

Da'wah Getting it Right

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The Da'wah (invitation) to Allah is the duty of the Muslim Ummah. Every Muslim is charged with this mission, as Allah (s.w.t) says: "Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is Ma'rouf (right) and forbidding what is Munkar (wrong). And it is they who are the successful." [3:104]. The fulfillment of this mission on the individual level however varies with the capacity of the Muslim, including their linguistic abilities, confidence, and knowledge.

Without Da'wah, the people fall into ignorance and misguidance. The absence of Da'wah means the absence of a force to prevent the spread of evil and injustice on the earth. Our Prophet (s.a.w) has warned us of the consequences: "*At a time when people become indifferent to the spread of evil, they incur Allah's punishment.*" [Ahmad, 1/9]

The successful Da'ee will need to consider many aspects of Islamic knowledge, the condition of the environment he is working in, his resources and means, and what he wishes to accomplish. This article is divided into four main themes and attempts to provide a perspective on these issues to assist the Da'ee in his mission.

[Sociocultural Structure of the West](#)

[The Da'ee](#)

[The Methodology of Da'wah](#)

[THE MEANS](#)

Sociocultural Structure of the West

As we head towards another millennium, Muslims are looking back at the events that shaped the 20th Century and are reflecting on this humiliating and devastating period in the history of Islam. The fall of the Khilafah and consequently the disappearance of the Shari'ah, the division of Muslim land into minute powerless countries, the rise of secular theories on all intellectual fronts, are only some of the major crises that inflicted the Muslim Ummah.

The consecutive dictatorship regimes and the degrading living conditions have driven many Muslims out of their homes temporarily to places less hostile towards their religion and in search of better living standards. The Western countries, a primary contributor to this migration, ironically accepted most of those Muslim immigrants who today number well over 15 million.

The West, a general term referring to Western Europe, North America and some other countries like Australia and Zealand, is a place of great opportunities for Muslims to practice Da'wah and claim more adherents to the universal Deen of Allah. However, to make use of such opportunities, the Muslim Da'ees must be aware and mindful of the environment they live in. They should attain an adequate level of knowledge about the culture and social order of their Western country. An understanding of the country's history, geography, demography, economy, religions and ethnic backgrounds are very important aspects which help the Da'ees in their mission. They also need to learn about the country's political system, parties and the "who", "what", and "how" of the political process. What are the major newspapers, magazines and broadcasting organisations? Who are the opinion leaders, famous figures, authors, scientists, etc.?

THE DA'EE

The Da'ee should exhibit the following traits, else his mission could lead to failure, in both his earthly mission and in the Hereafter.

Sincerity

Sincerity in conveying the Message and detachment from personal gain is the trait of righteous persons. Not only will the insincere Da'ee be punished on the Day of Judgment for his hypocrisy, but when people observe him craving for a worldly or personal benefit when conveying the Message, they immediately reject his advice and doubt his mission. On the other hand, the sincere Da'ee is respected by his community, and people usually listen to what he says and observe his recommendations. The Prophet (s.a.w) warned us: ***"He who let the people hear of his good deeds intentionally, to win their praise, Allah will let the people know his real intention (on the Day of Resurrection). And he who does good things in public to show off and win the praise of the people, Allah will disclose his real intention (and humiliate him)"*** [Bukhari, 8/506]. It is therefore essential for the Da'ee to be sincere, and to separate and openly declare oneself from personal gain, such as wealth, position or power; and thus imitate the example of the Prophets when they said to their people, "No reward do I ask you for it (my Message of Islamic Monotheism), my reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds." [26:109] Furthermore, let his motto be Allah's passage: "Say (O Muhammad): 'Verily, my Salat (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.'" [6:162]

