

Section A

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF DA‘WAH

1. FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- 1). Allah has directed us in the Qur’an to: “*Call (all people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best.*” (Q.16:125) The Muslim should therefore purify his intention to comply with Allah’s command without pride or any ulterior motive, out of a desire to help guide a fellow human being to know the truth. Da’wah involves anything that would help a person to come closer to Allah, whether by words or actions.
- 2). Da’wah involves an exchange of ideas and perceptions. Let it be a real conversation, not a monologue by the *da’iyah*. Many non-Muslims, despite having very little knowledge of Islamic teaching, have ideas and beliefs, which are very close to the Islamic ones.
- 3). “*Conversion*” is often a gradual process sometimes over several years. The pronouncement of the *Shahadah* is often just an acknowledgement of what has long been developing inside. It is like the ripening of a fruit which had its origins long ago when a seed was planted and nurtured.
- 4). Don’t be overzealous or overdo your Da’wah. When you see from his face or body language that the other person is losing interest, stop the conversation. You could ease the tension by suggesting you both have a cup of tea, or by introducing him to someone else at a gathering etc. Remember that Da’wah is a long process, and cannot be achieved in a single session, or even in a few sessions. It demands consistent effort and a lot of patience.
- 5). No one does worse than the person who, because she/he could only do a little good, decided to do nothing. Don’t underestimate your ability (with Allah’s help) to change others, even if it is only increasing the good in someone to from 5% to 6%.
- 6). Be humble, and don’t overestimate your ability to change others. Our duty is only to try, it is for Allah to guide.
- 7). Remember that “in the end, the sword is always conquered by ideas”. Falsehood by its nature is bound to perish in the presence of truth just as darkness by its nature vanishes where there is light.
- 8). Differences of opinion may not necessarily be deviations, but just healthily different and useful perspectives.
- 9). Difference of opinion does not automatically imply disunity.
- 10). Truthfulness may only be established by the evidence or proof for it, not by who puts the idea forward, or his reputation, qualifications, titles etc.
- 11). A scholar in one area is not a ‘*master of all*’. An ‘*expert*’ is usually one who knows more and more of less and less.
- 12). Priority areas to change are a person’s ideas, values and beliefs, followed by the apparent, visible aspects of their life styles.
- 13). “*Do not put all your eggs in one basket.*” Let Da’wah groups and organizations have diversity in their approaches but unity in their long term objectives, like the various branches of the State Health Services, such as specialist hospitals, emergency services, research institutes and so on.
- 14). Remember that laws and policies can affect behavior, which can change people’s attitudes (for better or for worse). Therefore it is important to be involved in moves to influence policies and/or policy-makers.
- 15). There is no “best Da’wah program” for every place and time. “Best programs” are limited to place, environment, level of development, time, culture, level of education, age, gender, local priorities, and who is handling the da’wah.

16). Considering the importance of Da'wah, it is worth remembering that in the Qur'an, Allah blamed the Jews for concealing truth from others. For many Muslims, Islam is also their "best-kept secret".

17). Healthy argument awakens reasoning and "practice makes perfect".

18). The requirement to use wisdom and the best of speech when presenting Islam is well served by broadening one's knowledge of Islam as well as other world religions. In this way, arguments about issues over which there is substantial agreement can be avoided and the discussions can focus more clearly on shared values and viewpoints as well as on true points of difference.

19). Keep in mind that Da'wah benefits not just others but also oneself. It may be necessary to conduct regular 'arrogance checks' on oneself so as not to uphold the view that one is a 'savior'.

2. WHAT TO SAY (OR DO)

1) Always give a positive response to a question, even though it is not related to the topic. But don't let it take too much time at the expense of more pertinent topics.

2) If quoting, maintain accuracy; if making a claim, provide proof (Qur'an 2:111): "*Say: produce your proof if you are truthful*". (See also Qur'an 21:24, 3:93).

3) The stress many Muslims place on abiding by Islamic law may discourage those who emphasize the spiritual side of faith. They may consider Islam as being overly legalistic.

4) Try not to give non-Muslims offensive and provocative tapes or books.

5) If a thing is *haram*, discuss its harm from all perspectives and angles - social, economic, medical, political, psychological, moral etc.

6) One may state that a thing is/may be wrong if its disadvantages are greater than its advantages (and vice versa).

