

Dawah mission in the 21st century

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Introduction

As a principle, in order to know about a thing, we must first learn about what it is not. The same rule applies to *La ilaha illallah* (*There is no god but One God*). This phrase which forms the basis of the creed of monotheism begins with “La” or denial – denial of all those whom one held as deities and resting one’s faith on One God alone.

Likewise, to understand *Dawah-ilal-lah*, we will have to first know what dawah work *is not* and then *what it is* will become clear. Dawah work does not aim at feeding the pride of Muslims; it neither seeks to establish the supremacy of Islam nor it is concerned with *milli* or community work. The aim of dawah work is to make people aware about the Creation Plan of God, that is, to make man aware about the purpose of creation, death and life after death along with providing answers to all such questions that mar the human mind. Those who do not understand this spirit of dawah work, know nothing about it. Doing some other work in the name of dawah work will not earn them the credit of it.

Erroneous interpretation of dawah work

I am often asked, “*You have been doing dawah work since long, how many people did you convert?*” Those who do such a question know nothing about the dawah mission. Asking such a question is tantamount to applying a wrong criterion to judge my mission. My mission is *not* conversion. It is to warn man of the impending doom. The Quran says

Blessed be He who has revealed the criterion [the Quran] to His servant that he may warn the nations. (25:1)

The literal meaning of *inzaar*, an Arabic word, is “warning”. Quran is a Book of warning and *not* a book of conversion. It must be understood that conversion is a choice of the other person, it is *not* our target. Our target is to make people aware of the reality. Every person has been given freedom by God. Our limit finishes when we transmit the message, then it is upto the addressee to decide for himself. Someone else’s choice cannot be our target.

Dawah work is obligatory

Acting as intermediaries, the prophets used to receive guidance from God and convey it to the people.

We sent our messengers in succession. (23:44)

This process continued for thousands of years until the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad, with whom the chain of prophethood ended. But, even after the end of the prophethood, the conveying of God's message to the people had, and still has to be continued. Generation after generation, innumerable people are born and, before they die, they must be told about the reality of life and the divine commandments. After the death of the Prophet, this responsibility had to be discharged by the Muslims. It is a *farz-e-aen* (obligatory) for Muslims and not a *farz-e-kafaya* (optional) as some may like to believe.

Now, with the end of the prophethood, the entire Muslim community stands between God and the people, a position formerly occupied by the prophets. This is not a reward for superiority but a massive responsibility, so that all of the Muslims' social and community-based planning must of necessity be dawah-oriented. Muslims should be most eager to carry out this mission, should make it their principal goal and be ready to sacrifice their all for it. That is why there is a two-fold reward for *Ummat-e-Muhammadi* – to understand the Creation Plan themselves and to make others aware about it.

Prophet Muhammad carried out dawah work for 23 years and passed away in 632 A.D in Medina. Two months before his demise, the Prophet Muhammad addressed a gathering of over one lac companions at Mount Arafat during the Hajj-at-ul-Wida (Final Pilgrimage). He said

O people, no Prophet will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore O people, and understand my words which I convey to you. All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people. (Ibn Hisham)

This address of the Prophet filled the companions with such zeal that they left their hearths and went out to far off lands for doing dawah work. This process was passed on to the companions of companions and likewise, coming through generations has reached us. The mission of this process is to spread the message of God to mankind.

Prophet Muhammad on Isra/ Meraj

Isra means “to take from one place to another”

Holy is He who took His servant by night from the sacred place of worship [at Mecca] to the remote house of worship [at Jerusalem] – the precincts of which We have blessed, so that We might show him some of Our signs. (17:1)

This verse describes *Isra* – the event during which God took the Prophet Muhammad from the Mecca mosque to the mosque in Jerusalem (almost 1,400 kilometers apart) so that He [God] would show him, His Signs. Now the question is which were those signs for which God had to take the Prophet in such an unnatural manner from Mecca to Jerusalem. It is believed that he was taken amidst the olive trees to visit some buildings, but this is an irrelevant description. Such a journey of taking a Prophet mysteriously and unnaturally, marks an extraordinary event and as such should have been for an extraordinary reason.

After much study, I have understood that in the above verse, the term “sign” refers to the process of *Isra* itself. It does not connote the visit to an architectural monument. Let me explain why. Through the process of *Isra*, God gave man a glad tiding for the future – about the coming of the age of communication. This prediction was made to make man aware that man will not continue to traverse on asses and horses (as was the case in 7th century, A.D.) and that means of communication and travel would undergo an extraordinary transformation.

This prediction was extremely important because the Word of God which had got preserved through the tireless efforts of the Prophet and his Companions had to now be spread to mankind. It was to support this declaration that *Isra* took place whereby the Prophet was informed in advance about the unfolding of an age that will enable global dissemination of the Word of God.