Part of sincerity in performing Da'wah is witnessing the Da'ee applying what he is preaching and being among the first to submit himself to Allah. Allah (s.w.t) instructed His Prophet (s.a.w) in this regard: "Say (O Muhammad): 'Verily, I am commanded to worship Allah (Alone) sincerely. And I am commanded (this) in order that I may be the first of those who submit themselves to Allah (in Islam) as Muslims.' Say (O Muhammad): 'Verily, If I disobey my Lord, I am afraid of the torment of a great Day.'" [39:11-13]

As an example for his community, the Da'ee should begin his Da'wah with his family, relatives and close friends in accordance with Allah's command: "O you who believe! Ward off from yourselves and your families a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones.." [66:6] This was the Sunnah of the Prophet (s.a.w) as his call was first directed to his wife Khadeejah, his cousin Ali, and his closest friend Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with all the Companions. Abu Hurairah (r.a.a) reported that when (this verse) was revealed: "And warn (O Muhammad)

your nearest kinsmen," [26:214] Allah's Messenger (s.a.w) said: *"O people of Quraish, buy yourselves from Allah (i.e. secure deliverance from Allah by doing good deeds), I cannot avail you at all against Allah. O 'Abbaas bin 'Abd al-Muttalib (the Prophet's uncle), I cannot avail you at all against Allah; O Safiyyah (the Prophet's aunt), I cannot avail you at all against Allah; O Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad, ask me whatever you like, but I cannot avail you at all against Allah."* [Muslim, 1/402]

A Da'ees household is always in the critical eye of the community. If they find his wife and children to be careless in their application of Islam, they will take the Da'ee as being incompetent at his job and turn away. The Da'ee will also be held responsible firstly for his family before his community.

Knowledge & Expression

The carrier of the Message must be sufficiently competent in Islamic knowledge and expression qualities, so to convey his thoughts about a certain subject accurately and explicitly. Obviously, an ignorant Muslim or one who is poor in articulation is not fit to convey the Message to the people. In fact, he may do more harm than good to the Deen of Allah and may drive people away from him. Some young enthusiastic Muslims erroneously think that Islamic knowledge can be gained from reading magazines or listening to an audio tape in their spare time. The truth is that the sciences of Islam can only be acquired through the systematic process of learning which demands wholehearted approach to time and effort. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: *"If Allah wants to do good to a person, he makes him comprehend the Deen; and of course knowledge is attained by learning."* [Bukhari, 1/67] Many pious Salaf have said: *"Give knowledge (of Deen) everything you have, it will give you some of what it has."* We may now ask: "How much will knowledge of Deen give us if we only give it some of our leisure time?"

The beautiful style of speech

In preaching Islam, the Da'ee should try when possible to demonstrate rhetoric and literary eloquent speech. This is the style of the Qur'an in addressing humanity and the Da'ees are responsible for acquiring a respectable level of language proficiency to effectively convey the Message. It is worthy to note that all evil channels of communication convey its falsehood and mischief through adorned speech. Allah (s.w.t) states: *"And so We have appointed for every Prophet enemies - Shayaateen (devils) among mankind and jinn, inspiring one another with adorned speech as a delusion (or by way of deception). If your Lord had so willed, they would not have done it, so leave them alone with their fabrications. (And this is in order) that the hearts of those who disbelieve in the Hereafter may incline to such (deceit), and that they remain pleased with it, and that they may commit what they are committing (all kinds of sins and evil deeds, etc.)"* [6:112-113] Therefore, if the leaders of falsehood use the weapon of garnished speech and styles of expression to deceive the hearts of those who disbelieve in the Hereafter, then the Da'ees are more entitled to use this to call for the truth.

Strong Will & Confidence

It is very desirable that the Da'ee exhibit strong will, positive self-confidence and a capacity to control emotions. These characteristics are gained from sincerity and reliance on Allah and from knowledge and language competency, along with extensive experience and repetition.

