

## **Key Leadership Insights and Lessons from Ancient Wisdom**

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### **Abstract**

*Here, in this article, the academician-practitioner author seeks to draw several key leadership insights and lessons from ancient wisdom including those selected from the Bible, the Talmud, the Koran or the Buddhist Sutras. The paper too attempts to examine what made leaders successful in terms of their qualities and traits. Leaders can really learn and apply the various wise tips and pointers from the ancient texts and move their organizations (nations) from good to great.*

**Key Words:** Leadership, Ancient wisdom, Buddhism, Buddhist values, Islamic Values; Koran (Q'uran); Bible; Talmud; resilience; learning.

### **Introduction**

All of us some times make the common error of viewing that the concept of leadership was invented in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by management gurus. Many classic works of literature and history express the issue of the meaning of leadership. After all, it has always been the leaders who have provided the most interesting subjects to poets and historians, and in the ancient world especially, there is a tendency to examine what made them successful or unsuccessful in terms of their qualities and inclinations (The Edge Leadership Group, 2014). Besides, prophets (such as Buddha, meaning “The Awakened One”, Jesus Christ, the Rabbis and Prophet Mohammad and others) are leaders of their people too, and we can see how they smartly lead their people. And from here, gain various insights and learn leadership lessons from them too.

### **Paper's Aims and Objectives**

Ancient wisdom is knowledge that has come down to us from the past. Note that there is indeed much wisdom and insights that can be derived from the ancient texts; it is by no means exhaustive. And the paper's aims and objectives here are thus to draw several key leadership insights and lessons, gaining from ancient wisdom from the selected few phrases or sentences from the biblical text, the Talmud (the Hebrew Bible), the Koran (Q'uran) or the Buddhist Sutras. In specific ways, the author will also attempt to analyze what made them (un)successful in terms of the qualities and tendencies of leaders. It is worthy to note that the author has cited *Happy* (by Lonely Planet, 2011) simply because all around the world, people find ways to making sense of their lives and little secrets (or values linked to ancient wisdom) to making leadership and life easier, better, more meaningful and/or enjoyable.

Ancient wisdom supplying the values can be argued as giving much to leadership and its strengths. First of all, it gives the leaders certain values and leaders must, in the first instance, always uphold a set of values or key beliefs. A case in point is the life of the late Indian freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi; his life was governed by values and key principles (Nair, 1997). [Leaders put down in words what they want and they know where they are going. “If you don't know where you're going, that's where you'll end up” (Lonely Planet, 2011: 11).] These priorities or values give and boost the spirit of the leaders, and to underscore this: in life, poverty of spirit is the worst form of poverty – nothing can help the person affected by such poverty. Here, I wish to relate this Buddhist story which I once came across but I cannot trace the source or its origin, and it goes like this:

A poor man asked the Buddha, “Why am I so poor?”  
The Buddha said, “You do not learn to give.”

So the poor man said, “If I’m not having anything?”  
Buddha said: “You have a few things,  
The Face, which can give a smile;  
Mouth: You can praise or comfort others;  
The Heart: It can open up to others;  
Eyes: Who can look the other with the eyes of goodness;  
Body: Which can be used to help others.  
So, actually we are not poor at all, poverty of spirit is the real poverty.

Second, since leaders uphold certain values and convictions, they work on them; these actions on values are indeed like providing the solid foundations as well as supplying the materials for building a magnificent castle. Values to this author, serves as a leader’s, to borrow Jones’s (1995: 19) words, “internal anchors”, seeking approval not from people but from the Higher Self, God or the Universe. Third, they too thus aid or assist in the leaders’ own ways of self-disciplining themselves. “All great leaders have understood that their number one responsibility was for their own discipline and personal growth.” (Maxwell, 1993: 161-162). Ray Croc once said, “The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves.” And this leads to the third pointer, that is, the values espoused become the leaders’ standards. Fourth, some values upheld make the leaders set the example and be role models (Low, 2013; Jones, 1995). And of significance, fifth, certain values espoused also embrace the fact people are paramount, and leaders exist for the people (“To those of your servants who please you give to eat what you eat yourself; and clothe them as yourself”; Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 111); they must truly serve the people and attend to their needs. Leaders feel for their people, very much as “Jesus personally felt other people’s pain” (Jones, 1995: 247), and here, there are compassion, understanding, love and empathy as well as service, separating true leaders from fake leaders or glory seekers.

