

DA'WAH: TRANSFORMATION METHOD IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM AND ITS CHALLENGES IN FORMING AN ISLAMIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract: Da'wah is a preaching to all mankind to return to Allah with great wisdom and to remind them of leaving the darkness of ignorance to the light of Islam until they believe in only Allah and leave behind the thaghut. The main purpose of preaching is *ta'zim li amrillah* which is to glorify the command of Allah and *syafaqah 'ala ibadillah* which is mercy or kindness to the servant of Allah. The da'wah approach used by the preachers is based on the target audience. It is clear to us that the movement of da'wah to the public is carried out in various forms, such as through places of worship like mosques and praying rooms, through educational places like educational institutions, religious educational huts (pondok) and so on. Furthermore, the content is also familiarized with Islamic culture in terms of clothing, social intercourse, hygiene and entertainment. We are also accustomed to Islam in family and neighborhood relationships and cultivating the spirit of brotherhood. Today, da'wah is facing various challenges and rejections. Duties and responsibilities of the preachers are increasingly demanding and challenging. Hence, this writing is intended to share knowledge, views and experiences on several methods and strategies of da'wah in order to facilitate current Islamic preachers. In addition, this paper also focuses on several processes of changes and transformation from a negative view to the enlightenment of identity which leads to the formation of an Islamic community. It demands the preachers to escape the scope of sentiment, emotion, public speaking and writing to the scope of planning, organizing, programming, preparing and building proposals and charities. The scope of da'wah has gotten wider with plenty of experiences and a wide range of communication approaches (uslub). The need for da'wah and its demands are extremely crucial. Such endeavor is necessary to restore the glory of Islam as in the days of the Prophet Rasulullah SAW and his Companions so that it remains relevant and has the ability to handle the spirit of da'wah with all the people in Malaysia.

Key Words: *Da'wah, Strategic Method, Transformation Challenges*

Introduction

The da'wah approach used by the preachers depends on the target audience in order to achieve the goals (Abdul Halim El-Muhammady: 1992). Changes in society result in the change of da'wah method to gain people's interest to Islam. The emphasis on understanding and the execution of da'wah is meant to build spiritual strength. It is done by highlighting the sources of revelation, namely the Quran and Hadith as the main references in solving problems and issues within the society. They need to be aware of the failures within today's system of practices and they should feel that something needs to be done to save the

civilization. Preachers also need to emphasize on the aspect of morality and attitude as the Muslims are losing their true identity. If a society neglects the moral aspects, the outcome will be catastrophic and unfortunate. Missionary responsibility should not be placed on a single group, such as the ulama and religious educators. All parties should move together to continue the legacy of the Prophet Rasulullah SAW by playing their respective roles in preaching according to their expertise and advantages as well as guidelines set in Islam.

The Mission of Dakwah Transformation

Identifying the mission of da'wah is an important issue. Without knowing the purpose of da'wah clearly, it will not be well-organized and unsuccessful. Every Muslim, especially the preachers should know exactly where the mission leads as well as its phases. To set the mission of da'wah, the first question that must be taken into consideration is on what purpose human beings are created on this earth?

Why mankind was created?

Allah SWT had clearly stated in surah al-Dzhariyat;56.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.

When deciphering the verse, Sayyid Qutb explained that the existence of man in this world has a certain purpose. It may be accomplished by performing a task already set. The task is to be devoted to Allah SWT, during which there are slaves (creation) and God (Creator), then slaves should worship God and God is to be worshiped.

Muhammad Ali al-Sabuni mentioned that through this verse, Allah explained the purpose of the creation of beings, which is mankind and jinn was made to worship Allah SWT and to obey Him. The purpose of the human beings is to worship Allah SWT and abandon the worship of other creations. Hence, one of the missions of da'wah is to make people worship only Allah SWT.

What is worship? What is meant by worship that becomes the purpose of human creation? According to the Arabic language dictionary, worship is referred to as devout accompanied by humility. Ibn Taimiyyah explained that worship is a word that comprises of

all actions and behaviours that gain God's pleasure. They exist in words and deeds, both expressed and hidden. They include performing prayers, zakat, pilgrimage, fasting, being honest, keeping promises and trust, being kind to both parents, keeping relationships, being patient, feeling gratitude and rejecting things prohibited by Allah. These matters are all parts of worship.