The importance of these characteristics becomes evident when knowing that facing the people with different beliefs and concepts with the aim of guiding them to the Straight Path is no less than declaring an ideological war on their beliefs and conceptions that are part of their persons. People will not relinquish their beliefs and thoughts unless they are convinced with better alternatives, and naturally, they would take a cautious stance from, if not oppose, the Da'ee. But when such a Da'ee is garnished with strong will and confidence and is charismatic in speech and presentation, people begin to feel that this Da'ee is a mentor who is keen on their guidance and happiness, and some of them may in fact respond to the call. When few people find the guidance, a group of followers begin to form, and more will follow suite.

Perseverance

In the course of Da'wah, the Da'ee will inevitably face afflictions, temptations and obstacles, that try to lure him off his mission. If he fails these tests, he will fall into the bait of Shayaateen and even though he is wearing the garments of a reformer, he will share in the corruption without him noticing. However, the true Da'ee remains steadfast on truth, seeking reward for his perseverance and knowing that being a leader and an example, his intowards seductiis more despicable and harmful than the wicked flagitious people. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: *"A Muslim remains subject to trials (in this world) in respect of self, children and property till he or she faces Allah, the Exalted, (on the Day of Judgment) in a state in which all his or her sins have been remitted."* [Tirmidhi, 49]

If the Shayaateen of man don't succeed in their hideous assignment to win the Da'ee to their side, they will at least subject their efforts on abusing him with offensive and threatening language, if not try to hurt him. The Da'ee must be patient and console himself by remembering that he is not better than the Prophets of Allah and their companions, who suffered tremendously on this noble path. He mustn't let their speech grieve him because all honour belongs to Allah who says: **"And be patient (O Muhammad) with what they say, and keep away from them in a good way. And leave Me Alone to deal with the beliers, and those who are in possession of good things of life. And give them respite for a little while. Verily, with Us are fetters (to blind them), and a raging Fire."** [73:10-12]

Persistence

Not only does the true Da'ee exercise patience during adversities and hardships, but he also continues his mission eagerly and devotes oneself assiduously to Da'wah work even if it was little. The Prophet (s.a.w) was asked: "What deeds are loved most by Allah?" He said: ***"The most regular constant deeds even though they may be few."*** He added: ***"Don't take upon yourselves, except the deeds which are within your ability."*** [Bukhari, 8/472]

Moral Excellence

Another really admirable characteristics of a Da'ee is exhibiting kindness, gentleness, courtesy and high manners when dealing with people. Being an active member of the society, the Da'ee would have excellent social relations and would not alienate himself from people. He would initiate greetings with Salam, respond to invitations, offer services, conciliate matters of differences among people, visit the sick, join funeral processions, etc., as reported in many Ahadeeth. The Da'ee should approach all these tasks with leniency and gentleness. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: **"Allah likes gentleness in all matters."** [Bukhari] Even if the Da'ee is faced with a hypocrite or an offender, he should maintain his friendly trait. 'Aaishah (r.a.a) narrated that a man asked permission to see the Prophet, and the Prophet (s.a.w) said: "He is a bad member of the tribe." When he entered, the Prophet (s.a.w) treated him in a frank and friendly way and spoke to him. When he departed, I said: "Allah's Messenger! When he asked permission, you said, 'he is a bad member of the tribe;' but when he entered, you treated him in a frank and friendly way." The Prophet (s.a.w) replied: **"'Aaisha! Allah does not like the one who is unseemly and lewd in his language."** [Abu Daawood, 4774]

The Methodology of Da'wah

Approach

The act of preaching and educating in the field of Da'wah are not easy tasks. They not only demand massive effort and God-fearing character, but also instigate a comprehensive systematic approach that is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Without such a proper approach, the success of the efforts of inviting to Islam is a remote possibility.