7) If one cannot publicly engage in verbal Da'wah efforts, one should at least support the efforts of those who do. The Prophet (s) described those who encouraged good as having the same reward as those who acted upon it. There is no excuse for not making a contribution towards Da'wah, be it financial or moral support, etc.

3. WHEN TO SAY (OR DO) IT

1) If possible try and see that friendship and good rapport is built before Da'wah. Even when Allah appointed prophets He did not send them on their missions until they were already well known and respected in their respective communities as good and truthful people.

2) The message of Islam should be presented to all human beings whatever their age. However, it may be between the ages of 13 and 18 that teenagers are most receptive to Da'wah if it is rationally presented and they are directed to the *fitrah*. This is the age of accepting truth but not necessarily of conversion, which may come later on.

4. WHO SHOULD SAY (OR DO) IT

1) Every Muslim should try to know enough about the basics of his/her religion to be able to explain it to others. There is no priesthood in Islam, so every Muslim has a duty to learn his religion and to pass on what he/she knows.

2) If you can't "do Da'wah" then support it (for the same reward).

5. WHERE TO SAY (OR DO) IT

1) You can initiate a dialogue almost anywhere — your place of study or work, on a bus, train, and airplane, while visiting friends or being visited by them. However, take into account the attitudes and customs of some people. In some cultures, religion and politics are "*taboo*" subjects at dinner parties and other social occasions, and you may not be invited again if you introduce a religious discussion. People are more likely to be responsive if they are alone and feeling relaxed, away from the pressure of what others might think or say.

2) In case of a public dialogue (Christian/Muslim, for example) it is better to choose a neutral venue rather than a mosque or any other place that may be closed to non-Muslims or not conducive to their participation.

3) If you are invited to give a lecture in a church however, take the chance and accept with pleasure.

6. HOW TO SAY (OR DO) IT

1) One of the most effective forms of Da'wah is the one-to-one personal approach with your friends.

2) With people you meet regularly, small 'doses' of Da'wah are best. Don't discuss religious issues on every occasion, but alternate with other diverse topics.

3) Let him/her set the pace. For each individual, learning about Islam is a very personal experience, and it is essential that he take his own time to go through it. Do not set any time limits, but gently guide him/her step by step as he/she is ready. It is very important that he/she does not feel any pressure, as this will put him/her in the wrong frame of mind for learning about the joy and inner peace of Islam.

4) Do not tell a non-Muslim what he/she believes. Avoid assumptions about a person's beliefs, attitudes or lifestyle because of what religion they profess to follow. Rather try to find out and make inferences from statements he/she makes. There are variations between people and sects even within one religion.

5) Control irritation and defensive urges in reaction to irrational or incorrect statements or accusations by establishing ground rules for discussion - start off by emphasizing the importance of rational/reasonable arguments.

6) Let him/her give general criteria for accepting/rejecting a scripture as the word of God. For example, you may ask: "What would you consider as sufficient evidence to establish or to cast doubt on the divine origin of a scripture?"

7) Avoid harshness in treatment of people, roughness in manner of approach and rudeness in calling people to Islam, all of which are contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Allah (ﷻ) commands us to call to Islam and to His teachings with wisdom, not with foolishness; with amicability, not with harsh words: Qur'an 16:125 - "Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious."

8) Be sensitive to those you explain the truth to. Even though Allah knew Pharaoh to be a disbelieving tyrant, He still ordered Moses (P) to speak to him in a gentle manner (Q.20:43-44). How much more should this lesson be applied when we speak to ordinary non-Muslims?

9) Tie your discussion to the *fitrah* throughout a dialogue (see Section C6).

10) There is no compulsion in religion or matters of faith (Q.2:256). Not even unfair psychological pressure is permissible.

11) Take into consideration a person's level of knowledge, understanding, exposure, etc. Do not give an overdose or attempt to "intellectually terrorize", especially if the person appears to be on a lower intellectual level.

12) Speak to people at their intellectual level. Remember they may also be higher intellectually than you, in which case find a more competent person, appropriate literature, audio or video material, or at least a translated copy of the Qur'an (such as those by Muhammad Asad, Muhammad Ali, Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Mamaduke Pickthal. Beware of the Dawood and Rev. E. M. Wherry translations!).

