Khurshid Ahmad, Director of the Islamic Foundation, London, United Kingdom

**Propagation of Islam:**

The Basic Principles

This is the first contribution to this journal by Professor Khurshid Ahmad. Although most readers would be familiar with Professor Ahmad's tireless efforts on behalf of Islam, a brief introduction is in order for the benefit of the general readership. Dr. Ahmad is a former professor of economy at Karachi University He has written a number of books dealing with various Islamic topics, and has served as editor for several Islamic journals. Professor Ahmad is a well-known speaker at Islamic conferences around the globe. In this article, he summarizes his long and valuable experience as propagator of Islam in non-Muslim societies.

Movement is a law of nature life itself is symbolized by action, effort and movement. In a world that is ever-changing, one has to move even to remain in the same place. What is true of the world of nature is even truer for the individual and social life of man. Islam is fully cognizant of this situation and provides for the efficient operation of this life-mechanism. A number of provisions have been made to make the principle of movement operative in the socio-moral life of the Community of Islam. Da'wah is one such principle. It constitutes a built-in mechanism that keeps the community as well as the individuals who compose it, active and upright, ensures the moral health of the individual and the community, and acts as a corrective. Force and a blessing for the whole of mankind.

Da'wah literally means call or invitation. In Islamic terminology it con- notes the invitation addressed to mankind by Allah and his prophets to believe in Islam, the true religion, the religion of all prophets. The message of the prophets is universal and this invitation is addressed to all without any discrimination. The only valid differentiation between human beings, according to Islam, is based on their response to this Da'wah those who believe in it or refuse to accept it.

**Islam: Faith, Community or Movement**

All the prophets were raised to convey Islam to their People, and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last of these prophets. He presented this divine guidance in its complete and final form. He invited the entire human race to follow the path of Allah and has been a mercy and a blessing to them all. The mission of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was to provide this complete guidance to mankind and to establish a community and a movement to act as its standard-bearer. The Muslim Community has been assigned the same role vis-a-vis the rest of the world as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was assigned to perform in respect of them.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى قلے النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

Thus we appointed you a moderate and moderating Ummah, that you may be witnesses (of Truth) to the people and that the Prophet may be a witness to you.

The mission of the Prophet has been incorporated into the historical role of the Ummah. This has been achieved through two major factors: the preservation of the Qur'an, which embodies the divine guidance and of the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him); and the assignment of the missionary role to the Ummah as its primary function. This responsibility rests on each and every believer and not merely on any one class or group of people. It is the common believer who has been primarily charged with this responsibility, and this is a unique feature of Islam. The moral health of the Muslim Community and of society at large depends on the continuation. of these roles and responsibilities.

**Da'wah: The Islamic Concept**

Islam is the 'religion for man. It is the embodiment of that code of life, that guidance, which the Creator of the Universe has revealed for the benefit of mankind. Its primary concern is to build correct relationships between God and man as well as among men."

Faith represents one's commitment to God a commitment to think, feel and live with the awareness of the Lord, to bring his will into harmony with the Divine Will and to strive to make His will supreme in the world. Islam awakens a new consciousness in man and gives him a new outlook on life. Equipped with this new outlook, he joins a community of faith and participates in a movement, a collective effort, to reconstruct human life and society. Islam stands, not for life-denial, but for life-fulfillment. It presents a program for the radical transformation of man and society in the light of the basic concepts of the Unity of God (Taw hid) and the equality. of all people. It gives an integrated view of man: moral and material, and spiritual and temporal, are welded into an indivisible whole. It refuses to divide life rigidly into the things of this world and those of the next; it regards the two as extensions of one another and invites man to enjoy the best of this world and the best of the hereafter. "

In our own times the Islamic Da'wah has quite often been presented in ways that leave much to be desired. For a host of reasons, some historical, some otherwise, the system which Muslims had evolved for Da'wah was particularly disrupted over the last two centuries. Whatever partial efforts were made to restore some kind of a system remained of limited effectiveness. The rise of Imperialist powers and their political sway over most of the Muslim lands dealt a severe blow to the old arrangement. Christian missions, and later on Communist onslaughts provoked some reaction. However, these efforts mostly were directed to meet specific challenges. Consequently, they not only remained (basically) negative, but also became over-obsessed with the issues raised by these foreign intruders. This distorted the perspective.