Reason with Truth

The first principle in the correct approach is in the Da'ee limiting his source of reasoning and inferences to the Book of Allah (s.w.t) and the Sunnah of His Messenger (s.a.w). All myths, suspicions, superstition and falsehood are sources rejected by Islam, for truth cannot be sustained except with truth. The Prophet (s.a.w) cautioned: **"He who intentionally lies about me will find his abode in Hell-Fire."** [Tirmidhi, 232] Truth has enough true proofs to uphold it. Even if the addressee accept to believe in false proofs, the addresser would have committed a great crime in Islam. Moreover, reasoning from falsehood weakens the truth that one claims to support. Such sources of falsehood include the kashf dimension in Sufism, fabricated ahadeeth, irrational or unfounded ideas to prove doctrinal concepts and the Bible (unless circumstances warrant). Allah the All-Wise states: **"Who is more unjust than one who invents a lie against Allah or rejects His ayaat (proofs, revelations, etc.)?"** [7:37]

Progressive & Gradual Education

Another important principle in the approach of the Da'ee is using the progressive, gradual development in preaching, beginning with the fundamentals ('aqeedah) followed by its major branches and tenets, general moral prescripts and major rules of worship. This was the Sunnah of the Prophets in inviting people to Islam. When Mu'aadh (r.a.a) was sent to Yemen, he was instructed by the Prophet (s.a.w) to call the people firstly to the testimony of faith (Shahaadah). If they obeyed him, he was to explain to them that Allah has prescribed five prayers daily, and if they obeyed him, the obligation of charity, and so on. [See Bukhari, 2/537]

The successful Da'ee recognises that his role is not merely in conveyance of the Message, but extends to the boundaries of continual Tarbiyah and education of young enthusiastic generations of believers. This role is crucial in the non-Islamic environment, where many uneducated Muslims who were raised on shallow perception of Islam or a scant emotion towards this religion, compete to lead Muslim organisations blindly for the sake of fame or reputation leading to deep divisions and anti-Islamic practices in the community. The Da'ee must plant the seeds of goodness in the hearts of the Muslim youth and then pledge to constantly raise them progressively in accordance with Allah's Law, resembling the description of the Companions of the Prophet in the Injeel. Allah (s.w.t) says: "...their description in the Injeel (Gospel) is like a (sown) seed which sends forth its shoot, then makes it strong, it then becomes thick, and it stands straight on its stem, delighting the sowers - that He may enrage the disbelievers with them." [48:29]

Guidance is from Allah

The Da'ee must always remember that he is not entrusted with transforming people from Kufr to Imaan, for ultimate guidance is from Allah, and free will is the bases of the Divine worldly test. Allah (s.w.t) said: "The Messenger's duty is only to convey (the message) in a clear way." [24:54] Nor should the Da'ee worry about the number of his followers; but should sympathise with some of the Prophets (s.a.w), the best of mankind, who will come on the Day of Judgment with just one or two followers [Ahmad, Bayhaqi, Nasaa'i.]

Shaytaan will use this fact to establish resignation and hopelessness in the hearts of the Da'ee. He will make it appear to him that he could funnel his efforts elsewhere, until the Da'ee believes that it is better to fix himself (the so-called Jihad al-Nafs) rather than others. This selfish view, which denies the community their right to be educated on Islam, has afflicted many Da'ees who have not grasped the essence of conveying the message.

Public Presentation

Propagating the Message through oration is a very effective and common method of Da'wah. Words that are heard are more inspiring and moving than words that are read, as they contain prominent features of life and emotion. When the Da'ee is assigned with a public presentation (e.g. Khutbas, lessons, etc.), there are rational and traditional (Sunnah) guidelines he should follow. Some of these are summarised below:

1. Choice of subject

The choice of subject must be relevant and interesting, well researched and prepared,

systematically developed and integrated, and logically approached by building up the main themes and ideas leading to a final conclusion, in harmony with the Fitra of the sound intellect.

