

THE NATURE OF ISLAMIC DA WAH

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This is a brief paper aims at examining the nature and scope of Islamic Daw'ah so as to appreciate its bearing on the future construction of mankind.

1. Movement is a natural fact. Life itself consists of action, effort and movement. In a world that is ever changing one has to move just to stay in the same place. What is true of the physical world is truer of human world, the individual and social life of man.
2. Islam is fully aware of this fact and provides in several ways to make the principle of movement operative in social and morality of the community of Islam. Da'wah is one such way. 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 act as a corrective force and acts as a corrective force and blessing for whole of mankind.

Da'wah literally means call or invitation. In Islamic terminology it denotes the 'invitation to mankind from Allah subhanahu wa ta'la and His prophets to believe in Islam, the true religion, the religion of all prophets.

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The message of the prophets is universal and this invitation is addressed to all without discrimination. The only valid differentiation between human beings, according to Islam is based on their response to the Da'wah [a] those who believe in it [b] those who refuse to believe it.

ISLAM, FAITH, COMMUNITY AND MOVEMENT

All the prophets were raised to convey Islam to their people and Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) was the last of these prophets. He presented the Divine Guidance in its complete and final form. He invited all mankind to follow the path of Allah and has been a mercy and blessing to all. His mission was to provide this 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 task and role viz-a-viz the rest of the world as the Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) was assigned in respect of the Muslim community.

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, through two major factors: the preservation of the Quran, which embodies the Divine Guidance, and of the example of the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him), the Sunnah and the assignment of the missionary role to the Ummah as the primary responsibility. That responsibility rests on each individual believer and not merely on any one special class or group of people, a unique feature of Islam. The moral health of 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 mankind. 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 relationship between God and man, between one man and another, between man and social order.⁷

Faith represents one's commitment to God, a commitment to think, feel and live with the awareness of the Lord, to bring man's will into harmony of Divine's will and to strive to make His will supreme in this world. Islam awakens a new conscience in man and gives him a new outlook of life. With this new outlook, he joins a community of faith and participates in a social movement, a collective effort to reconstruct human life and society in accordance with the values and principles of Islam, which stand, not for life-denial, but for life-fulfillment. It presents a programme for the radical transformation of man and society in the light of the basic concepts of the Unity of God (tawhid) and the equality of all people. It gives an integrated view of life in which moral and material, and spiritual and temporal, are welded into an indivisible whole. It refuses to divide life rigidity 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."

Following these general introductory observations, let us try to examine more closely what Islamic da'wah invites man to do, why it invites him and how he is to answer the invitation.

The central issue, according to Islam, is not man's need to know the person of God and to extricate himself from his predicament by seeking grace through a savior, but his need for hidayah (divine guidance) to enable him to know the will of God and to try to live in obedience to it. Islam means complete submission to the divine will and it is this harmonization of man's will, with the Divine Will that leads to real peace, peace within man's soul, between man and man, between man and the creation, and finally man and God.

The condition of man, in Islam's view of it, is explained in the Quran's account of his creation.

Man was created to play the positive and dynamic role of God's khalifah, His deputy on earth, His representative and vicegerent. He was endowed with free will and the capacity to make moral decisions, and he was given the knowledge of things, so as to make such decisions properly: thus man had the means to show whether he could behave responsibly, fulfilling the trust that had been placed in him. The experience he had of this freedom before he came to the earth bring to light his potentials as well as his weaknesses, his exposure to evil and the danger of his succumbing to it as also his innate goodness for realizing his mistakes and striving to rectify them. It is because of this human situation that man needs Divine Guidance, as a reminder, a protection and surety and a guide to making and holding steadfastly to the right moral decision. The critical question is man's relationship with God and in the light of that his relationship with himself and with other human beings, with the whole creation and with history.

The strategy of the hidayah is to start by giving man Iman i.e. faith and conviction in the unity of God, in tawhid with all its ramifications. God is One, He is the Creator, the Lord, the Mercy- giving, the Sustainer, the Nourisher, the Perfecter, the Truth, the Guide, the Law-giver, the Sovereign, the Judge, the One to whom man is to return. God and man represents two categories and man's success and salvation lies in accepting God as God (ma'bud the object of worship, reverence, loyalty and obedience).

God's will is not something mysterious, vague or unknowable. It is revealed in the hidayah which provides code of human conduct, the law, the Shariah. Islam is al-Din, a complete way of life. Acceptance of God and His Hidayah results in the emergence of a community of faith, whose social institutions are founded upon Iman. The community is an ideological entity and represents a social movement to actualize in space and time the demands of the hidayah.

For Islam is not merely a metaphysical doctrine or theology. Its emphasis is on Iman as the starting point that is a conviction and commitment to accept God as the Lord and to submit to His Will completely. This moulds a life-outlook and indeed Islam provides a complete way of life, a system with explicit criteria for right and wrong and a set of clear injunctions as to how to regulate one's life spiritual or worldly, individual and collective, how to run the major social institutions to ensure the establishment of a just order based on the Shariah. Finally Islam inculcates the spirit of living in God's presence as symbolized by the Islamic value 'Ihsan'.

ISLAMIC DA WA: WHAT, WHY AND HOW:

What the Islamic Da'wa is, is an invitation to Islam, a faith; and as a way of life as al-Din. It is addressed to all human beings and is the more pressing for those who respond to it, for they must then engage in an unceasing struggle to transform their own lives, individual and social, in accordance with its guidance.

