

Islamic Dawah in the 21st Century

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In today's newspaper there is an article about an incident which occurred in Mexico. About 31 children died when a day care centre caught fire in Mexico. A police commander on seeing this incident shouted, "Where is God? Where is God?" This cry of the policeman deeply moved me and I thought that had there been members of CPS in Mexico they would have immediately put up a book stall telling these distraught men and women that 'God is here! God is here!'

The Irony

As I was reflecting upon these words, I was reminded of a Hadith according to which,
"No house on Earth – big or small – will remain but God's Word shall enter into it."
(Musnad Ahmad)

Referring to its interpretation in *Mishkat*, makes it clear that the above mentioned Hadith is a prediction of the future; according to it, the future will be for Islam. Some people think this Hadith predicts that Islamic rule will be established everywhere in the world. In their interpretation, this Hadith means that Islam will enter every house either by force or by no force. This is an incorrect interpretation of the Hadith. The correct interpretation is that the Word of God will enter people's houses, *either willingly or unwillingly*.

The above Hadith is often quoted to justify the political interpretation of Islam. Those who believe in it think that the *Mahdi* or the Messiah will come in later times and the Muslims will do *jihad* under him to establish Islamic rule in the world. The irony here is stark. Muslims believe that the Messiah hasn't come as yet but they have undertaken *jihad* already, all by themselves. Such an approach indicates contradiction in their thinking as when on the one hand, they believe that they will do *jihad* under the leadership of the Messiah and on the other hand, without acknowledging anyone as the Mahdi/ Messiah, they have been involved in result-less *jihad* for the last 200 years.

Two opportunities provided by history

It is very important to understand that the above Hadith refers to the coming of a particular age, when opportunities that open up shall be availed and great milestones would be achieved. History gives us the example of two such opportunities that it opened up.

The first opportunity

The first one was during the time of the Prophet of Islam. When the Prophet was in Mecca, the leaders offered him to become the ruler of Mecca. The Meccan leaders wanted the Prophet to become their political leader so that he stopped propagating his mission. The Prophet said to them, *"It's not my mission to attain sovereignty over you."* (Ibn Hisham)

This statement of the Prophet was a very profound one. It was said in the backdrop of the history that began with the sacrifices of Abraham, Hajra and Ishmael. The history initiated by these three gave rise to such immense dawah opportunities which the Prophet and his companions succeeded in availing.

The second opportunity

The present age of communication and multimedia has opened unimaginable opportunities that can be tapped to do dawah work. The prediction in the Hadith – of word of God spreading far and wide - can become reality only by fulfilling certain prerequisites. Such prerequisites existed even at the time of the Prophet, and they do so even today.

Pre-requisites to avail the dawah opportunity

The *first pre-requisite* is that the word of God should be available in the understandable language of the present age. According to a verse in the Quran:

"Each messenger We have sent has spoken in the language of his own people so that he might make the message clear to them." (14:4)

The starting point therefore is to make available the dawah literature in today's idiom. Merely taking the Quran in the Arabic language to people will not make them understand. Since the past 200 years Muslims have engaged themselves in *jihad* (for example, the movement of Muslim Brotherhood, *Al-Jihad fil Islam* (Jihad in Islam) etc., in Libya against Italy etc.) but this struggle has led to no progress. In fact all time which had to be spent in dawah work has been wasted in resultless *jihad*.

The *second pre-requisite* is to avail this age of communication and multimedia to spread the word of God. As the President of America, Barack Obama delivered a speech in Cairo University on June 4, it was heard by millions the world over with simultaneous translations running in twelve different languages. It was a very well organized speech. In fact it will not be wrong to add that such a grand organisation has never happened in history before; neither an emperor nor any Caliph was able to do so. Through Obama, God gave a partial demonstration of how International *dawah* has to be done by Muslims. But it is extremely sad to see that despite possessing such wealth and manpower, Muslims have not taken up dawah work in an organized and big way; they are still lying in deep slumber.

International Dawah

The availing of the opportunities that would lead to international *dawah* work demand a sacrifice - the most necessary condition being patience or *sabr*. Here patience means unilateral patience. According to a verse in the Quran, the Prophet is told,

"And for the sake of Lord (and dawah work), be patient." (74:7)

This verse means that if there is no patience, there would no peace and the normal condition between the addresser and addressee would get disturbed resulting in no *dawah* work. No patience or no avoidance leads to the concept of "*we and they*", a situation that is extremely unfavourable for *dawah* work. The life of Prophet Muhammad exemplifies the exercise of unilateral patience under all circumstances.