2. Method of delivery

The Da'ee should be in connection with all levels of the community and not favour a group of people over others. He should also address his lectures with wisdom on different occasions, depending on the people's scope of intellect. However an outstanding feature of an exemplary lecture is when the speaker addresses the thoughts, feelings and souls of the audience. The expectations of the listeners' thoughts are met when logical proofs presented to them. The li' feelings and emotions are moved when they hear the truth that calls for good and rejects evil; and their souls will be delighted when they hear the desire of Allah's great reward and the despise of His punishment.

3. Good preparation

If the Da'ee is well prepared and has trust in Allah, his confidence will be at a high esteem. Allah (s.w.t) says: "And who is better in speech than he who says: 'My Lord is Allah (believes in His Oneness),' and then stands straight (acts upon His Order), and invites (men) to Allah, and does righteous deeds, and says: 'I am one of the Muslims.'" [41:33]

4. Parables & similitudes

The use of parables will make the comprehension of an issue and its memorisation much easier and more interesting. Allah Himself makes use of such language: "And indeed We have put forth for men, in this Qur'an every kind of similitude in order that they may remember." [39:27]

5. Choice of time

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ood (r.a.a) narrated that the Prophet (s.a.w) used to take care of us in preaching by selecting a suitable time, so that we might not get bored." [Bukhari, 1/68]. It should be remembered that each group will have its concentration span. Young children are limited to 20 minutes, adults who come to pray Juma'a and have work will also become fidgety if the Khutbah gets too long.

6. Brevity & eloquence

The Prophet (s.a.w) said: "***The lengthening of prayer by a man and the shortness of the sermon is a sign of his understanding (of faith). So lengthen the prayer and shorten the sermon, for there is charm (in precise) expression.***" [Muslim, 1889]

Unfortunately however there are many who will out of good-will give a prolonged Khutbah, citing that this is the only opportunity that many will receive some knowledge. The converse is true in this situation, as the people become restless and tune-out.

7. Clarity & repetition

Narrated 'Aaishah (r.a.a): *"The Prophet (s.a.w) used to talk so clearly that if somebody wanted to count the number of his words, he could do so."* [Bukhari, 4/768]. It has also been narrated from Anas bin Maalik (r.a.a): *"Whenever the Prophet spoke a sentence (said a thing), he used to repeat it thrice so that the people could understand it properly from him."* [Bukhari, 1/95]

8. Gestures

Abu Uthman (r.a.a) narrated that while we were at Adharbijan, 'Umar wrote to us: *'Allah's Messenger (s.a.w) forbade wearing silk except this much. Then the Prophet (s.a.w) approximated his two (index and middle) fingers (to illustrate that) to us.'* [Bukhari, 7/719]

This hadith illustrates the importance of the clear and intentional use of body language. The positioning of the body, stance of the feet, hand gestures and eye contact will all affect the public's reaction towards the speech.

9. Visual aids

Visual aids have become more widespread and accepted as a form of communication with the onset of technology. Overhead projectors, chalk or white boards, and charts are very effective ways to reinforce specific points. The Prophet (s.a.w) used visual aids to bring across important facts as 'Abdullah bin Mas'ood (r.a.a) narrated: *"Allah's Messenger (s.a.w) drew a line and then said: 'That is the path shown by Allah.' Then he drew several other lines on his right and left sides and said: 'These are the paths on every side of which there is a devil calling towards it.'* He then recited this verse: *'And verily, this (i.e. Allah's Commandments) is my Straight Path, so follow it'* [6:153]" [Tirmidhi, Ahmad, Nasaa'i & Darimi]

10. Questions

Answering questions is one of the best forms of teaching as it satisfies the needs of the questioner. There are many verses in the Qur'an which were revealed to answer a posed question [eg. 8:1]; to explain a law that was called for by an event [eg. 66:1], to respond to a raised objection [eg. 25:20], or to comment on a past incident [eg. the verses revealed regarding battles]

Posing questions will stimulate thought and the sharing of ideas. Answers which are rewarded will often encourage eager participation.