It is therefore, necessary that the concept of Da'wah, as it emerges from the Qur'an and Sunnah should be clearly understood.

1. Islam is not the national religion of the Muslim. It is the eternal religion. Muhammad (peace be upon him) is not the author of Islam. Allah has revealed essentially the same religion through all His prophets. Thus the prophets Abraham, Isaac, Ismael, David, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus (peace and blessings on them) invited man to follow the path of Islam and no other. 10 The followers of these prophets did not safeguard their teachings with the result that some of the message was lost while in the rest of it the Word of God and the word of man were mixed up. (See insert from the St. Louis Post Dispatch of January 10, 1975)..

Muhammad (peace be upon him) was raised to reveal the same path in its pristine purity and to restore and finalize God's message to all humanity.

The Qur'an is the superseding guardian (Muhaimin) of the doctrine revealed to all the prophets. 11 Muslims believe in all the prophets and we are not allowed to play one off against the other. We invite all people to discover their real religion. The teaching of the Qur'an is to make them eschew all national or racial prejudices and join this universal com- munity of faith. 12 The first principle of Islamic Da'wah is to emphasize this common feature and to ignore all national antagonisms. They are not our concern at all.

2. Secondly Islam is a complete way of life, and not a scheme of partial reform. It deals with the whole of man, his spiritual, moral, personal and social existence. It offers guidance on every aspect of human life. It aims at spiritual, moral, material and social reconstruction of human society. It tries to change man from within and to enable this new man to create a just and harmonious society. It neither neglects the spiritual, nor the material dimensions of life. The moral ideal of Islam seeks realization in the shape of a God-conscious man operating in a moral society with its social, economic, political, and national and international relations emanating from the basis of truth and justice. It is this complete and integrated view of Islam as a way of life that deserves to be projected in Daw'wah.

3. The Islamic Da'wah is to be presented through word and deed at individual and social levels. It is a misconception that Da'wah would be complete or fully effective merely by spreading the knowledge of Islam. The teachings of Islam must be disseminated but this should be accompanied by setting a true Islamic example, individually as well as collectively. The Qur'an emphasizes that a prophet is the first believer; 13 he lives according to what he preaches. 14 That is why his words are a source of knowledge and his actions are a model for behavior. 15 Conformity between word and deed, particularly in the context of Da'wah, has been stressed by the Qur'an. 16 It is therefore a fundamental principle that Muslims in making efforts toward Da'wah must also set a good example to the rest of the community. It follows that Da'wah is not merely for non-believers. It is equally important for believers and non-believers; it consists in efforts to Islamise the Muslims¹" and to convey Islam to the non-Muslims.

4. Another principle of Da'wah is to carefully examine the circumstances in which the message is being delivered. The message is universal but it should be presented in such a way that its relevance to the situation is fully realized. Moreover, the problems of the society are to be approached in such a way that the evil is attacked at its roots, not merely at the level of symptoms. This becomes very clear when we try to study in the Qur'an the way in which different prophets conveyed their basic message. All of them tried to go to the root of the problem whether a people acknowledge the sovereignty of God or not. In the last analysis everything follows from this fundamental outlook. That is why every prophet tried to correct the relationship between God and man. But along with this he took issue with his people in the light of their situation. Prophets Solomon and Moses (peace be upon them) took up the question of magic. Prophet Lüt focused on the sexual morality of his people. Prophet Shu'aib invited them to establish economic justice. Prophet Moses concerned himself with the political and cultural servitude of the Children of Israel.

**PROPAGATION OF ISLAM**

Prophet Joseph looked into the management of the state and its economy. And in respect of each of their problem-areas they showed how the establishment of a proper relationship with God on the correct foundations would help them solve their problems. From this we may infer that the Da'wah should not only take note of the specific problems of the society in which it is being given but should also go deeper and show how a fundamental transformation of outlook is a precondition to the solution of these problems.

5. Da'wah is not merely a system of communication with the outside world, it also includes the evolution of a system of training of Tarbiyah and Yazkiyah so that the mechanism for absorption and consolidation should operate along with the machinery for contact and expansion. This is essential for the maintenance and improvement of the moral health of the community itself.

6. The ideal form for Da'wah is that the entire community should be organized on the principle of Khilafah 'ala-Minhaj-al-Nabuwwah (caliphate patterned after the Prophet's life). Under this system the Ummah can attain optimum effectiveness, within and without. The collective system would be a model of Islam. This is the most effective way. But if this is not so, as is the situation today, then on the one hand efforts should be made to establish this system, and on the other, whoever is conscious of the missionary responsibilities of the Ummah should engage in this task individually as well as through organized effort.

