

## **LEADERSHIP IN ISLAMIC LAW: AN OVERVIEW OF THOUGHTS AND IDEALS OF SHAYKH ABUBAKAR AHMAD ARABI JOS**

**Adam Yusuf Adam**

*Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arabic & Islamic Studies,  
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria*  
[adam.yusuf@udusok.edu.ng](mailto:adam.yusuf@udusok.edu.ng)

**ABSTRACT:** *Leadership in Islam is a trust that whoever is bestowed with it must act as Allah's vicegerent on the face of the earth. It is a task that implies caring for the welfare of the led, doing what is best for them and guiding them on what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Thus, this paper used analytical approach in examining the concept and Shari'ah perspective of leadership. It surveys the principles leadership. It also studies the thoughts of Shaykh Ahmad Arabi, one of the contemporary legists of northern Nigeria, his life ideas as an exemplary Muslim leader, and philosophy about the objectives of a good leadership. The paper uncovers that Islam as a complete way of life, considers leadership as a foundation upon which all essence of life is built upon. It is a security that checks the provision and realization of the Shari'ah objectives, called Maqasid al-Shari'ah. It also discovers that the two cardinals of Shari'ah, known as Jalb al-Naf' (bringing benefits) and daf' al-darar (preventing harm) depends on the existence of effective leadership. Therefore, concludes that the necessity for leadership in every human society is as that of life itself.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Trust, Vicegerency, Accountability, Shaykh Arabi's Thoughts*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*One distinct feature of Islam that always distinguishes it with other ways of life is that it is complete, total and comprehensive. It is a system independent of any culture, tradition or civilization. It is a divine principle revealed by the Creator to guide man throughout his tenure on this transient earth. Its principles are all-encompassing consisting all aspects of human life, religious, social, economic and political. It, thus, commands that all its laws must be followed, and whoever refuses or rejects it, and in any of its aspects, is considered an infidel. This makes leadership equally importance as observance of any act of religious rite. Hence, Islamic texts (Nusus) are replete with commands for selecting leaders at any given point and time, and outlined principles that each leadership must conform with. The purpose behind this is to help in the realization that Allah (SWT) has created human beings out of His Mercy to eat, enjoy and benefit from His infinite bounties. This is apparently possible when there is an effective leadership.*

*However, the twenty-first century is a complex epoch in the human history. Human civilizations brought systems that are too numerous to determine. In leadership, there abound various system and styles through which man meant to govern himself and his fellow countrymen. But such systems often failed in their objectives as they detached*

*themselves away from divine guidance. Islamic system of leadership, which is seen as archaic and obsolete, stood the test of time, and proves its efficient. It is a style of leadership with a defined purpose and objectives. It is an institution through which Islam breaths its essence. Its philosophy is not more than that of protecting the rights of individuals, their lives and properties. It is, above all, the justification for Islam as system and civilization.*

*It is, therefore, against this background that this paper seeks to study the concept of leadership in Islam and its salient features. It used analytical method in examining principles that constitutes leadership in Shari'ah perspective. The paper also traces of the practical interpretations of those principles in the thoughts of Shaykh Ahmad Arabi. Consequently, the paper identifies and underpins the ethos of leadership exhibited by Shaykh Arabi as his core values that characterized him as an ideals social as well as religious leader.*

### **Meaning and Basis of Leadership in Islam**

*Etymologically, leadership in Arabic language is associated with words such as al-khilafah, al-Imamah, al-Wali, al-Riyasah and al-Imarah among others. Of all the above, al-Imarah can go directly with leadership. The word comes shares the same root with the verb A-ma-ra, from which the term Amir, which signifies a person which commands or has power to command, is derived. According to Ibn Mandhur, al-Imarah generally contains the function of leadership and authority to give command.<sup>1</sup>*

*However, Al-Qur'an, as the main source of Islamic law (Shari'ah), is the basis of Islamic concept of leadership. It considers it as an integral part of its teachings where is used several words for that purpose. In one particular verse, the Almighty Allah says:*