To explain further, these are the leadership qualities and tendencies linked to ancient wisdom as well as the happiness of leaders and people that can make a leader successful; and they are as follows:

### **Making Full Use of the Present Life or Whatever Resources Are Presented to Us**

Being grateful, and counting their blessings (Lonely Planet, 2011: 33), leaders often take “the root less travelled”, “taking a long view rather than expecting instant gratification” (Lonely Planet, 2011: 31). “Lay not for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourself treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where the treasure is, there will your heart be (*values are*) also.” (Matthew, 6: 19-21, *italics author’s*).

It is worthy to note that a leader needs to know and understand the shortness or brevity of life, and one’s life is a droplet of water in the vast ocean, hence should appreciate long-termism and on that basis, work out a more strategic approach. And (s)he should also be able to apply a broad-stroke vision. After all, we make our marks on this earth; more so when we live but for a short while like a mist and it very soon disappears.

Next, another angle to look at is this: life is like a cloud. A cloud may be pleasingly lovely and beautiful or wretched and ugly. With clouds, we can expect future weather it will rain, overcast or be sunny. Clouds are here one instant and vanished the next; thus, they are soon forgotten. Our life is like a cloud. Some people have pleasant and beautiful lives in the after-life while other people have wretched lives which are blackened by selfishness and self-interests. As with clouds, one may look at one’s life and see what the future holds (James 1: 23-24) and do or carry out things particularly so, values one espouses as revered or valued. A person who is sowing to the flesh will reap (materialism and) corruption and a person sowing to the Spirit (sacrosanct values) will reap everlasting life (Galatians 6: 8, *author’s italics*).

Most people have the tendencies to put stop signs and think in the CAN’T mode; they really CAN’T or not able to grow or go beyond their potentials. It must be in an ALL-SYSTEMS GO to attain the heart of brilliance (Scheele, 2000).

When one exudes optimism and positive thinking, one will find it reflected right back at one. (Niven, 2000). And a happy, positive leader is one who is most likely to be approachable and well-liked by his or her people.

Indeed one truly needs to know and choose how one would live as after all, for Buddha and in Buddhism, one is what one thinks or we are what we think (Thinkexist.com, 2013; Toula-Breysse, 2001). The right thinking or perception is critical (Andersen, 2012; Lowenstein, 2005; Toula-Breysse, 2001).

“If your attitude is not right, then even if you are surrounded by good friends and the best facilities, you cannot be happy. This is why mental attitude is more important than external conditions”. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 185). The mind is everything. And all that one is arises with one’s thoughts; with one’s thoughts, one makes the world, the universe or one’s very own empire.

The above point on: “Making full use of the present life or whatever resources are presented to us” indeed leads us to the next important pointer – that is – the need to be...

### **Seeking Knowledge and Wisdom over Fame and Fortune**

Keep on climbing mountains. Never stop learning and adapting. (Niven, 2000). Any person especially a leader is never too old to learn new tricks, one just have to keep one’s mind stimulated. A commitment to lifelong learning helps one expand and grow (Lonely Planet, 2011: 39). While making the leader happy, learning also gives him or her opportunities to stumble upon new interests and opportunities, developing one’s new skills; improving the quality of work while expanding one’s disciplinary borders as well as uncovering one’s innate talents that one never even knew one had. Good leaders must have this overall quality of keen learning: learning, unlearning and relearning and indeed be flexible in learning, reinventing and growing him(her)self (Low, 2011). One becomes happy (the mass appeal) by learning; “you’re never too old to learn new tricks” (Lonely Planet, 2011: 39). And good leaders also develop and grow people; they know that their people need and want development and growth. (Maxwell, 1993).