Here, one must understand a principle that applies to the Quran and Hadith. That is, some verses and traditions are applicable as and when revealed or narrated, for example, the verses pertaining to prayer and fasting. However, some other verses of the Quran or Hadith spell a future course of action. For example, in the seventh century, it was revealed in the Quran that the body of the Pharaoh has been preserved so that it may become a lesson for the future generations. The discovery of the mummified body of the Pharaoh took place only in the 17th century.

So We shall save your body this day, so that you may serve as a sign for those who come after you: for many people are indeed heedless of Our signs. (10:92)

Setting in of the age of communication

Isra was a prediction for the setting in of an age of communication in future that will enable the spread of the Word of God, globally.

This prediction also highlights that dawah work, which was initiated by the Companions was limited to local level due to the lack of means of global communication and lack of knowledge of geography. I would cite here an instance of a *Tabaieen* (companion of a companion), **Uqba bin Nafe**, which illustrates the zealous spirit with which *Sahaba* (companions) and *Tabaieen* (companions of companions) did dawah work. After traversing through the terrains of the African continent, when *Nafe* along with a group of companions, reached the shores of Atlantic Ocean, he could only see the endless ocean before him. Disheartened by the halt, he prayed to God in these words,

O God! If I knew of any other human habitation that lay beyond the [Atlantic] ocean, I would have cast myself into this ocean till the Word of God spread all over the world

[Ae Allah! Agar mein janta ki is samandar ke us paar bhi ek duniya hai jahan log rehte hain toh main is samandar mein ghus padta yahan tak ke saari duniya apne Rab se bakhabar ho jaye] (Al Bidaya)

Despite being imbued with the spirit, the companions and the companions of the companion could not undertake global dawah work because of lack of means of communication and other resources. But today, the prediction of *Isra* has actualized and the voice which resonated at Arafat in 7th century A.D is reverberating yet again.

The mission of the Prophet Muhammad was neither motivated by politics nor plunder. The agenda was one-point – to make people aware of the Creation Plan of God. Those who listened to him at Arafat that day spread the Message as much as they could and devoted their lives towards the cause of dawah work. In this age, when the world has become a global village and there exist no restrictions, the followers of Islam are required to spread the message of God by availing the opportunities that have opened up. It is the time to fulfill the unfinished mission of the Companions. In fact, *it is a thrilling idea that we are destined to finish the unfinished mission of the Companions*

The opportunities are shouting that in today's times, *Isra* has become a reality. The print and electronic media have opened avenues to bring to fruition this Hadith

No house – big or small – will remain but God's Word shall enter into it. (Musnad Ahmad)

This Hadith was in terms of potential or opportunities that would open up to spread the message of God, globally. It is now up to the present-day man to turn this potential into actual. It is important to understand that if the message could be auto-disseminated, no Prophet would have ever come. But, history is waiting for that group, which will accomplish this unfinished mission of the companions. Contrarily, those who consider establishing Muslim superiority to be the aim of dawah mission, know nothing.

Threats to dawah mission

Dawah work is a mission for which God has pledged His Succour

God will surely help him who helps His cause (22:40)

The threat therefore, is not from the point of view of being source-less. When Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr were the only two people in the *Cave of the Bull (Ghar-e-Thawr)* and people had reached there to kill them, Prophet Muhammad said to Abu Bakr

What do you think O' Abu Bakr about two people if God is the third with them?

Ae Abu Bakr! Tumhara un don ke bare mein kya khayal hai, jiske sath teesra allah ho (Ibn Hisham)

Drawing from the above Hadith, we can understand that in the case of dawah work as well, there are two roles - *dayee* (addressor) and *madu* (addressee) – the third amongst them being God Himself. Rephrasing the above, I would say,

What do you think about two people (*dayee* and *madu*) if God is the third with them?

Un don (dayee aur madu) ke bare mein kya khayal hai, jiske sath teesra allah ho

The promise of divine blessing is an extraordinary one; it does not emanate from oratory but real fact, which indicates that no one has the power to obstruct the mission of God. Those involved with the dawah mission must not consider them as helpless, because God is at their backing.

The threat to the dawah mission, however may arise on two accounts - *Rukuun* (external influence) and *Tafaruq* (internal difference). Let me explain them separately.

Explaining, *Rukuun* , the Quran says

Do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest the Fire touch you. (11:113)

The external influence (*Rukuun*) referred to in the above verse is the “tilt” arising on account of performance of dawah work and failing to get adequate response. When this happens, people convert dawah mission into *milli-work*, and start feeding the pride of Muslims so that they get fame, money and stage. Such people start speaking what the community wants to hear and exert their energy in empowerment of Muslims. This shift, marked by succumbing of the proponents to external influence, is called *rukuun*. This is a dangerous situation, which believers must save themselves from. According to a Hadith, when the above verse was revealed, the Prophet started feeling very burdened as a huge responsibility now lay upon his shoulders.