*God is the Protector of those who have faith; from the depths of darkness. He will lead them into the light. Of those, who reject faith, the patrons are the Evil ones...  
(Qur'an 2:227)*

*The word al-Wali used in the verse bears the meaning of helper and protector, but it actually signifies the function of someone who guide, that is a leader. This is because it is the function of a leader to defend and give help to those under his custody. This shows that leadership is the ability to develop or communicate a vision to a group of persons to make that vision true. Leadership is, therefore, a process of influencing the activities of an individual and groups in efforts towards a desired goal. To support this assertion, the Almighty Allah says:*

*And We made them leaders, guiding by Our command; and We inspired them to do good work, and to observe the prayer, and to give out charity. They were devoted servants to Us. (Qur'an 21:73)*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan al-Arab*, Dar al-Sadir, Beirut, nd, p. 95.

*In Hadith, the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said:*

*All of you are shepherds, and each of you will be asked concerning his flock.*

*By the above-quotations, leadership is a paramount institution needed in every human society. A society without leaders would lose its direction and purpose. Thus, Islam laid down the basics principles of leadership that include: personal submission to Allah, implementation of Shari'ah, Consultation (Shura), Knowledge, Justice and Free from mental and physical deformity among others. It could be noted that the above requisites are given as the minimum requirements for a good leadership, there are further explanations among various Muslim jurists on the extent of the need of these conditions in each leadership depending on the depth of its responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> To this importance, Shaykh Ahmad Arabi had during his life time exhibited the most exemplary leadership that Islam has commanded. Thus, the subsequent segments of this paper explore his thoughts and ideal on Islamic system of leadership.*

### **The Life and Times of Shaykh Ahmad Arabi: 1909 -1975**

*Shaykh Ahmad Abubakar Al-Arabi, popularly known as Ahmad Arabi Jos was of Fulani descendant from Nafada town of the present Gombe state. He was born in Nafada in 1909 to the family of Alkali Abubakar Sambo, the then Alkalin Dukku. His father was a learned and well-respected scholar of his time. Been the first child of Alkali Abubakar, Shaykh Arabi had, together with his younger brother Malam Abubakar El-Nafaty, received their early education under their father. While continuing his Islamic education, Shaykh Arabi was enrolled in the Elementary School, Dukku where he obtained his Leaving School Certificate.<sup>3</sup> Shaykh Arabi, like most scholars in the northern part of the country, started his education with learning the Qur'an and other branches of Islamic knowledge right from his hometown in Nafada. The outstanding efforts he exhibited in learning from his childhood had encouraged him to pursue more knowledge. It was that zeal that prompted him to leave Nafada to Jos, which at the time was at its thriving moment of becoming an epicenter of Islamic learning due to its strategic location and its role as Zango, situated by the road that witnessed the massive movement of scholars mostly from Kanem Bornu, Bauchi to Nasarawa and other parts of the Middle belt and beyond.<sup>4</sup> Having acquired in-depth knowledge in Arabic language and literature, Islamic jurisprudence, theology and logic, Qur'anic Exegeses, and Islamic history, he started teaching students independently. After his appointment as an Arabic teacher at Jos Elementary School by the Jos Native Authority, Shaykh Arabi sought permission to further his education and immediately left to Kano for School for Arabic Studies (S.A.S). While studying in Kano, his teachers observed that he was, indeed, an exceptional student and thus recommended him for teaching in the*

---

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qalami, Abu Abdullah, *Tahzib al-Riyasah wa Tartiybu al-Siyasah*, Dar a-al-Nashr, Ardan, nd, pp. 6 -7.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad, Musa Salihu, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts of Shaykh Ahmad Arabi*, Jos, Arewa House, centre for Historical Research and Documentation, Ahmadu Bello, University, Kaduna, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Garah Nengel, "Movements of Peoples in Pengana District from Earliest Times to 1960", in Elizabeth, Isichie (ed.), *Studies in the History of Plateau State, Nigeria*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1982, pp. 69 – 72.