The Talmud is one of the world’s great books of wisdom and the word, Talmud means “teaching” or “learning”; and that is what the Talmud is all about. Rightly so, it speaks of: “Who is wise? One who learns from all”. Jewish tradition holds that the Talmud is the ‘oral Torah’, or a verbal explanation of the laws that God gave to Moses (the “great lawmaker”) on Mount Sinai; and that Moses taught to others (Parry, 2004).

Like sand in the hour glass, all of us have to accept and celebrate the transience of life and appreciate knowledge and wisdom (Lonely Planet, 2011). In Buddhism, learning is valued, and “the wise man learns from everyone”; the fool learns from no one while the wise can learn from any quarter. (Takamori, 2012: 60). And this is reminiscence of the words spoken by Emerson (cited by Dale Carnegie, 1981: 31), that is, “Every man I meet is my superior in some way. In that, I learn of him.” And in the Bible, King Solomon was Ancient Israel’s third monarch. The history of King Solomon’s reign is found in the Old Testament of the Bible [in the Books of First Kings and Second Chronicles]. King Solomon was well-known as the wisest man of all time who attracted many important dignitaries to visit him.

Solomon asked for the wisdom to effectively lead the people of Israel, and God blessed the young king for his quest for wisdom and not fortune and fame and gave him all three (Ecoggins, 2014).

These days, many enter into business to make their fortune and perhaps be famous someday. The effective leader smartly knows that fortune and fame can only come through knowledge and skill and the wisdom to use them in relevant ways that propel their business forward (Ecoggins, 2014).

### **Learning by Way of Pain, Hatred or Any Adversities**

“To err is human” (Lonely Planet, 2011: 17) and one learns well from one’s mistakes. A person or a leader is happy when he picks him (her) self up, move on and get on with their lives (Lonely Planet, 2011: 45) and leading. Leaders overcome difficulties through pain, suffering or any other adversities. And these we learn from the ancient texts. “Although he (Jesus Christ) was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8). Great leadership is often built or shaped by the way of adversity; it serves as certain form of training and leadership skill-building. Interestingly, Haller (2009) cited several leaders who have such qualities including political leaders, chiefly, Winston Churchill, Jefferson Davis, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman, George Washington, and Woodrow Wilson and US military leaders, some larger than life US Generals such as George Patton and Douglas MacArthur.

“Never tell anyone it can’t be done. God may have been waiting for centuries for somebody ignorant enough of the impossible to do that very thing.” J. A. Holmes cited in Foster (2003: 93).

The Can't and setbacks can and are often translated into the CANs by effective or true leaders. In the Singapore context, this author is fascinated by a number of rags-to-riches business/ community leaders of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Lim Boon Keng, Tan Tock Seng and C. K. Tang. And leaders indeed also see difficulties or adversities as challenges to be overcome – and interestingly, even more so, by the gentle way (Ephesians 3: 1-2). Are there not more gentle ways such as patience, kindness, mercy and flexibility? And yet are there many more of other ways? And are these not really gaining and winning (win-win situations) by the way of soft power, serving as catalyst to change for the better.

Jesus was fond of saying, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” (Luke 6: 27-30, cited in Borg and Riegert, 2008: 20).

And in Buddhism, Borg and Riegert (2008: 20) remarkably cited a parallel: “Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by love; this is an eternal truth... Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good. Overcome the miser by giving, overcome the liar by truth”. (Dhammapada 1.5 and 17.3; note that the Dhammapada is a collection of sayings and aphorisms).

Adversity is a fact of life and it can be turned into an ally and an advantage (Forster, 2003). In the Chinese or more so, the Confucian context, in times of adversity, one should not surrender or give up; instead one diligently work to perfect one's life; (s)he should extend him(her)self to better serve society. (Ng, 2013).

Overall then, in essence, adversity brings benefits; problems and difficulties are “the price of progress. The obstacles of life are intended to make us better, not bitter.” (Mason, 2003: 93; also cited in Low 2012: 948; 2013a: 36). Like the mighty ocean, leaders are strong, bold and resilient as well as enduring (Low, 2013a).