It is in pursuance of this principle that efforts at Da'wah are being made by Muslims in different parts of the world.

7. Another principle is that Da'wah should be presented in a most carefully diplomatic way. The Qur'an says:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَدِلُهُم بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَن

Invite others to the way of your Lord with wisdom and gentle admonition and debate with them in the best possible manner.

In the Qur'an and Sunnah ample light has been thrown upon certain methodological aspects of Da'wah. Inter alia the following deserve careful consideration.

(i) Those methods should not be used which may inflame the combative passions of the addressees, dim their sense of perception or provoke prejudiced retaliation.

(ii) If you are wronged, try to rectify the situation by resorting to good means. "And good and evil are not alike. Repel (evil) with a compassionate response. "

 (iii) The efforts should be made with patience and perseverance. The Qur'anic term for this mode of behavior is Şabr, which implies (a) patience in the sense of being thorough and devoted; (b) constancy, perseverance, steadfastness and firmness of purpose; (c) planned and systematic effort with a realization of phases and grades involved; (d) confidence and belief in the mission itself; (e) a cheerful attitude of acceptance and understanding in sorrow, defeat or suffer- ing and of humble restraint and thankfulness to God in happiness, success and achievement. Şabr is the principle of constructive dyna- mism and of calculated effort in the path of Da'wah.

(iv) To adopt a rational and thoughtful approach and to resort to in- formed discussion and cool debate. In this respect it is suggested that one should make use of all available knowledge, the most reliable sources.

(v) To be aware of the psychology of the people, their receptivity and responsiveness. Da'wah is not a unilateral process with one way traffic only. It should involve a meaningful dialogue, to be pursued with care, wisdom and patience. The element of time and different quantitative and qualitative consideration should be kept in view.

(vi) The message should be clearly expressed in the language of the people, the crucial importance of the Arabic language notwithstanding. This is essential so that they feel at home with the message and are able to follow it.

(vii) Efforts should be made to benefit from the latest and most appropriate techniques of contact and communication. The best possible technology should be used in the service of the Da'wah.

(viii) The process of Da'wah should be properly graduated. We must be clear about our priorities. Fundamentals must have precedence over details. Faith should be the first target. It is only through attainment of faith that the road to Islamic life can be followed. Obligatory duties should come before non-obligatory ones. The objectives and general principles of the Shari'ah should come before its minutia. Sectarian differences should be avoided at all levels and emphasis placed upon the essentials and on the areas of agreement. No effort should be made to achieve everything all at once. The wisdom behind the piece-meal revelation of the Qur'an was that society adopts Islam step by step and gets firmly rooted in it through a gradual process.

**Footnotes**

1. Qur'an, 42:13, 111, 84.

2. Qur'an, 5:3.

3. Quran, 21:107.

4. Quran, 2:143. Also 22:78.

5. Qur'an, 3:104 and 110.

6. "What monks have been to the expansion of Budhism, traders and merchants have been to that of Islam. The faith of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) makes no provision for an ordained clerical or monastic body which could assume the main responsibility for missions as is the case with Christianity and Budhism. Rather the missionary task (has fallen) to the lot of the ordinary believer, and perhaps by consequence, he has generally been more effective in this work than have his counterparts in other religions." Encyclopedia Americana (International Edition): New York: American Corporation 1965 Vol. XIX, p. 229.

7. See Understanding Islam F. Schuon, London: Allen & Unwin 1963, p. 13.

8. See Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam S.M. Iqbal. Ch: "Spirit of Islamic Culture".

9. Qur'an, 2:201.

10. Qur'an, 2:128, 132; 3:52, 67; 5:111; 10:90; 1:101; 22:78; 27:31, 38, 42, 91; 28:53; 39:12; 46:15; 51:36.

11. Qur'an, 5:48.

12. Qur'an, 111:64.

13. Qur'an, 7:143.

14. Qur'an, 39:12.

15. Qur'an, 33:21.

16. Qur'an, 2:44, 41:2-3.

17. Qur'an, 4:136, 41:10-11.

18. Qur'an, 3:104, 9:122.

19. Qur'an, 16:125.

20. Qur'an, 6:108.

21. Qur'an 41:34.