Sayyid Qutb explained that the concept of worship which is the task of human beings to achieve their mission is not merely by performing religious rituals; but it is also in the duty of man to be the caliph of Allah in the world. Thus, the meaning of worship is found in two aspects, which are the firmness to the understanding of being devoted to Allah in one's soul, as well as the convergence to Allah in every intuition, behaviour and lifestyle accompanied by sincerity.

From the above statements it can be concluded that worship represents all actions and behaviour of a person due to his obedience to Allah with all his heart, by either obeying Allah or abandoning His prohibitions. Since human beings are meant to worship Allah, then worship is part of the mission of da'wah.

Leading to Prosperity

People also invite others towards the well-being and pleasure of Allah SWT by guiding them from the darkness of disbelief to the light of faith. As Allah said in surah al-Maidah:16

يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (١٦)

By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darkness into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.

In accordance to the verse above, Rashid Rida explained that the Islamic religion delivered by the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W can save people from misery and sorrow in the world and the hereafter, to the safety and contentment in both worlds. It also prevents people from the obscurity of worshipping other creations and superstitions to the sacred light of faith far from the shackles of religious and worldly conquest. It can also bring people to the right path which is the main reason for the introduction of Islam to all mankind.

The explanation above indicates that da'wah is meant to bring mankind to salvation, goodness and happiness in the world and in the hereafter.

The happiness in the perspective of da'wah is happiness that has its own meaning, whether it is for a shorter time or longer. The happiness that the da'wah aims to achieve is a meaningful one rather than temporary. Happiness that becomes the mission of da'wah is the happiness of a person which involves the full needs of mankind. Based on that mission, Islam has placed many things on each of its followers, either for the sake of present life in this world or later in the hereafter.

Creating a Favourable State

Contentment and salvation are unlikely to be achieved without a proper form of control based on an appropriate and just rule, and taking into account the needs of mankind. Hence, a favoured state called the Islamic government to control its people fairly, equitably and accordingly is required.

For that reason, establishing the Islamic government and appointing an *imam* or a leader is one of the stages on achieving the mission of da'wah. Hence, the Islamic government is itself one of the stages in the mission of da'wah. An Islamic state is unlikely to be a reality if Muslims themselves are weak and diverged from one another. Meanwhile, the weaknesses experienced by Muslims arise from the problem of understanding and appreciation of Islam. As a result, the enhancement of understanding and appreciation of Islam among Muslims must be done through da'wah. The purpose has then become a mission of da'wah.

Generating Strengths

At this stage, the objective of da'wah is to empower the Muslims in several aspects. These aspects need to be empowered through da'wah, which include:

1. The power of faith
2. The power of knowledge
3. The power of deeds
4. The power of education
5. The power of unity

6. The power of economy
7. The power of politic
8. The power of jihad/army
9. The power of discipline
10. The power of science and technology
11. The power of physical and health

The efforts in da'wah should be arranged in such way to build empowerment among the Muslims.

Obtaining the Light of Faith

The aim of da'wah towards non-Muslims is to save them from forever worship other creations and bring them into the light of faith. This can be seen in the word of Allah SWT in surah Ibrahim:1

الرَّحْمَٰنُ أَنْزَلَنَاكَ إِلَيْنَا لِنُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (١)

Alif, Laam, Raa'. (This is) a Book which We have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), that you might bring mankind out of darkness into the light by permission of their Lord – to the path of the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy.

The aim of da'wah towards non-Muslims as an initial step is to introduce Islam so that they may feel attracted to it. The mission of da'wah consists of several stages. It begins with the empowerment of the Muslims or escapism from the shackles of disbelief for non-Muslims. While the final stage, which is also the ultimate motivation of all the struggle in Islam is the pleasure of Allah and His retribution.

Having the Pleasure of Allah SWT

The ultimate goal to achieve through da'wah is to get the pleasure of Allah and His Syura, as Allah had described in surah al-Fajri:28-30.

ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (٢٨) فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي (٢٩) وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي (٣٠)

Return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing (to Him)! And enter among My (righteous) servants. And enter My Paradise!