### **Being Honest and of High Integrity**

Of great significance, leaders must be honest, sincere and stand tall. These days, however, in the post-Enron climate of business, all of us want leaders to raise the ethical bar – or if not up it, then at least read about (Pava, 2003) or be aware of it. Being honest and of high integrity is of critical importance; one approach to creating greater moral sensitivity in the business-corporate sector and the world is to have leadership lessons drawn from the sacred texts aka ancient wisdom. [Laurie Beth Jones, for example, wrote her leadership best-seller, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* using sacred texts from her tradition to communicate leadership lessons.]

In Islam, integrity is vital, and should be a part and parcel of not only the leadership qualities, but also that of any person. Prophet Mohammad (cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 114) urged that “No man is true in the truest sense of the word but he who is true in word, in deed, and in thought.”

And truly, “wealth, properly employed, is a blessing; and a man may lawfully endeavour to increase it by honest means.” (Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 110).

In the same vein, the Buddha (the founder of Buddhism, 563-483 B.C) once said, “Let the wise man do righteousness: A treasure that others cannot share, which no thief can steal; a treasure which does not pass away. (Khuddakapatha 89 cited in Borg and Riegert, 2008, 50-51).

A leader must thus be a man of high integrity (Owen, 2012). It is better to live truth instead of expressing or voicing it and one stands tall.

### **Being Contented and Having Peace of Mind**

“As water clings not to the lotus, so the tranquil clings not to the senses.” (Jara Sutta, cited in Allen, 2002: 93). And people are happy when they simply calm their thoughts, practice yoga or breathe steadily. (Lonely Planet, 2011: 67).

Leaders should have peace of mind, avoiding greed, envy and other distracting emotional troubles and anxieties. Greed, envy, anger; ignorance and arrogance, doubt and even wrong conceptions can be contained by the (Buddha) heart that is cool and calm. This is tantamount to Lao Tzu's (cited in Easwaran, 2005: 220) “use the light, come home to your true nature. Don't cause yourself injury: This is known as seizing the truth.”

Perhaps to borrow from Noel M. Tichy's book *The Leadership Engine*, he says that good leadership is very much like good parenting; both need the systematic investment of time (and what he calls "a teachable point of view" (HRFocus, Jan. 1998: 5). But what I would modify or add is that while one must have the *edge* to make the important yes-no decisions: the edge or the courage, one should also be composed and be detached from greed or other emotional troubles. Anger really fogs the mind; one should not be angry or get agitated when facing thorny or sensitive issues and a leader needs to be cool and calm. Decisions are often at the heart of leadership success, and at times there are critical moments when they can be difficult, perplexing, and nerve racking ["You will not be punished for your anger, you will be punished by your anger" said the Buddha (Thinkexist, 2013). Be aware that a person's anger spreads out in waves without end and know that anger is the enemy and patience is the foundation of long-lasting peace (Takamori, 2012).] And when one's mind is composed, having peace of mind (detachment or non-attachment), a leader can decide better.

Meditation, as in Buddhism, is seen as useful and helpful to allow one to having a peaceful and contented mind. All religions teach its adherents or devotees to pray and meditate for peace of mind. Here, Buddhism teaches its adherents to be mindful or aware, leading to greater tranquility:

1. One sits comfortably with one's upper body straight. Bring your neck into alignment with your back. Practice long breaths and observe how long breaths feel.
2. And then practice shorter breaths. Observe how these feel.
3. Now breathe in a smooth unhurried rhythm. Again observe how these feel.
4. Continue to breathe in a normal and unhurried rhythm and watch your breathing from its entry at your nose through its descent through your chest and to your rising and falling abdomen.
5. Focus on the moment of stillness between your breaths. Then observe the movement of your exhalation. Notice other thoughts that occur to you and let them go. Continue this exercise for 5 minutes or however long you feel comfortable. Stretch out this time as you get used to this meditation. (Lowenstein, 2005: 93).

Indeed "riches are (thus) not from abundance of worldly goods, but from a contented mind." (Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 110).

And through control of the mind, one becomes peace and contented; the Kingdom of God is within one (in Christianity), and there is "no wanting, no self" (in Buddhism; Lowenstein, 2005: 50). When a person or a leader has peace of mind, (s)he has clarity and being cool and calm, (s)he therefore knows where to go. (S)he then becomes a better leader. And like a compass or a radar, (s)he ably directs the people well.