school at the time of his graduation. After spending some time teaching in Kano, the Jos Native Authority called him back in 1950 to continue with his teaching job and was requested to teach Islamic Religious knowledge (IRK) along the Arabic subject that he was initially teaching.<sup>5</sup> While Shaykh Arabi was working with the Native Authority, he observed that the society he lived in was in dire need of Islamic education for proper practice of the religion. For that, he revived the initial school he started in 1947 before leaving to Kano. The school was like other existing Qur'anic schools in the region, but he was able to bring into it new structure to rhyme with the emerging system in most parts of the then Muslim world. In the school, students, mostly elderly and other scholars of the town, would gather for studies through reading various classical books in the fields of Arabic grammar, Literature, Jurisprudence and Tafsir with some in-depth discussions on meanings and their implications on the public and private life of a Muslim. He also had sessions for Tafsir mostly in weekends and during the months of Ramadan. It is confirmed that Shaykh Arabi maintained these educational routines throughout his life to the time of his death.<sup>6</sup>

### **Shaykh Arabi's Literary Writing on Islam and Islamic System of Leadership**

Shaykh Arabi was an erudite scholar and a prolific writer during his lifetime. He authored many works in the fields of Arabic and Islamic studies and wrote in Hausa, Fulfulde and Arabic languages. Shaykh Arabi was also the second among the most prominent scholars of Northern Nigeria that used Hausa and Fulfulde Ajami in their writings. Though the exact number of such literary works were not yet determined but one can identify from what was so far collected that such treatises deal with various aspects of the Islamic religion from theology, law, jurisprudence, leadership and politics to economics among others. These include: *Kitab Sahl al-Ma'khaz li al-Nafada fi Sharh al-Akhḍari*, *Fulfulde Poetry (Shi'ir)*, *Labarin Annabawa (The Story of the Prophets)*, and *Arkān al-Hajj* among others.

### **Shaykh Arabi's Thoughts on Islamic System of Leadership**

Shaykh Arabi has the following as his thoughts and ideas on Islamic system of leadership:

#### **a. Qur'an as a Fundamental Source of Good Leadership**

Shaykh Arabi asserts that there is only one type of leadership given to human beings, that which the Qur'an established and described as 'the most just'. He described it as a system devoid of corruption, dishonesty and injustice, and any other system outside this cannot be called leadership. The author believes that Al-Qur'an is the only perfect book that designs for human beings what is right and beneficial to their life. Thus, anything that emanated from it can be described as perfect, and by way of example its system of leadership. For that, he praised the Almighty for sending the Prophet ﷺ with the best of His

---

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts of Shaykh Ahmad Arabi...*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Shaykh Abdul-Aziz Yusuf Abdullahi, Jos, (83 years), Secretary, Jama'atu Nasr al-Islam, Plateau State, Interviewed at his residence in Filin-Ball, Nasarawa area, Jos on 9/2/2021.

*Book that contains the perfect guidance. He, therefore, points that the Book (that is, the Qur'an) would be the point of reference to all that he discussed in the poem.*

**b. Principles and Responsibilities of Leadership in Islam**

*Shaykh Arabi believes that knowledge of the principles of leadership is a fundamental in good leadership. Thus, he calls people to acquire the knowledge of leadership and advised that only those with such knowledge are to be selected as leaders. This according to him can be possible when people learn about the Shari'ah. He posits that through Shari'ah, leaders would come to know their responsibilities, and the rights and duties of their subjects; and they too (the subjects) would come to know the necessity of obeying their leaders. And when people are taught about Shari'ah, ignorance will be eliminated, and each will come to know his/her rights, the rights of his leaders and the duties of his Lord upon him.*

*Shaykh Arabi dwells further on the qualities that every leader should possess. And as regards to public wealth, he emphasizes that a leader must be trustworthy. Thus, he calls that people who seek leadership should avoid being self-aggrandizing and exploiting people and their wealth. For whoever violates the trust entrusted in him, hellfire would certainly be his final abode. Thus, he says:*

*Whoever is given power, let him do justice, and whoever does the opposite, his destiny is hell.*