THE MEANS

Means Serve Objectives

The means of any mission must serve its objectives. So in order to utilise those means, our objectives for Da'wah in the West must be clear and ambitious, but realistic and achievable. Through knowledge and wisdom, Da'ees can pioneer social change, even if it was minor. For their Da'wah to be effective and convincing, their means of Da'wah work requires broad perceptiveness and open channels of communication.

No Justification for un-Islamic Means

The work of Da'wah necessitates the employment of lawful means and the Da'ee must not adopt any mean or instrumentality to achieve his objectives save those allowed by Islam. It is not permissible to make use of any mean that is forbidden in essence as a pretext to convey the Message. It is necessary here to distinguish between means that are forbidden in essence from means that are essentially lawful but are chiefly employed in forbidden tasks or for forbidden purposes.

Today, one can witness how falsehood has had no shame or hesitation in spreading its ideas and advertising its belief. On the contrary, it has done so with sheer arrogance and pride, through the exploitation of women, violence, propaganda, misguiding the masses, violation of treaties and so on. The Da'ee must not engage in such hideous means, but let his motto be the principle of Shari'ah which dictates, 'the mean does not justify the objective.'

There are Muslims who will stoop to unimaginable lows to promote Islamically praiseworthy projects. It has become the norm to see the funding of schools, mosques, trips and books coming from interest. Some will allow the mixed gathering of men and women to encourage participation. The result will be identical - anything which does not operate within the framework of Islam will inevitably fail, as the Islamic framework is the most solid one for societies' progression, and anything other than this will lead to its decline.

People learn in different ways

Researchers in pedagogy have confirmed that people learn in different ways. Some learn more by what they see, others by what they hear, while some prefer to read. People's acceptance of a concept also depends on their scope of intellect, cultural background or field of operation. These important and diverse factors call for various methods of Da'wah dissemination that appeals to and stimulates people's interest, senses and needs. Furthermore, in the West's information-oriented world, it may often be impossible to reach the public with our message without the means of media and communication channels.

Therefore, it is clear that Da'wah should be conveyed through all possible means of communication. Such means include writing, publishing and distributing books and other reading material on Islam, producing audiovisuals and computer software, utilising public media such as radio and television broadcasting stations, the press, and the Internet. Establishing Da'wah institutions, designing educational programs, conducting camps with Da'wah themes or even personal dialogue with neighbours and work or student-mates are also effective ways in which non-Muslims can embrace Islam and non-practicing Muslims can return

to the truth. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: ***"By Allah, if Allah guides a man (to Islam) through you, it is much better for you than being blessed with the best pleasures of this world."*** [Bukhari] Furthermore, the Prophet (s.a.w) didn't even leave an excuse for an indolent or negligent person by asserting: ***"Convey (my teachings) to the people even if it were a single sentence."*** [Bukhari, Tirmidhee & Ahmad]

Therefore, the Da'ee should be a dynamic individual who is committed to building up his skills and developing his talents. Some useful knowledge enhancements in the field of Da'wah, which Da'ees ought to acquire, includes skills in management and administration, public speaking, information technology, journalism and financing.

To utilise the above means of Da'wah efficiently and successfully, Da'wah needs organised and collective work. Obviously, an individual, or even a few individuals, can't be entrusted to perform these massive load of Da'work. Nor can we expect conceand team work without organisation that correctly directs the efforts and guides to the objectives. Islam is the Deen of organisation were all forms of worship, including the pillars, are performed at certain times, in a particular way and with obedience to the Imam. Da'wah is not an exception and the Da'ees must follow this system, by choosing their leader, continuing their education, formulating and reviewing their plans, funding their means, etc.

Conclusion

Our Prophet (s.a.w) passed away after he had conveyed the Message, fulfilled the trust and counselled the Ummah. Our duty is to safeguard the trust handed down to us through generations of the Muslim Ummah.

"May Allah bless a man who hears my sayings and commits them to memory, then faithfully communicates them (to others)" [Bukhari]