### **Relating Well with the People**

One should not be exclusive; non-successful leaders or in fact, non-leaders are cut off from their people. They have no rapport or connections with their people; often, they cannot relate well with their people. It is truly worthy to note that people are indeed happy when they realize their inter-connectedness with others (Lonely Planet, 2011: 125), particularly so, with their leaders.

Leaders need to relate well, "appreciate the gifts of (the) family" (Lonely Planet, 2011: 117) and make the people (organizational members/ citizens) part of the family. Successful corporate cultures promote teamwork and they work as families. All the holy books indicated that the whole of humanity is of one union and unity and should thus be united. Successful leaders often realize – in spite of conflicts or disagreements – it is really the ties that bind. King Solomon, in his wisdom said, "Better are two than one, for if the one falls, the other will pick him up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9). And Mother Teresa (*italics, author's emphasis*) pointed out, "Do not wait for leaders. Do it alone, *person to person.*"

Jesus, for example, relate well with the people (Jones, 1995), one's "most appreciable asset" (Maxwell, 1993: 113). He "hated to eat alone... ..he (even) invited the thief dying on the cross to join him in Paradise" (Jones, 1995: 275). [Author's emphasis: We need each other, and leaders must relate well with their people.]

In Buddhism, loving-kindness is giving others happiness (aka relating well with others). Compassion is removing the bitterness of others; joy is removing the suffering of others. And in Islam, leader cannot be self-centered or self-indulgent. (Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 111). A leader should understand not only him(her)self but to understand others too (Owen, 2012).

In this connection, the Dalai Lama (cited in Dalai Lama with Chan, 2012), in practicing the Sutras and Buddhist teachings, spoke of educating the heart especially in a world which embraces academic achievements with near religious fervor. He believes that is vital to take a step back and look at the bigger picture, to examine a young person's interaction with his or her family, community and the environment. Empathy and the ability to manage stress are skills that can help students lead a more fulfilled lives; he believes students ("the seeds of better future"; Dalai Lama with Chan, 2012: 149) can be nurtured to becoming more caring, tolerant and peaceful individuals. For the Dalai Lama, "educating the heart implies learning that leads to developing genuine compassion" (Dalai Lama with Chan, 2012: 163) and with that, there is always heart-to-heart talk, communication and understanding with others/ people. And that is the beauty of them all.

It is said, "verily, a man hath performed prayers, fasts, charity, pilgrimage and all other good works; but he will not be rewarded except by the proportion of his understanding" (Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 114).

Jesus even "saw them (his people) as God's gifts to Him" (Jones, 1995: 278). Each person is a beautiful soul. And as a leader, each of us needs to connect, talk to, listen to, understand and relate well with our people; they are lovely, unique individuals.

### **Practicing Universal Love, Loving for Ourselves and Others**

#### **Why Leaders Must Love Their People?**

One should not be selfish. This is beautiful. "Lov(ing) thy neighbour" (Lonely Planet, 2011: 29; Jones, 1995; Leviticus 19:18), "Jesus had compassion for the crowds" (Jones, 1995). Leaders should be practicing universal love; there should indeed be love and compassion for ourselves and others. All the prophets showed much care, concern, compassion and love towards their people. It is also said that the "most striking of all the parallels between Jesus and Buddha are those dealing with love" (Borg and Riegert, 2008: 16).

In the Talmud, all of us must be responsible and here, the vital lessons: leaders must indeed be responsible and there is a need to show compassion especially for those weaker than ourselves (our people. (Kahaner, 2003: Preface xix; author's italics). The Talmud also clearly states that "The highest form of wisdom is kindness" (The Talmud, Thinkexist, 2013a). In being Happy, Lonely Planet (2011: 107) speaks of being kind to strangers and discovering the pleasure of generosity.