Explaining *Tafarukk*, the Quran says

Hold fast to the cord of God and let nothing divide you. (3:103)

It is a fact that every person is a special creation and as such differences are a part of nature. Being a part of nature, how can differences become an excuse to divide the team? To do so is a dangerous thing. Therefore, the principle to follow is, “*if you have a good excuse, do not use it!*” In other words, the members of a mission must *remain united despite differences* and hold no negative feelings about each other. Holding such negative emotions is tantamount to a *pre-suicidal* act.

According to a Hadith, on one occasion, the Prophet Muhammad prostrated for an unusually long time. When the companions present, asked him the reason for doing so, he said that he asked for many things from God in his prayer. God granted all except this one – may there be no confrontation in the community (*ummat mein ikhtilaaf na ho*) and people do not make difference as an excuse and stay united.

The Prophet had prayed because he knew that few people cannot accomplish big feats; huge accomplishments require team effort. And within a team, differences are bound to arise, which may serve as obstacles to the unity of the team. But God did not accept the Prophetic prayer because managing differences is a test paper for man; to abolish the test paper was against the Creation Plan of God.

Global Dawah Work

Global dawah work is the greatest task to be accomplished in the world. This task entails rigorous team work, which is possible only when people have the courage to not make difference an excuse.

Even the companions of the Prophet were fraught with differences, to the extent that they even had differences with the Prophet. But they did not let the differences become as a cause of conflict; they could accomplish the gigantic task because they remained united with each other. For example, at the time of distributing the war booty of *Hunayn*, the Prophet gave it to the *Muhajirs* and did not give it to the *Ansaars*. The companions felt that justice was not done in this case and this feeling was so strong that an *Ansaar* told the Prophet that he had not exercised justice. However, such a situation did not disunite the companions. Upon deeper deliberations, the *Ansaars* realized that the act of the Prophet must have been reason-bound as he [the Prophet] had not taken anything for himself either.

A *dayee* must always remember that the person who gets up for *dawah* mission is the most sourceful person of the world but he *must* save himself from *rukuun* (external influence) and *tafaruq* (internal difference). And to adhere to this, a dayee has a thrilling reason that, *he is completing that mission which was left unfinished by the Companions*. This thrill strengthens the resolve of a dayee and makes him forget all differences.

All the prophets of God treaded the path of accomplishing dawah work however they could not accomplish it due to lack of global means of communication. It is most thrilling for those of us in the 21st century as we have the chance to fulfill the unfulfilled prophetic mission. This thrill is big enough to make us forget all differences and engage in a united effort towards accomplishing dawah work.

Here, am reminded of my visit to a leather factory years ago. There was an unbearable odour at the factory, which I could not withstand. I asked the owner how he stayed there. He replied, “When I get paid for it, I forget it all!” [*Jab paisa aata hai, toh sab kuch bhul jata hai!*]

This must be the thinking of a dayee. The sight of a gigantic mission must make him forget all petty differences and strife. It is said that *to make small a line, a bigger line must be drawn parallel to it*. Likewise, when Satan attacks a dayee, he must keep sight of the great mission that he is destined to accomplish. Thinking this will instill such thrill that the *dayee* will forget everything else!

Conclusion

On one hand, God instituted the age of communication for accomplishing *dawah work* and on the other hand, He instilled the spirit of enquiry within man.

Despite witnessing unprecedented material development, the present-day man has not succeeded in eliminating despair from his life. The distorted version of religions could not satisfy his search and man continues to live in immense dissatisfaction.

A Brit couple, deeply influenced by the idea of social service, came to India to serve the poor and needy. But their endeavour did not give them peace of mind. A CPS team member gave him a copy of the Quran, upon receiving which he exclaimed, “*I always wanted to know the other version of Truth!*” The biggest example of this is Mother Teresa, who as her biographer records “*died in agony!*”

It is worth noting that every person is speaking the same language – he who has money, who is doing social (or welfare) work, who is a proponent of a faith – all are dissatisfied and their mind is yearning to find another version of truth as the one they have does not address their mind. In effect, the spirit of enquiry is lying dormant within every man. This alludes to the divine principle that nothing except God-realisation will lead man to satisfaction.

To complete the arrangement, God preserved His word, led to the creation of an authentic history, brought about the age of communication and imbued man with the spirit of enquiry. The very dissatisfaction that man grapples with is what has made him a seeker.

For those who have embarked themselves on the mission on spreading the Word of God, all opportunities are ripe, they only need to get up and disseminate the message!

May God accept us and make us live and die for the cause of this mission!

Question – Answers

Q1: As far as his material needs are concerned, man does not remain contented? Then why is that for his religion man blindly follows the practice and beliefs followed by his ancestors?

