

WHAT MAKES AYATULLAH SISTANI SUCH A GREAT LEADER?

Written by ramadan
Monday, 05 February 2018 09:06 -

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**Jumuah lecture on Friday 2 February 2018 (15 Jamadi-ul-Ula 1439) at the Ahlul Bait (a.s) Masjid, Ottery, Cape Town
Delivered by Sheikh Muhammad Hassun – visiting representative of Grand Ayatullah Syed Ali Sistani**

I convey choicest greetings and best wishes to all, from the centre of Islamic knowledge and the grand Ulama and spiritual authorities, especially from our Grand Marja Ayatullah Sistani (May Allah protect him).

There is a Hadith narrated from our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), where he is recorded as saying that “Ulama of my Ummah are better than Prophets of Bani Isra-eel”. This Hadith communicates something crucial, namely the status and position of Ulama (religious leaders) and their role in the leadership of this Ummah (Islamic nation).

THE GREAT RESPONSIBILITY BESTOWED UPON RELIGIOUS LEADERS

The position of Grand Marja as it is traditionally referred to ie. the spiritual authority, is a very crucial position. On the one hand it is a position of great authority to lead the Muslim nation, and

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on the other hand it comes with great challenges and dangers along with it.

Of course, we followers of Ahlul Bait (a.s) have the greatest of respect for all the spiritual authorities and Ulama. In the fiqh (jurisprudence) of Ahlul Bait (a.s), I may follow one particular Marja (religious authority) and you may be following another religious authority.

They are all respected given their great position, whether inside of the Islamic seminaries or outside. This applies equally to the great and grand Ulama who are the point of reference and authority for our Sunni brothers in the different parts of the world. They all enjoy the greatest respect and status in this Ummah (Muslim nation).

AYATULLAH SISTANI'S 3 DISTINGUISHING QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

Today we have the example of the leadership and supreme authority of Ayatullah Sistani in Najaf, Iraq. He enjoys amazing support and respect from the people across the spectrum. This extends beyond being an authority for Shia, to other schools of thought in Islam. It even extends beyond that, where he enjoys the greatest respect from non-Muslims as well. What is the secret in this charismatic leadership of Ayatullah Sistani?

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I would like to draw your attention to the major qualities of this great leader's personality, as there are important lessons for all of us from his leadership style, which makes him so revered by all. They are:

1. Extremely basic lifestyle
2. Respect the law of the land
3. Embrace all with open arms

1. AYATULLAH SISTANI'S EXTREMELY BASIC LIFESTYLE

The first quality of this great leader Ayatullah Sistani is his extremely basic and simple lifestyle. An authority who receives huge amounts of funds from across the world does not even own a house in Najaf! He lives in a very basic rented house, despite a huge budget being spent under him for Islamic propagation and development.

This approach is in line with the exemplary leadership of our master, Imam Ali ibn abi Talib (a.s), when he was asked the same question about his very basic lifestyle, despite have access to large sums of wealth in the public treasury. Imam Ali (a.s) said that he living a very basic lifestyle means that he can share in the pain of the people who have absolutely nothing.

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2. AYATULLAH SISTANI'S RESPECT FOR THE LAW

The second point to reflect on the lifestyle and character of Ayatullah Sistani is that he strongly believes in respecting the law of the society you live in. He firmly believes in being law-abiding citizens of a country, even if it is a non-Muslim country. The exception to this is where laws are oppressive or where laws are interfering with our religious values and our acts of worship, compelling us to act contrary to the principles of Islam. His principle point is that we should respect the law of the country we live in except when this red line is crossed.

An example is the stance Ayatullah Sistani took when the American forces occupied Iraq and wanted to impose their own written constitution on the people of Iraq. His one sentence filled with wisdom defeated this sinister attempt, when he announced that the constitution of the new Iraq will only be written by Iraqis. They had no choice other than to surrender to this very strong position taken by him.

Ayatullah Sistani is not a commander of an army, nor does he have weapons at his disposal, but could manage to take a firm stand against the occupiers, in a very peaceful manner, with full trust in Almighty Allah (SWT), and with the support of the people of Iraq. He was able to defeat all their devious conspiracies to control the resources of Iraq, in a very wise manner.

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Ayatullah Sistani does not expect others to first obey the law before applying it on himself. Quite the contrary – he applies the law upon himself first before he expects the same from others.

As you know Ayatullah Sistani is an Iranian citizen and carries an Iranian passport. He had to undergo health related treatment in London in 2004, and upon his return applied for an Iraqi visa, requesting permission to return to his adopted country.

