympathy for people and do not behave toward them like a bloody predator who tries to devour them, for people are of two groups: they are either your brothers of the same religion or your brothers of the same origin.*¹

The leader of a society must grasp the necessity of bearing in his heart love, mercy and sympathy for the people who are under his leadership in the same way that he presentially grasps the necessity of defending himself before occurring threats. Imam Ali (PBUH) has related the story of Mu'awyah's invasion on the Al-Anbar province in the following words:

It has been reported to me that some soldiers of the enemy have attacked women and plundered their jewels while they begged the invaders to spare

1- Nahjulbalaghah, Letter 53.

*them. After doing these, the troops of the enemy have returned to their camps with many trophies without having even a scratch on their cheeks. If a Moslem man dies after hearing this story, he would never be blamed for his death, but such a death for a Moslem man due to that event is worthy in my view.*¹

This worthy death requires an existential sense of belonging to a society which has poor and oppressed people. To promote such a lofty sense in the members of society, the leader himself needs to have that sense in the fullest fashion. It is in this spirit that Imam Ali (PBUH) has written to his representative in Basra, Othman Ibn Hanif:

*Should I suffice as myself to state that this is the Prince of Believers and not to be beside them in the hardships of time?*²

The Criterion of the Necessity and the Value of Motives

The most basic motivation, according to Islam, i.e. common sense and pure conscience, is that which stems from the most basic needs. Then the more basic and vital something is, the more basic and vital its respective motivation will also be.

The basic needs of humanity, all of which become manifested in the phenomenon of "self-preservation", can be classified under the following three categories:

- 1- Natural Self-preservation involves needs for food, housing, hygiene, reproduction and the defense of one's life before intruding factors.
- 2- Mental Self-preservation pertains to needs for mental peace, the logical regulation of subjective and objective factors, the preservation of unity and harmony among the constitutive elements of personality and protecting it against disorders which can threaten its health, like multiple personality, dissociative identity disorder and so on and so forth.
- 3- Evolutionary Self-preservation: This category contains the most significant needs of humanity which have been highlighted and addressed by revealed religions, ethicists, legal schools and constructive and pioneering rules, as means of human intellectual evolution.

This brings us to a necessary principle which is of a fundamental significance in management despite its simplicity. Mankind requires a sound management in the process of self-preservation in all of the three aforementioned aspects. Of course, this management becomes harder when the targeted aspect entails complicated situations and settings. For example, the management of housing affairs in a village or a small town is much easier than that in a large city, as educational management in underpopulated areas is far simpler than areas with heavy populations. Accordingly, managers must be appointed based on their capabilities and experiences as the management of complicated situations requires enough information of the elementary

1- Ibid: Sermon 27.

2- Ibid: Sermon 47.

and secondary motives of the manager if the intended plans and decisions are to be realized in a logical fashion.

Different Types of Motivation in Management

The following taxonomy seems to contain almost all of the motives that are involved in management:

1- Objective Motivations, like environmental and social factors, which have in turn various types, for instance:

- I) The compulsion of blind forces. This type of management has indeed no natural motivation, but the only motive of a manager in this stage is the preservation of the natural self before destructive factors. It is needless to say that compulsion lies outside the domain of values.
- II) In a motivationally higher stage than the previous stage, management is motivated by the sustaining factors of natural life such as housing, food, clothing, hygiene, and the like. Although these factors are not as much compulsory as the need for the defence of one's life, since they are the necessary requirements of natural life, one can say that this motivation is based on semi-compulsory factors, scientifically speaking.

2- Subjective Motivations: This type of motivation is divided into various kinds:

I) Regarding oneself as being superior to others; this in turn can have two kinds:

- * This is a realistic estimation of oneself in the sense that one's sense of manual or intellectual superiority is rooted in one's individual merits. The activities of a human being with such a sense of superiority can be driven with value-laden motives if he undertakes these activities with the sense of duty; otherwise, man's actions should be understood as spontaneous effects of natural necessities.
- * This egocentric estimation of oneself does not match the realities on the ground. There is no complaint of this man if his wrong estimation of himself does not damage the reality. However, he would be sued if found guilty of a wrongdoing.

II) The motivation driven by egotism and ostentation, which is against values.

3- Utility-driven Motivation: The manager's decisions and actions are based on his personal interests. This motivation and the previous one are two main motivations of management in the contemporary Western world.

4- Personal Fondness of Management: Most of the people who have a temperate mental state show a particular enthusiasm for some special vocations like piloting, industrial affairs, scientific works, army, judgment and so on and so forth. This enthusiasm is so deeply rooted in human existence that Rumi says:

*As it is pleasant for us to live an urban life
It is also pleasant for others to have a tribal life,*

*As you love to be a master,
Whereas your fellow man prefers to be a blacksmith.
Everyone has been made for a vocation,
And its love has been put into their heart.¹*

Now we have to see where these enthusiasms have their roots in. To answer this question, one needs to resort to psychology and other branches of human sciences. Of course, we may not find the ultimate answer, but we can shed some light on it by our researches.

- 5- Having professional knowledge and experience in management is itself one of the significant factors of one's enthusiasm for managerial activities. In other words, someone's profession in one particular field of knowledge as such shows that he has had a driving enthusiasm for the field that helped him obtain the highest degree in it. The difference between the fourth motivation and the present one lies in the fact that in the previous motivation, it is personal fondness that leads to profession while according to the present motivation it is profession and activity that gradually leads to enthusiasm.
- 6- The sense of responsibility resulted from transcendent human commitment: This motivation and the next one certainly lie within the domain of values. Those who act under the motivation of this transcendent sense of responsibility, which has its roots in human inherent dignity, tread the path of perfection. This is the very authentic and valuable motivation that has been occulted under an insufficient notion of morality like many other nobilities and necessities of human evolutionary nature.² In other words, since the outbreak of the fatal disease of "morality, evolution and values in general must be kept out of the scientific life of human individuals", the machine-plagued minds escape from morality and spiritual evolution, without which personality is nothing, as a prey escapes from the predator! To put the matter in a nutshell, the sublime moral motivation, which is more valuable than the shallow and transitory pleasant phenomena, is the very motivation which can lead a society to civilization, happiness and true freedoms.
- 7- The sense of divine obligation: This is indeed the noblest motivation that one can imagine for management. There is no sign of utilitarianism or deterministic factors of

1- Rumi's *Masnavi*, Book 3.

2- If you ask a knowledgeable man to list the three basic causes of debacle of human evolutionary nature, one of them will be certainly the occultation of morality due to the blind scientism and egotisms instead of logical promotion of knowledge, which is one of the necessary pillars of human life. To put it otherwise, with the modern compartmentalization of knowledge by blind votaries of science, all fundamental ethical realities like the necessity of truth-seeking, using power as a means for social reformation and justice, the recognition of sacred phenomenon of human life and so on and so forth, have been occulted.

society and environment in this motivation. It is neither infected with egotism or ostentation nor is it driven by gratification of personal fondness or profession. This is the very motivation that has incited the divine prophets and saints to reform human societies and individual lives.

The primary effect of this motivation is that the manager regards his staffs as organs of his own existence.¹

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1- This relationship has been already discussed in the first condition of management.