

Inappropriate Da'wah Methodology: A Major Cause of Disunity among Contemporary Nigerian Muslims.

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Abstract

The success or failure of any activity depends largely on the way or manner such an activity is carried out. In Islam, calling people to the way of God and righteous deeds, otherwise known as “Da'wah” is a worth-while, commendable and rewarding act. However, in the contemporary Nigerian society, Da'wah has become a curse rather than a blessing. It has heated up the Muslim society and created acrimony, hatred and war among the Ummah described by Allah as brothers (Q49:10). This does not suggest that Da'wah itself is harmful but it reveals the fact that the strategies being used by some in carrying it out are outright faulty. It is therefore the concern of this paper to explain some of the methodologies that can be employed in Da'wah activities so as to achieve the prime goal of guiding people to the right path and bringing peace, love and unity to the Muslim community.

Introduction

Da'wah is an Arabic word derived from *Da'a* which means “to call or invite”. It is an act of calling people to the right way of belief, worship and behavior as designed by Allah and as enshrined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Sheikh Ahmad (1995) defines *Da'wah* as “the teaching and propagation of Islam in the society”.

Because of the significance of *Da'wah* in correcting ills and ensuring peace, love and unity in the human society, Almighty Allah raised all His messengers including Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to engage in it. He (Allah) also enjoins those who have capability among the Muslims to embark on it saying: “let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining Al-Ma'ruf (i.e. Islamic monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbidding Al-Munkar (i.e. polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden) and it is they who are successful (Q. 3:104).

It is however worthy to note that *Da'wah* is a very delicate exercise. As it is useful in ensuring peace, love and unity, so it is capable of creating trouble, hatred and disunity in any given human society if not carefully handled. That was the reason Allah ordered Prophet Muhammad to do *Da'wah* with wisdom and good preaching when He says: "invite (Mankind, O Muhammad) to the way of your Lord (i.e. Islam) with wisdom and fair preaching and argue with them in a way that is better. Truly, Your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His path and He is best aware of those who are guided". (Q. 16:25).

In the present Nigerian society, some of those who engage in *Da'wah* fail to apply wisdom, thus their *Da'wah* is characterized by hate speeches, reckless utterances, threat, intolerance, hatred, arrogance, violence, force and a host of other inhuman practices. As a result, the Muslim community turns hell and according to Femi and Liad (p. 6) "for every trivial matter, Muslims; groups and individuals often antagonize one another thereby making themselves easy for their enemies to manipulate and exploit unduly". In his own account of the situation, Quadri (2013, p. 4) submits:

Today, Muslims all in the name of God are divided among themselves and the major causes of differences are ignorance, deficiency in knowledge, overzealousness and holier-than-thou attitude. Everybody now sticks to his views and ignorantly declares a fellow Muslim a Kafir thereby causing disunity of the Ummah.

In the light of this, this paper sheds some light on the right principles and methods through which *Da'wah* in Islam can be carried out successfully in this modern era where everybody has the right to freedom of religion and association.

Principles and Methods of *Da'wah*

For *Da'wah* to achieve its intended objectives, anybody engaging in it must, as a matter of fact, possess certain qualities which are divided into two; namely, personal and professional qualities.

Personal Qualities

The success or failure of *Da'wah* activities depends largely on the personality of the propagator. So, every propagator is expected to exhibit good characters such as integrity, honesty, self-control, patience, love, kindness, simplicity, leniency, tolerance, open-

mindfulness, intelligence and a host of other beautiful virtues which will endear him to his audience. Sheikh Ahmad (1995, p. 26) confirms that “human personality cannot be positively recognized without being known to be honest, trustworthy and straight forward. These are qualities of a truly reasonable personality that wins people’s confidence and their co-operation any day”.

Undoubtedly, it was the exemplary characters of the Prophet, which Allah confirms in the Qur’an saying: “and verily, you are on an exalted (standard of) character”. (Q.68:4) thus actually attracted many people to Islam in his life time. The above is corroborated by Haykal (1982, p. 83) thus:

The personal example of Muhammad was the best support for the spread of his course. He was merciful, charitable and humble yet manly, sweet of word yet just, giving to each his due yet full of compassion and sympathy for the weak, the orphan, the deprived and the oppressed.