Based on the statements that have been explained, it can be concluded that the aims to be achieved through da'wah have several stages, which are:

1. Bring non-Muslims to Islam
2. Improve the Muslims' understanding and appreciation towards the religion as a way to develop self-sustainability and strength
3. Develop a favourable country
4. Aim for security and prosperity
5. Gain Allah's pleasure and his Paradise

Method (Technique) and Strategy of Da'wah Transformation

What is the method of da'wah? What is its relationship with *uslub* and *manhaj*? A method means how to do something or a system. It originates from the English language which means system, sequence or technique. The term method is used similarly in both Malay and English languages. The method of da'wah involves any matters relating to the representation of Islam and eliminating all barriers that might bring harm to this mission. Da'wah should follow certain methods; otherwise it may end up in vain. Hence, the suitable method of da'wah is through demonstration as an approach to enable the target audience to receive the message with a clear understanding and full consciousness, without compulsion, pressure and deceit. Therefore, the principle of da'wah method is as follows:

1. Clear and comprehensible explanation
2. Conducted in stages
3. Simple in nature
4. Compassionate
5. Rationale behind orders and forbiddance
6. Suitable with the target audience

Clear and Comprehensible Explanation

All the lessons or messages delivered to the target audience should be clear and comprehensible, so that it does not lead to ambiguity and misunderstandings. In this case, Allah explained in His words: surah al-Maidah:92 and al-Nahl 35.

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَاحْذَرُوا فَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا عَلَى رَسُولِنَا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware. And if you turn away – then know that upon Our Messenger is only (the responsibility for) clear notification.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا عَبَدْنَا مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ نَحْنُ وَلَا آبَاؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَمْنَا مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ كَذَلِكَ فَعَلَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَهَلْ عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

And those who associate others with Allah say, “If Allah had willed, we would not have worshipped anything other than Him, neither we nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything through other than Him.”

Thus did those do before them. So is there upon the messengers except (the duty of) clear notification?

These two verses describe the task of the Prophet s.a.w, which is to convey the religion clearly and explicitly. In a hadith narrated by Aisyah r.a.: Rasulullah s.a.w’s words is one that can clearly be understood by anyone who hears it. The above descriptions evidently show that clear explanations are the basis of the delivery of Islam to the target audience.

Conducted in Stages

Da'wah delivers teaching to the devotees in stages instead of at once. Its purpose is not to burden the people who receive da'wah. As an example, the obligations that Muslims must perform are not being taught all at once. Orders or commands are passed down one at a time. This is similar to the ban of liquor which is done by phases. This is the method used in Islam as a delicate way of teaching the target audience.

Simple in Nature

Islamic religion is presented to the target audience in a simple way, because Islam itself is simple which is comparable to the human nature. Through this religion, Allah wishes for ease of humanity especially in the flexibility of jurisprudence on the basis of rational reasons. In this case, Allah spoke in surah al-Baqarah:185.

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ

Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship.

The Prophet SAW had told his Companions to treat those who had just converted to Islam with kindness and compassion.

From these verses and hadith, it is understood that Islamic law is not rigid. It has flexibility and convenience according to the state of the target audience. Performing da'wah to the society can be done in the form of education channeled through places of worship such as mosques and surau. Likewise, it can also be done through educational institutions such as universities, schools, religious educational huts and so on. Apart from providing consultation and module, the use of cultural aspects and lifestyle is also one of the ways we can convey Islam in a simple way, such as the way we dress and socialize, hygiene, and entertainment.

Compassionate

Allah had said in surah al-Imran:159

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لَنتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ
وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

So by mercy from Allah, (O Muhammad), you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude (in speech) and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah.

Indeed, Allah loves those who rely (upon Him).

Besides facilitating Islam for certain community, the Prophet s.a.w also reminded his companions to be kind and have mercy. As he said: give good and happy news and do not leave them astray.

The statement above indicates that da'wah is delivered with kindness and compassion towards the target audience.

Reasons Behind Orders and Forbiddance

There are necessary rationales for every order and forbiddance in Islam. For instance, there are good reasons and purposes on why five times prayers are made as an obligation to the Muslims. Allah mentioned in surah al-Ankabut:45

Based on the verse, it clearly shows the benefits obtained by performing the prayers.

Suitable with the Target Audience

Messages brought through da'wah are suitable with the intelligence level of a target group. To explain further, Saidina Ali had advised:

“Speak to others based on their understanding (in such way that is comprehensive to them)”.

Thus, the level of understanding of the target audience should be taken into account in a da'wah for desired outcomes.