**c. Protection of Human Rights**

*Another ideal of Shaykh Arabi of leadership is the protection for human rights. He, therefore, stresses the necessity of protecting the rights of subjects by leaders. It states that the texts (that is, the Nuṣuṣ) of Islamic law have categorically commanded leaders to preserve and protect the rights of the Muslims, and any leader who fails to uphold this responsibility will not be admitted into al-Jannatu al-Firdaus (Paradise). The reason, according to Shaykh Arabi, why hellfire will be their end, is because the Nuṣuṣ (Islamic texts) were explicit about human rights and the way they should be protected by whoever is appointed as a leader. Thus, he points that the implementation of the rules of Islamic law is the effective way of protecting and preserving human rights. Nonetheless, Shaykh Arabi listed some of the human actions that often lead to violation of rights that includes greed, selfishness, wickedness, dishonesty and the actions of an unjust judges among others. On this, he says:*

*Greed and selfish ambitions are the roots of all evil. Violation of others rights is the root of all evil. Anyone who behaves in this manner shall surely be doomed. Leaders should take notice of violators, mischiefs and fraudulent people who do not care about tomorrow. They should also pay attention to judges who violate human rights, especially in countries with a large Muslim population that have a long history of the protection of human rights.*

**d. Justice (al- 'Adl)**

*Shaykh Arabi also expresses that the fundamental thing that constitutes the Islamic system of leadership is fighting injustice (zulm) and dispensing justice ('adl). This is by fighting human lust and self-centeredness, which according to him are the factors leading to injustice. Where a leader fails to fight injustice, there would be malice and civil unrest among people that would lead to a series of lawsuits. Thus, he warns that people who were identified as self-centered are not to be selected to lead people. He warns that any leader who infringes peoples' rights is without doubt be admitted into hell fire in the Day of Judgment. For this, he opines that it becomes a necessity that only those who are found just and trustworthy are to be trusted at the helm of affairs of the Muslims at whatever levels, including their homes.*

**e. Dissemination of knowledge**

*Another major ingredient of good leadership in Islam is dissemination of knowledge among citizens. The aim, according to him, is to portray it as one of the solemn duties of a leader. This is by making it accessible to every section of society, including women in their various homes. Therein, Shaykh Arabi suggests that the subjects to be taught must include those that would instill good moral behaviours, and eschew moral degradation among Muslims. In correcting societal ills, he points that recourse to what the Qur'an contained and adopting its method is the most effective model and means that a leader could employ for positive social reformation. He further shows that it is unacceptable in the sight of Allah ﷻ for a Muslim leader to fail in educating his people, and whoever fails in that is a monumental betrayal of the trust given to him by Allah ﷻ and would be held accountable for the gross act of injustice he committed.*

**f. Holding onto the Religious Rules**

*Still, Shaykh Arabi is of the view that holding on the religious laws is an important cardinal of good leadership in Islam. He, thus, admonished Muslims, both the leaders and the led, to hold tight to the religious rules wherever they are and at all times. He posits that whoever downplays the rules of the religion he/she would surely be among the losers of this world and would regret his/her actions in the hereafter. Meanwhile, he calls the attention of all the Muslims that religious rules are from Allah ﷻ, and for that, they should be careful of their earnings and live within their lawful means and avoid unlawful things. He also reminds human beings to be mindful of the fact that Allah ﷻ is watchful of their actions, whether in hidden or in an open space, for He is All-Knowing and All-Seer. By the above illustration, we would grasp the depth of Shaykh Arabi's thoughts and the wideness of his scope in the discourse of Islamic system of leadership. The beauty in that is that such thoughts are not far away from what was enshrined in the Qur'an and exhibited by the Prophet ﷺ. Hence, it encourages Muslims to understand them in order to imbibe them as their leadership traits to enable them discharge their duties as required by the Almighty Allah.*