In a nutshell, the relationship between the moral disposition of a propagator and his *Da’wah* work is like that of a foundation to an edifice. The span of the latter is determined by the former. This is why Khalid (2010, p. 96) advises that “to pave way for *Da’wah* work and make it more effective in modern times, we have to make use of moral and spiritual weapon...”

Professional Qualities

Before anyone can be regarded as a professionally qualified propagator, such a person must have adequate knowledge of the under-listed:

Message of *Da’wah*

This refers to the subject or topic on which the *Da’wah* exercise will focus. Every propagator is expected to be well versed in the subject matter he intends to deal with. In addition, important issues that have bearing on the unity of all Muslims must be thoroughly and carefully dealt with while trivial issues that are capable of disuniting the Muslim Ummah must be de-emphasized. For instance, issues like Sufism, keeping beard, kneeling down while greeting, naming ceremony, using other formula of Salat to seek blessing of Allah on Prophet Muhammad etc. should be ignored to tackle more significant Islamic issues.

Audience of *Da'wah*

Like a teacher who must have the knowledge of the nature of his students, a propagator needs to be acquainted with the nature of his audience. This is so because audience comprises of people of different traits and to be able to successfully win their hearts, a propagator will have to know them so as to know how he will handle them.

Purpose of *Da'wah*

Like other messengers of Allah, Prophet Muhammad was raised to carry out *Da'wah* simply for the purpose of guiding people to the right path and taking them away from darkness. Allah says in Qur'an 65 verse 11: "Allah has sent a messenger who recites to you the verses of Allah (the Qur'an) containing clear explanations, that he may take out those who believe and do righteous good deeds from the darkness (of polytheism and disbelief) to the light (of Islamic monotheism)".

It is, therefore, apparent that *Da'wah* should always focus on the benefit of the audience. However, no propagator is expected to seek from his *Da'wah* activities any worldly gains; rather, he/she should follow the footsteps of the messengers of Allah each of whom used to tell his people: "O my people! I ask of you no wealth for it, my reward is from none but Allah". (Q. 11: 29).

No doubt, it is when a propagator has another ulterior motive behind his *Da'wah* activities that he uses force, hatred, blame, condemnation etc as his tools and always tries to make a mountain out of a mole hill.

Environment of *Da'wah*

Environment is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as "the conditions that affect the behavior and development of somebody or something"; "a physical condition that somebody or something exists in" and "the natural world in which people, animals and plants live".

Bukoye and AbdulKadir (2008, pp. 125-126) explain that "the psychologists see environment as the physical and non-physical space in which we start our lives, mature, grow develop and eventually die".

Other than the physical space, environment also refers to the economic, political, religious, educational and social situations of a given society. Since environment differs from place to place, it must therefore be noted that for any propagator to achieve his *Da'wah* objectives, the environment in its wider form must be taken into consideration. He must also ensure that each environment receives appropriate *Da'wah* methods. For example, the way *Da'wah* will be exercised in a Muslim-dominated society will be different from how it will be handled in a non-muslim community.

Language of *Da'wah*

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, language is “a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country”. It is also “a particular style of speaking or writing”. All languages spoken by human beings are the languages of *Da'wah* in addition to Arabic language which is fundamental to *Da'wah* because it is the language of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

More importantly, what is referred to as the language of *Da'wah* in this context is the style used by a propagator to address his audience. This can either make or mar *Da'wah* exercise. This is so because when a propagator uses soft, peaceful and convincing language to address his audience and present his message, this will appeal to their minds and yield a positive result while there will be a negative outcome when a *Da'wah* activity is characterized by abuse, tongue-lashing, condemnation etc.

In fact, it is the poor style of expression that has majorly created war and disunity among the Muslims in the present era. Some propagators regard and address their Muslim brothers as *Kafir* (unbelievers) because of some minor practices such as kneeling down in greeting, Sufi practices, failure to keep beard etc. This is why, when interviewed on the solution to the disunity among the Muslims in Nigeria, Al-Iloriy responded in Femi and Liad (p. 34):

Since a person who believes in the five pillars of Islam is regarded as a Muslim, then such a person must not be called a KAFIR for a simple mistake or misdeed (in Islam) or minor differences from one thought to another. No school of thought should engage itself in provocative and derogatory talks or actions against another on any Islamic doctrine. All

Muslim preachers, orators, writers and publishers must desist from reckless utterances.

