

The value of an intellectual audience

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

One important aspect of the Quran is that it is a record of the Prophet's mission. What course of action did the Prophet follow? And how did the previous Prophets proceed? According to the Quranic account, all of the Prophets invariably addressed the intelligentsia of their time. Their first target was the people of intellect. For this reason we see that when the Quran refers to the response of the contemporary people, it always mentions the intellectuals and not the common people. For example, in a verse in the chapter entitled *Al-A'raf* (The Heights), the Quran says: "But the leading men of his people said, 'Truly, we see that you are obviously lost in error!'" (7:60).

Why did the Prophets opt for this method? The reason is that the intelligentsia are the representatives of their societies. This method is very important and for very well-known reasons. The first reason is that the method of the dawah mission is vertical rather than horizontal in nature. You can reach down from the intelligentsia to the common people, but if you try to reach up from the common people to the intelligentsia, it would not produce any significant result. It is a law of nature that a mission always percolates down from the intelligentsia to the common people: it is always the intelligentsia who influence other people and not vice versa.

The Prophet of Islam also followed this pattern. At that time Mecca was the centre of Arabian leadership. The Prophet gave his message to the leaders of Mecca, who were also the leaders of the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. This strategy worked. First, the best minds of Mecca embraced Islam, then after a period of some years, the entire Arabia entered the fold of Islam.