A: The very concept of religion being a “sacred” discipline is responsible for promoting such thinking. Sacredness was made synonymous to superstition, which sought to curb questioning. Our mission made “thinking” a part of religion, for the first time. This approach was amiss for years. Likewise, the heart-based school of spirituality contributed to the above belief. According to our mission, mind-based and not heart-based (as was thought earlier) spirituality is the source of unveiling man’s potential. More than the common man, the responsibility lies with the clerics who derived such wrong interpretations.

Q2: Can or should we ask donation at organisation level for dawah work?

A: It is legitimate to ask for donations for dawah work, even the Prophet did it. The only problem is that a precise system of accounting should be in place with clear accountability on the part of the manager/ treasurer. Whenever the donor wants, he can come and see how the funds are being utilised. If the above can be managed, donations for doing dawah work can be sought.

Q3: What is the role of dua in a dawah process?

A: According to a Hadith

Dua is worship (Mishkat)

Prayer may alter destiny [Muqaddarat ko sirf dua badalti hai] (Tirmidhi)

Dua is neither *milli-work* nor an act of announcement. In the true sense, it is the act of well-wishing for the *madu*.

Q4: While explaining taleef-e-qalb, I gave the example of the Prophet making Jewish qiblah as their own. My addressee replied saying that the direction of the qiblah was repealed by Quran, and as such this example is no longer valid. Please comment.

A: It must be understood that some examples are given for teaching a principle. In this case, for about sixteen months, Prophet Muhammad made the Jewish *qiblah* as theirs. This example does not follow that the present-day Muslims should make the Jewish *qiblah* as their own. It means that a *dayee* can go to any limits (within the limits of legitimacy) to do *taleef-e-qalb* of the *madu*.

In the context of this particular example, it must also be understood that form and principle are different. In today's times, the form of the above verse does not apply because even if a dayee makes the direction of prayer of the madu as his qiblah, that would not amount to *taleef-e-qalb*. It must therefore be understood that *taleef-e-qalb* is a principle, not a form and as such is an outcome of thinking process.

Q5: According to a Hadith, if a fly falls in a drink, immerse it completely and then drink it. What does this mean?

A: This Hadith denotes the situation of scarcity of resources. If the drink is available in limited quantity and you throw it away, what will you drink? Medina likewise, was a town with scanty resources and as such everything had to be used carefully. People who do not apply wisdom and live in the psyche of abundance will not be able to understand its meaning.

Q6: Was the primary purpose of Meraj only to predict the advent of age of communication?

A: Some consider *Meraj* and *Isra* to be one, some hold it to be others. My answer was in context of *Isra* and not *Meraj*.

Q7: When people's world view is so different from one another, then what efforts can be made to unite people towards a singular mission?

A: The discovery that difference is not an evil becomes the starting point in this case. A boon, difference gives you a point of discussion and leads to intellectual development.

Q8: We wish to open Islamic banking to eradicate sociological imbalance? Please comment.

A: To my mind, *Islamic banking* is a romantic idea. It is neither Islam nor banking. The need of the hour is to provide an ideological framework to people so as to develop their thinking. Material causes can be striven for if people work hard.

Q9: According to a Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad said, "I feel the breeze, cool wind coming from India" Please explain

A: Caliph Umar said:

Jo chahta hai is blessing ko hasil karna ki who khair-e-ummat bane toh who wesa kaam karein.

In other words, to be rewarded like Companions, do the work they did, that is, do dawah work in India and support those who set out to accomplish this task.

Meri ummat ke do giroh hain jinehain allah ne dozakh se najaat de di hai – who jo India mein ghazwa (dawah campaign) karenge aur who jo Christ ki help karein.

Q10: We know differences should not be made excuses. But how should we stay positive despite negativity arising amidst team members?

A: This is simple – *take it as an opportunity*. There is a great reward if you do something unwillingly. In other words, if you are not willing to do a something and do it solely for God, He will reward you immensely for it. So, when differences emerge and for the sake of God, you don't let it obstruct your mission, you stand to be rewarded by God.

Q11: What is the sign of being sincere while carrying out Ilmi / fikri (academic) tajziya (analysis)?

A: Sincerity cannot be measured objectively but while carrying out the analysis, one must bear in mind whether it is being done for the sake of God or for expressing contempt against the other person.

A person may be sincere in formulating an opinion. But when his opinion is rejected basis facts and if he refuses to admit his mistake, the person is clearly insincere. In other words, if a person cannot say, “*I was wrong*,” in face of clear reason, he is insincere in his approach.

Q12: How can imaan grow?

A: Imaan (faith) grows through *tadabbur/ tafakkur* (contemplation and thinking). The more a person thinks, the more he studies, the more he prays, the more will be the growth in his faith.