Time of *Da'wah*

It is the belief of some people that *Da'wah* exercise can be embarked upon at any period of time whether day or night. This is erroneous. *Da'wah* has its appropriate time and that is the period when there will be communication flow between the propagator (i.e. the source) and the audience (i.e. the target) without the barriers that are capable of disrupting messages. For instance, *Da'wah* is not appropriate at a time when the audience is psychologically ill or not in a good state of mind. Having known this, the propagator must make sure he chooses the right time for his *Da'wah*. That will enable the message to be acceptable to the audience.

Principles of *Da'wah*

In addition to both the personal and professional qualities a propagator is expected to possess, he must take into consideration the under-listed principles if his *Da'wah* efforts will yield any meaningful results:

Acknowledgement of the Nature of Man

Since human beings are created differently, they think, speak, act and react to issues differently. This gives birth to their disagreement on different matters. Quran 11 verse 118 says: *“and If your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one nation, but they will not cease to disagree”*.

When this fact is upheld, propagators will give room for other people's views and no attempt will be made to fight people for not accepting one's view. In Ayinde (2017, p. 67), Al-Iloriy explains:

The companions (of the prophet), the followers (of the companions) and the rightly guided leaders (imams) disagreed (on issues) and none of them imposed his ideology on the other or addressed the other as an unbeliever because he disagreed with his ideology.

In his own submission, Sheikh Ahmad (1995, p. 31) asserts that “human beings have their different peculiarities. It is when this fact is recognized and addressed that success in *Da'wah* will be realized”.

Guidance Comes only from Allah

Whatever efforts human beings may be making to guide their fellow beings to the right path, no positive result can be reached without the guidance of Allah. In other words, it is only Allah that has the power to guide people aright. Quran 28 verse 56 reads thus: “indeed you cannot guide aright whoever you wish but it is only Allah that guides whoever He wishes and it is He alone that knows best those who are rightly guided.” Having known this, every propagator should tread the path of *Da'wah* with care.

Gradualism

It is natural that human beings do not change suddenly. They undergo gradual processes before a new habit can either be formed or dropped. Islam recognizes this fact and that was the reason Allah prohibited intoxicants in three stages. In the first stage, Qur'an 2:219 explains the dangers in alcohol drinking. In the second stage, Qur'an 4 verse 43 warns the believers (i.e. the Companions of the Prophet) from going near prayer while they were under the influence of alcohol. It is at the third stage that Allah outrightly prohibited the consumption of alcohol in Qur'an 5 verse 90. On the basis of the above fact, every propagator should not expect a sudden change in his audience. He must make sure he applies the principle of gradualism.

Judgment is for Allah

Allah alone owns the power to judge people. He will reward with paradise and punish with hell fire. He (Allah) did not delegate this power to any creature. However, it is surprising to see some propagators nowadays judging their fellow Muslims and condemning them into hell simply because they do something considered by the so-called propagators as heresies. The category of propagators who address others as *Kafir* believe they are holier than the rest people. It must be noted that as long as a propagator believes he is better and holier than his audience, his efforts in *Da'wah* may be in vain.

Conclusion

In present day Nigeria, disunity among the Muslim Community is caused majorly by lack of appropriate *Da'wah* methods. Many scholars engaging in *Da'wah* activities do so without possessing necessary personal and professional qualities and without having the knowledge of the essential *Da'wah* principles, some of which have been dealt with in this paper.

It is therefore suggested that *Da'wah* training schools where the would-be Islamic propagators would be well drilled on *Da'wah* strategies should be established by the various Islamic organizations most especially the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs which is the highest religious body in Nigeria. Also, anybody who has not undergone training in *Da'wah* among the scholars should be disallowed from practicing it. By so doing, the Muslim Community will be rid of disunity, trouble, hatred and ideological war created by lack of the essential knowledge of *Da'wah* therefore, peace, love and harmony which are the hallmark of Islam shall return to the Muslim Ummah.

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