It is an invitation not only to a new man, the outlook of life but also to a new order, the Islamic Way of Life. It calls us not merely to accept a certain historical event but to engage in a dynamic unceasing process of understanding, discipline and social action. Da'wah requires the transformation of human life through tarbiyah (training) and tazkiyah (purification) to realize the relevant Islamic values, and society.

Why Islam requires this of us; can be understood by reflecting that man is not self-sufficient, he needs Divine Guidance. As Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is the last Prophet, how does the mechanism for guidance operate after him? The Islamic position is that this is ensured first by the preservation of the Divine Guidance, in its pure and pristine form in the Quran and Sunnah, and secondly by making the Muslim Ummah, every Muslim and all Muslims witness of Truth before mankind in the same way as the Prophet was a witness of the 'Truth' to the Ummah.

Now a word about the 'how'. Da'wah is presented chiefly by communicating the message, preaching, you may call it, and by practicing it and thus presenting to the world a living example of it. Islam has ruled out techniques, of coercion as instruments of Da'wah. The methods it has enjoined and actualized in history are methods of communication, discussion and persuasion on the one hand, and the gravitational pull of godliness as exemplified, in the lives of the people and realized in the social order. There is no professional class of priests or preachers in Islam. Every Muslim is responsible for the da 'wah whatever his vocation in life.

THE QURANIC PRINCIPLES OF ISLAMIC DA WAH:

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 historically and some otherwise, the system which Muslim had evolved for da'wah was particularly disrupted over the last two centuries. Whatever partial efforts were made to restore some kind of 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 missionaries 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 Quran and Sunnah should be clearly understood.

1. Islam is not the national religion of certain Muslims or certain Muslim states. It is the eternal religion. Muhammad (blessings and 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, Ishmael, 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 remainders, the

Word of God and the word of man were mixed. Muhammad, upon him be peace, was raised to reveal the same path, in its pristine purity and to restore and finalise God's message to all humanity.

The Quran is the superceding guardian (Muhaimen) of the doctrine revealed to all the Prophets." 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 Quran is to make them eschew all national or regional prejudices and join this universal community 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 merely 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 of in the shape of a God-conscious man operating in a moral society with its social economic, political, 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 da 'wah.

3. The Islamic Da'wah is to be presented through words and deeds at individual and social levels. It is a misconception that da'wah can 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 collectively. The Quran emphasis that the Prophet is the first believer, 13 he lives according to what he preaches. That is why his words are a source of knowledge and his actions are a model for behavior.

Conformity between word and deed, particularly, in the context of da 'wah has been stressed by the Quran. 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 Islamize the Muslims" and to convey Islam to non-Muslim.

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 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 Quran 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 i.e. Tawhid. 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 issues with his people in the light of their situation. Prophet Solomon and Moses, upon them be peace, took up the question of magic, the alleged supernatural resource. Prophet Lut focused on the sexual morality of his people. Prophet Shoaib invited them to establish economic justice. Prophet Moses concerned himself with the political and cultural servitude of the children of Israel. Prophet Joseph looked into the management of the state and its economy. And in respect of each of their problems-area they showed how the establishment of a proper relationship with God on the correct foundation 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 of 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 or tarbiyah and tazkiya so that the mechanism for assimilation 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 of 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 with care and sensitivity. The Quran says:

"Invite others to the way of your Lord with wisdom and gentle admonition and debate with them to the best possible manner", 19

THE METHODOLOGY OF ISLAMIC DA'WAH:

In the Quran 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 those addressed, cloud or numb their sense of perception or provide prejudiced retaliation.²⁰

ii. If you are wrong, try to rectify the situation by resorting to good means. "And good and evil are not alike. Repel (evil) with a compassionate response. 21

iii. The efforts should be made with patience and perseverance. The Quranic term for this mode of behavior is sabr, which imply (a) patience in the sense of being thorough and devoted, (b) constancy, perseverance, steadfastness and firmness of purpose, (c) planned and systematic efforts with a realization of phases and degrees involved; (d) confidence and belief in the mission itself (e) a cheerful attitude of acceptance and understanding in sorrow, defeat or suffering and of humble restraint and thankfulness to God in happiness, success and achievement. Sabr is the principle of constructive dynamism and of calculated effort in the path of da'wah.

iv. To adopt a rational and thoughtful approach and to resort to informed discussion and cooled debate. In this respected it is suggested that one should make use of all available knowledge, the most reliable sources.

11 V. To be aware of 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 considerations 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 minutiae. Sectarian differences should be avoided at all levels and emphasis placed upon the essentials and on the areas of agreement. No efforts should be made to achieve everything all at once. The wisdom behind the piece-meal revelation of the Qur'n was that society adopts Islam step by step and gets firmly rooted in it through a gradual process. That is the way to transform an entire life-style and to restructure the whole cultural landscape. That is the prophetic model for change.

12 ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

Qur'an 42:13, 111, 84.

2 Qur'an 5:3.

Qur'an 21:107.

Qur'an 2:143. Also 22:78.

Qur'an 3:104 and 110.

6 "What monks have been to the expansion of Buddhism, traders and merchants have been to that of Islam. The faith of 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 Buddhism. Rather the missionary task (has fallen) to the lot of the ordinary, he believers, and perhaps by the 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.

" See Understanding Islam-F. Schoun, London: Allen & Uowin, 1963, p.13.

13 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.

"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 4:134, 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.

14