In Buddhism, "the selfish person suffers here, and he suffers there; he suffers wherever he goes. He suffers as he broods over the damage he has done. He suffers more and more as he travels along the path of sorrow. The selfless person is happy here, and he is happy there; he is happy wherever he goes. He is happy when he thinks of the good he has done. He grows in happiness as he progresses along the path of bliss." (The Dhammapada: Twin Verses, cited in Easwaran, 2007: 107-108).

And from the Buddhist texts, what is being taught is that "there is a path to walk on, there is walking being done, but there is no traveler. There are deeds being done, but there is no doer. There is a blowing of the air, but there is no wind that does the blowing. The thought of self is an error and all existences are as hollow as the plantain tree and as empty as twirling water bubbles" (Sayings of Buddha, 1988: 19). There is clearly thus no self, and since there is no self, there is indeed no ego. The pertinent leadership lessons are that leaders should be humble, other-centered and they, like the Buddha (cited in Easwaran, 2005: 35) pointed out, need to "love the whole world as a mother loves her only child".

Additionally, that the Buddha shared what he had learned in itself signified an act of compassion. And anyone who will follow his way will reduce his or her own suffering and by developing love and compassion (training the mind for compassion; Khadro, Sangye 1996), help to heal others – and of course, learning to appreciate the experience of others also helps us to heal ourselves (Lowenstein, 2005). In spite of all these, then again, interestingly a true Buddhist practitioner would never be interested in tagging any act Buddhist, let alone one of compassion. In the Buddhist teachings, compassion is unanimous; even Mother Theresa (cited in Bloom, 2010: 9) has said, 'Religion has nothing to do with compassion'.

#### **Persuading People, Telling Stories and Selling the Benefits**

We learn well from stories told to us such as in schools and in books.

The Talmud, for example, has great stories, and great stories have the power to draw the heart; they capture our hearts. It teaches values and persuades people to espouse such values and its benefits. The Talmud also serves to remind us the need to balance in a workaholic culture, a treatise on personal responsibility and a call to charity in a society that seems driven by greed (Kahaner, 2003).

What makes a good or an effective leader? Leaders must be able to persuade and influence their people (Maxwell, 1993; Low, 2013). Telling or sharing stories is very persuasive, and it is as old as fire. The Huns and other tribespeople liked to gather to listen to their chiefs or leaders talking and sharing stories (Bloom, 2010; Roberts, 1987). The tribal chiefs, prophets and the sages – leaders – generally tell stories to better connect; touch-base, relate with and persuade the people.

Selling is not just for salespeople; all leaders have to sell themselves, sell their ideas and all new initiatives; if one cannot sell, one cannot lead (Owen, 2012). Or one cannot succeed, change things or effect any transformation. Leaders need to sell and tell the people the benefits or what's in it for them. Jesus said that "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Follow the Path, and they will be in paradise".

### **Caring for Nature and Environment or Being Corporate Socially Responsible**

How does effective leadership impact an organization or nation?

Leaders must be responsible. They must act and act responsibly. Additionally, we are presently living in the age of the individual and we are slow to give. However, indeed when people contribute and be a useful member of society, they feel good; they also feel part of something greater than oneself (Lonely Planet, 2011: 113).

Also, leaders and in fact all of us should make the connections; home is where earth is and note that one becomes happy when one realizes one's connection and does not feel out of place or out of time (Lonely Planet, 2011: 95). Besides, all of us should truly appreciate nature ("Let nature make your heart sing"; Lonely Planet, 2011: 65) and see everything and the world with "a good eye" (Parry, 2004). Leaders must indeed care and be socially responsible for nature and the environment; Mother Earth needs our care and love; all of us need to adopt Green Earth ways. The Bible says that human beings are to be the stewards or keepers of earth's environment. In the Talmud, we are told not to waste any resources, natural or artificial because they are not ours to dispose of; besides, we are responsible for any damage we cause (Kahaner, 2003). ["Whoever destroys a single life is as guilty as though he had destroyed the entire world; and whoever rescues a single life earns as much merit as though he rescued the entire world" The Talmud, Mishna. Sanhedrin, cited in

[http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/The\\_Talmud/.](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/The_Talmud/)] "The Living God did not create a single thing without a purpose." (Talmud Shabbat 77b, cited in Parry, 2004: 252). Basically, the Talmud directs and guides that the unique gifts of energy, material or spirit with which a person is endowed must all be channeled to larger community or human service (Bokser, 1951).