Current Challenges and Solutions

Seeking history by observing how da'wah had been able to spread Islam throughout the world, it is found that there were not few obstacles that the Messenger of Allah had gone through to ensure the mankind's acceptance towards this new religion. However, he had been equipped with divine revelation and unique advantages when dealing with rejections from his people. Armed with the Qur'an and al-Sunnah as guidance, today's preachers continue the delegation of da'wah left by Rasullullah saw with more challenging hurdles and rejections.

The rapid development of the new era with modernization and globalization has made the da'wah more challenging and at the same time force Islamic preachers to work harder to

ensure that the act of spreading righteousness continues. The flow of globalization and the boundless world have shaped 'an open-minded society' while at the same time providing a great opportunity to the spread of da'wah. In addition, such situation also requires the transformation in preaching to keep up with the pace of the modern times.

In general, da'wah is seen as a verbal preaching activity in mosques, praying areas, and any other places that can bring speakers and listeners together, but now the medium is seen to be evolving in parallel with the development of technology, such as via social media, video conferencing and others. The advanced technology has brought with it new values and culture that include clothing, food, perceptions, thoughts and lifestyle.

The values and lifestyles have a slight influence on the process of emphasizing Islam by local preachers. In addition, the current globalization has also brought some new agenda, which among them are *Islamophobia*, *hedonism* and liberalism.

Islamophobia is a term that refers to prejudice or discrimination against Islam or Muslims. This term was first known around the 1980s, but has been increasingly used after the World Trade Center attack on 11 September 2001. This term is commonly associated with the feeling of hatred, fear of Islam, Muslims and Islamic culture based on prejudice, as well as inducing some people to prosecute Islam as violent, undisciplined, no tolerance and other negative images. These misconceptions and negative responses have indirectly made da'wah activities extremely challenging because people are afraid and refuse any reading materials related to Islam, hence making it difficult to reach out to them.

Whereas the hedonism which is spread across the country and turns teenagers into a major target has led them far out of the true teachings of Islam. Hedonism aims at nothing but achieving the personal pleasure and enjoyment of life and it has been the one to introduce extreme entertainment and materialism in the local community. This agenda from the west has been accepted without any restrictions, though it clearly shows the damage that will be brought to the future generation in this country. The new generation of millenniums cloaked by this hedonism culture might become a generation of closed minds and morally disheartened for being immensely attached to the beauty of the world and being a servant of entertainment and materialism. Hedonism is also seen as an agenda to undermine the Muslims, hence become an obstacle to the process of forming a favourable and better generation.

In addition, there is another equally challenging obstacle which is liberalism. This stream of thought emerges from Islamic reformation that claims it is based on the basic principles of Islam but differs in interpreting the applications of core Islamic values in modern life rather than being conservative. Some features that can be identified with liberal tendencies include, granting autonomy to individuals to interpret Quran and al-Sunnah, granting equal rights of gender in all aspects of religious rituals, such as women can lead both men and women in prayers, as well as being too open minded in the acceptance of modern culture. This is seen as contradicting fundamental Islamic teachings, which the interpretation of the Quran and al-Sunnah can only be practiced by the scholars, including gender boundaries in some areas.

Challenges and obstacles will require mental and physical readiness and resilience among the preachers. In fact, they also need to arm themselves with a solid knowledge to deal with the issues raised out of current developments. The longer the society becomes vulnerable to the problems, the more issues will arise that require relevant and sound solution. The methods of delivery also need to be intensified or even modified to suit the demands and needs of the community. This is to ensure they love and be keen to be the audience of da'wah. Communities need to be approached with tolerance and prudence rather than blaming them for any problems and mishaps that occur. They need to be encouraged to return to Islamic religion by showing good Islamic values without discrimination against anyone. They also need to be exposed to the beauty of Islam so that they will be happy to practice Islam as their sole religion.

Conclusion

Da'wah is an effort to encourage others to Islam. All Muslims need to have a sense of responsibility to preach despite having to face all sorts of challenges in the modern era. Nonetheless, every preacher must get himself ready and properly equipped with strong Islamic knowledge, as well as studying the methods that fit the background of the target audience. The vast da'wah activities should be followed by intensive education and appropriate methods. These activities are some of the efforts to continue the legacy of the prophets' preaches and also the sense of responsibility to implement *islah* which should cover all range of communities. The cooperation from all Muslims is needed to spread the elements

of Islam by giving true understanding of the religion and expressing its goodness in every aspect.

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