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Islam as a religion has been explicit and unequivocal about its philosophy, both in theory and practical life of Muslims. It came as a mercy to man in this world, and a way of salvation in the hereafter. It makes its principles known and emphasized that such principles are sacrosanct as its essence. It commands leadership and laid its values so that man can pursue it to determine his benefit and salvation. It is made a factor of progress and prosperity in every human society. This is realized by Shaykh Ahmad Arabi, a twentieth-century Nigerian scholar. Shaykh Arabi was, indeed, a social and religious leader who lived according to his ideals. He immensely contributed to the development of his immediate society in particular, and Nigeria at large. This had been in various aspects that included the religious, social, economic, political and educational life of his people. He had, indeed, lived up to the expectations as his leadership impacted lives of his people. Thus, this paper recommends that:*

- 1. Muslims should always hold on to Islamic guidance in all aspects of their life, leadership inclusive.*
- 2. Qur'an and Sunnah should always be a guiding principles of leadership system we operated at all level.*
- 3. Thoughts and personal ideas of our pious predecessors should always serve as model of our operations in this contemporary time.*
- 4. Shaykh Arabi's ideas of leadership could solve most of the social and political challenges Muslims are confronted with.*
- 5. Islamic system of leadership and its principles are the safest and guaranteed way of success and prosperity in the modern times.*

## **REFERENCES**

- Adam, A. Y., & Aminu, M. Y. (2023). A SURVEY OF THE ORIGIN AND PRACTICE OF THE ISLAMIC ARBITRATION SYSTEM IN NORTHERN NIGERIA. Tahdzib Al-Akhlaq: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 6(1), 2-2.*
- Al-Qalami, Abu Abdullah, (Nd), Tahzib al-Riyasah wa Tartiybu al-Siyasah. Ardan: Dar al-Nashr.*
- Choli, I. (2023). THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN INCREASING STUDENTS'RELIGIOUS AWARENESS. Al-Risalah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam, 14(2), 3-3.*
- Faqihuddin, A. (2021). Building Character in Islamic Education Perspective. Al-Risalah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam, 12(2), 372-382.*
- Hadi, A., & Uyuni, B. (2021). The Critical Concept of Normal Personality in Islam. Al-Risalah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam, 12(1), 1-19.*
- Hamid, A., & Uyuni, B. (2023). Human Needs for Dakwah (The Existence of KODI as the Capital's Da'wah Organization). TSAQAFAH, 19(1), 1-26.*

## THE FACES OF ISLAM

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BKMT and AS-SYAFIYAH ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

Jakarta 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023

- Hayati, N., & Kohari, K. (2021). *THE DA'WAH CHALLENGE OF THE PROPHETS IN THE SURAT AL-ANBIYA'*. *Spektra: Jurnal ilmu-ilmu sosial*, 3(2), 1-25.
- Ibn Mandhur, (nd), *Lisan al-Arab*. Beirut: Dar al-Sadir.
- Ismail, A. I., & Uyuni, B. (2020). *The new perspective of interfaith dialogue as da'wah approach in global era*. *Journal of Xidian University*, 14(3), 1540-1552.
- John, Garah Nengel, (1982), "Movements of Peoples in Pengana District from Earliest Times to 1960", in Elizabeth, Isichie (ed.), *Studies in the History of Plateau State, Nigeria*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Muhammad, Musa Salihu (2008), *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts of Shaykh Ahmad Arabi, Jos. Kaduna: Arewa House, centre for Historical Research and Documentation, Ahmadu Bello, University*.
- Shaykh Abdul-Aziz Yusuf Abdullahi, Jos, (83 years), Secretary, Jama'atu Nasr al-Islam, Plateau State, Interviewed at his residence in Filin-Ball, Nasarawa area, Jos on 9/2/2021.
- Uyuni, B., & Muhibudin, M. (2020). *COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: The Medina Community as the Ideal Prototype of Community Development*. *Spektra: Jurnal ilmu-ilmu sosial*, 2(1), 10-31.
- Yani, A. (2021). *The Madinah Charter as A Culture and Civilization Concept*. *Spektra: Jurnal ilmu-ilmu sosial*, 3(1), 1-10.