Islam, in turn, necessitates or obliges that mankind maintains a balance between their love for and abstinence from material things. Such wisdom of restraint in acquiring material resources is also said to be true for the whole of humanity (Almunawar and Low, 2013). Human beings are God's vicegerent on the earth (Q'uran, ii, 30 cited in Sharif, 1963: 159). And based on the Koran, Hadith and the Shari'ah, there are extensive teachings, both legal and moral, concerning the natural environment: the way that animals should be treated kindly, trees preserved and not cut unless extremely necessary, plants or vegetation protected even in war, running water guarded, and many other pertinent issues. Prophet Mohammad Himself was always very kind to animals. As for trees, he stressed on the significance of creating what is today called green space; he said, "It is a blessed act to plant a tree even if it be a day before the end of the world." (Nasr, 2002: 143). The Shari'ah declares certain general principles concerning the environment, such as that of balance (mizan) between all parts of God's creation, the prohibition of waste, and respect for all life forms, and specific injunctions, such as the creation of protected areas for wildlife (Nasr, 2002).

Taking Action at times, sometimes or to most at most times, we can be enveloped or halted by inertia. Passivity can kill!

The late John Wayne once said these, "Courage is being scared to death – and saddling up anyway." And there is much inaction.

All of us must move. Leaders must move. And “the great thing about moving is it’s easier to change direction” (<http://janetpoole.com/category/ancient-wisdom/>). Yes, leaders must indeed take action. They must ACT. No action means NO results.

A person or a leader should be a doer, otherwise, (s)he is like a (wo)man who looks intently at his(her) natural face in a mirror; for (s)he looks at him(her)self and goes away and at once forgets what (s)he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty (found the wisdom?), and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, (s)he will be blessed in his (her) doing (James 1: 23-25). And through actions, one also sets the example; thus others/ one will recognize them by their fruits. (Matthew 7: 20).

For the Muslims, “every good act is charity” (Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 59). And “When you speak, speak the truth; perform when you promise; discharge your trust” (Prophet Mohammad cited in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 58).

The Talmud is also said to be ‘promoting’ pro-activeness. Thousands of years before the term “proactive” was thought up by motivational experts, the Jewish Sages gave this essential tool for success a name, calling it *zerizus*. *Zerizus* is the quality within us that fires accomplishment, the trait that takes what we are capable of or skilful in and turns it into real achievement. *Zerizus* is, in Rabbi Zelig Pliskin’s (2008) words, the “joyful willpower” that we all need to make our dreams come true. “Your thoughts are the source of your will power. The actions you take flow from your thoughts about them. Every step you take is through the use of your willpower. Every time you do anything, it is through the use of your willpower.” (Pliskin, 2008: 16).

*Zerizus* is said to take us from “I wish” to “I will”. It is not about hurry, and it’s not about pushing, violence, aggression or aimless, rushed activity. As all of us cultivate *zerizus*, we learn to create meaningful, doable goals (targets) and actually reach them. As *zerizus* becomes a part of our lives, we find joy and serenity in our lives, as well as practical accomplishment.

Seemingly and on the surface, Buddhism is preaching non-action but far from it, it is, in actuality, very proactive. The Buddha, for example, once said, “An idea that is developed and put into action is more important than an idea that exists only as an idea.” (Thinkexist, 2013). Essentially, in Buddhism, practice is truly critical and it helps thought transformation, mindfulness and change in action and behavior as well as acting in true compassion and having right actions (Khadro, Sangye, 1996; Lowenstein, 2012). Indeed to paraphrase Pericles (Greek politician, general and statesman of the aristocratic, Alcmaeonid family, 495 BC-429 BC) had once said, “(Through your actions,) what you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven into the lives of others.” (Thinkexist, 2013).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Leaders including organizational/ national leaders can truly learn, pick and employ the various wise tips and pointers from the ancient texts, and model themselves after these sages and prophets; they can then move their organizations (nations) from good to great.

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