Life of Prophet Muhammad

There are two phases of the life of the Prophet: Meccan and Medinan. In both the periods, the Prophet adopted unilateral peace. Unilateral peace means to avoid any form of negativity that may arise for anyone for the sake of *dawah* work.

Undeclared Peace Treaty

In Mecca, Prophet followed the policy of adopting an undeclared peace treaty. For example, in Mecca the Prophet neither asked for a share in *Darul-nadwa* (equivalent to today's parliament) nor got into a tussle about the presence of 360 idols in the Kabah, he concentrated his efforts on doing *dawah* work alone. In this way the Prophet avoided all possible points of conflict or confrontation in Mecca and solely engaged in doing *dawah* for thirteen years. It was possible because Prophet had adopted the policy of maintaining 100% peace even without any formal announcement. In fact it was during this period of his life that Prophet got the companionship of top Sahabas.

Declared Peace Treaty

When the Prophet reached Medina, he neither made any complaints against the Meccans, nor did he demand anything. Rather he immediately engaged himself in establishing peace with various tribes (Ibn Kathir). Thus in Medina the Prophet entered into declared peace treaties to have an environment conducive to carrying out *dawah* work. It is important to note that peace in both the periods was attained at the cost of patience (*zulm par sabr*). The importance of exercising patience can be well understood from reading about the initial days when people came in the fold of Islam and the patience they adopted towards the atrocities meted out to them. When for instance, the slaves came within the fold of Islam, their Masters became very cruel towards them. According to a tradition, a person named Yasir and his family were being beaten up by his Master because they had accepted Muhammad's religion. Prophet Muhammad happened to pass from this place and all he said to Yasir was:

"Exercise patience O Yasir! For you shall be rewarded paradise." (Ibn Hisham)

Today, we are in an age of international peace treaty. All the countries of the world are members of the international organisation, The United Nations, which works towards promoting peace and harmony between nations. This international peace can be opens up a plethora of opportunities for doing dawah work, provided we take no aggressive or violent steps.

For international *dawah* we need to have knowledge of geography. Long back a person called Al Idrisi made a map of the world on the basis of his conjectures. That map was no doubt inadequate in view of the world we know today. It was due to the effort of Americans that today we have access to maps that would provide us knowledge about the remotest locations. According to a tradition, a companion *Uqbah bin Nafe* undertook a strenuous journey (in 63 Hijri) to spread the Word of God. He was so passionate about doing dawah work that after having traversed entire Africa when he reached the shore of the Atlantic Ocean and could see nothing but an endless spread of ocean ahead of him, he let out a heart wrenching cry saying, *"O! God had I known that people reside even beyond the ocean, I would have jumped into the ocean with my horse, to spread the message to these people."* This was impossible in the 7th century as very little was known about the geography of our world. However, this is possible in the 21st century due to the technology developed by Europeans and Americans.

Conclusion

According to a Hadith,

"God will take help from non-believers to strengthen this religion." (Al-Bukhari)

This Hadith speaks of a process which was initiated from the time of Hz. Hajra and culminated with Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. And the revolution that was brought about by the Prophet and his companions culminated in this age of modern civilization brought about by the West which has opened up unlimited opportunities for international dawah. Democracy for example, is a divine gift due to which there are no political wars and opportunities for *dawah* were available but Muslims in their sheer ignorance started fighting against democracy.

Earlier religion was attached to politics. Hence the religious people were biased and closed. Openness was brought about after religion was detached from politics. Due to this openness people happily take *dawah* material which is offered to them. Also with the coming of science, spirit of enquiry has come. People are inquisitive to know everything, also religion.

The speech delivered by President Obama entered the houses of people all over the world - willingly or unwillingly. That is, it was telecasted even in the houses of those who were not interested in such matters. This is a wake-up call for the Muslims. Through this speech, God demonstrated how His word has to be spread to every household. The Hadith quoted in the beginning does not mean that God's word will spread by force. Rather it means that God's word will spread in the way in which Obama's speech entered every house, willingly or unwillingly.

In the whole world the image of Islam is that of a violent religion. An English newspaper published from UK, once had an article on Islam titled, "A religion that sanctions violence." The President of America on the other hand said something else about Islam, by quoting verses such as the following from the Quran,

"Whoever killed a human being...shall be regarded as having killed all mankind and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind." (5:32)

June 4, 2009, the day Obama gave his historic speech marks the beginning of the process of the word of God spreading all over the world. The process has to be continued or carried forward by us. May God give us the strength to do dawah work on an international scale!