The Iraqi Ambassador told Ayatullah Sistani that he is the Leader and Grand Authority of Iraq, so he surely can enter Iraq at anytime and does not require any permission. However, Ayatullah Sistani rebutted this assertion from the Iraqi Ambassador, saying that since he carries an Iranian passport he is required by law to apply for a visa and he is respecting that law of Iraq!

3. AYATULLAH SISTANI EMBRACES ALL WITH OPEN ARMS

The third point which Ayatullah Sistani practically proved is that he is not in the service of one particular sect or even any particular religion. He practically proved that he speaks in the interest of all the people of Iraq, regardless of religious persuasion or sect. He practically demonstrated that he considers their interests above all other interests. This is after all the false accusations and propaganda levelled against him.

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When ISIS occupied parts of Iraq, they did not occupy a single city which is populated by Shia. All the cities which they grabbed control of were Sunni populated. However, Ayatullah Sistani issued a fatwa (Islamic decree) of Jihad to protect the population of these Sunni populated cities, calling upon the Shia of Iraq to go and defend Sunnis under attack. This stance from him brought an amazing sense of unity to Iraq, transcending all religious boundaries.

Therefore, the Shia youth of Iraq immediately responded to this fatwa of Ayatullah Sistani to fight the enemy in ISIS, and liberate the people of these captive cities. These youth offered great sacrifices and were killed in the liberation of these areas, of which none are Shia populated! This has beautified Iraq with amazing brotherhood between Sunnis, Shia and other religious persuasions.

AYATULLAH SISTANI'S LEADERSHIP IS INSPIRED BY UNADULTERATED ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES

This is the message of Ayatullah Sistani. The position he took is inspired by the Quranic and Prophetic command that whoever has proclaimed Shahadah is a Muslim and therefore all his assets, dignity and integrity should be respected and protected. Every Muslim is responsible for defending another Muslim in all its efforts.

ISIS killed a large number of non-Muslims when they entered Mosul. Ayatullah Sistani also very openly and categorically called for the defence of all these people who were the target of ISIS

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criminals. Christians in Iraq who were the target of ISIS, as their houses and churches were burned down by these demonic savages. For Ayatullah Sistani, it is our responsibility to protect the oppressed people and their places of worship, irrespective of your religion. Everyone's blood should be safe and protected.

Furthermore, Ayatullah Sistani's position is also inspired from the teachings of Imam Ali (a.s), where he says that human beings are of 2 types – they are either your brothers in faith or your fellows in humanity. This is what gives us direction on how to interact and treat people of other faiths.

MESSAGE OF AYATULLAH SISTANI'S LEADERSHIP STYLE FOR OUR COUNTRY

The message is therefore very clear. Sunni or Shia is immaterial. We live in a country which is majority non-Muslim. Our struggle is to convey the beautiful image of Islam of love and compassion to others with our manners, etiquette and noble moral character.

We are ambassadors of Islam in this society. More than any ideological position and slogans, debates and speeches, our actions speak for our religion. We are ambassadors of Islam and our actions reveal what Islam is all about, more than anything else. Therefore, we have a great responsibility in this regard.

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Conversely, if a Muslim acts with bad moral character by being dishonest etc., it becomes incumbent upon us all to address the situation. It is not an individual action. It is a big responsibility and is a reflection of what Islam and our Ulama have taught us about how to live and interact with others.

In conclusion, immense congratulations on the great success of establishing this beautiful Masjid and academic centre, where Ibadah and education will flourish. Indeed, it is a great achievement in this part of the world.

A mosque is not only a place to prayer, but also, it is the centre of education, training and development. It is also a place of intellectual enrichment which this centre will serve as.

I would like to remind you about how grateful we should be to Almighty Allah (SWT) for providing us such a wonderful facility in this country, together with the numerous other mosques in this beautiful city of Cape Town.

There are brethren in other parts of the world who are not privileged to even have a small place of worship, facing all types of resistance to practice their faith without discrimination. We in South Africa live in a free country which allows us to practice our faith and foster Islamic empowerment freely. This is the gratitude we need to express to Almighty Allah (SWT).

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These insights from Sheikh Muhammad Hassun, representing the Grand Marja Ayatullah Sistani, is very clear about what Taqwa means for us, where we live in a society where we are surrounded by those who may not share in our religious beliefs, but we still have a responsibility towards them in the light of Taqwa ie. the fear and consciousness of Almighty Allah (SWT).

In conclusion, this is again a concerted appeal regarding the drastic water situation, as it is our Islamic duty to be extra cautious during these crisis times of water shortages.

We should remember that water is more sacred than it is scarce! This is what Islam teaches us and we must show our utmost respect to this favour of Almighty Allah (SWT).

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