13) When dealing with a specialist in a particular field, make sure you know enough to substantiate the Islamic position on the topic. For example, while discussing the issue of *riba* (interest) with a professional banker, be sure you can convincingly defend the Islamic view on it.

14) If persons with whom one is trying to communicate do not know Arabic, then it is better not to use Arabic words they do not understand. The Prophet (s) exhorted his followers to speak plainly to people and to avoid using confusing words.

15) Make your partner answer in the affirmative and avoid his saying "no" as far you can, because once he says "no" his pride could impel him to adhere to his word. An answer of "no" is not just a monosyllable. The whole organism, with its nerves, muscles and glands will be pinned on it. In contrast, the word "yes" is soft and costs little.

16) If the target audience happens to be a group of more than five persons, the relationship may become a bit more impersonal. It is more like giving a speech. In such cases, questions should be invited after the talk and some brochures may be distributed. Those group talks are best when they give the speaker the opportunity to develop personal contacts with new people.

- 17) Persevere. Do not dismiss anyone because they seem to have closed minds. Those whom you dismiss may one day become friends or even brothers.
- 18) Do not negotiate or compromise any part of the message but present it in a graceful manner. This will earn more respect and credibility. Insistence on a certain point does make people think twice about whether you may be correct.
- 19) Avoid calling anyone a “*kafir*” (one bent on denying truth). The Prophet (s) was sent as a “*rahma*” (Mercy), not to condemn people.
- 20) Be careful to avoid pushing people into embracing Islam without their being totally convinced. A truthful disbeliever is better and less harmful to himself and the community than a hypocrite.
- 21) Donate good books to public and departmental libraries. This can be *sadaqatun jaariyatun*.
- 22) Ensure that “*Da’wah activities*” are not turned into mere social entertainment gatherings. Though these can have their benefits, “*edutainment*” would be preferable.
- 23) Programs should be conducive and open to weak Muslims who are willing to improve on their *iman* (faith) e.g. by not insisting on their wearing *hijab* as a condition for learning about their weakness.
- 24) To win someone’s favor is better than to win a round against him. You may silence an opponent without winning his consent and acceptance. Intellectual proofs may be compelling without winning the goodwill of the other party. A sensible person should realize that it is more important to win other people’s hearts than to push them into a corner.
- 25) Make the other party aware of your sharing some of his conceptions, and declaring your approval of and satisfaction with his correct ideas and sound information. Let a spirit of objectivity and impartiality prevail.
- 26) There is always the peaceful alternative of “agreeing to disagree.”

7. NON-VERBAL DA’WAH

- 1) Never underestimate the eloquence, charisma and value of non-verbal forms of communication/Da’wah. Da’wah by behavior and appearance (non-verbal Da’wah) includes your dress, vocabulary, command of language, tone, gestures, manners, type of company/friends you keep, where you go, whether you visit the sick, send cards or flowers, are useful to the community, etc.
- 2) Remember that simply being known as a kind, generous, friendly and virtuous Muslim living close to or among non-Muslims can clear numerous silly misconceptions about Islam from both adults and children.
- 3) Be genuinely interested in people’s problems without intruding. Selflessly offer help or assistance to others when they are in need. Islam preaches kindness and goodness even towards an enemy — it will most likely turn him/her to become your best friend (Q.41:34).
- 4) Remember that nothing preaches a religion more clearly than conduct. People will most likely assess Islam by how you are rather than what you preach.
- 5) Muslims should be kind and compassionate towards non-Muslims; because that is the first thing many non-Muslims will look for in a person who claims to be religious.
- 6) The Qur’an also addressed the Prophet (s), defining his relationship with his companions: “*It is part of the mercy of Allah that you (Muhammad) deal justly with them. If you were severe and harsh-hearted they would have broken away from about you.*” (Qur’an 3:159)
- 7) In order to preserve integrity, do keep your promises. Behave with the best of manners (grace, politeness, understanding, listening with interest) and composure.

8. OBSTACLES TO DA’WAH (INTERNAL & EXTERNAL) AND HOW NOT TO DO DA’WAH

- 1) A person may remain “closed minded” (“*kafir*”) because of a defect in your method of Da’wah, the contents, timing, location, non-verbal communication etc. i.e. it is possible that she/he is “closed minded” because of you.
- 2) Don’t make an assault on another’s belief or religion. Instead, try to clarify vagueness, supply neglected information, and finish incomplete thoughts found in the usual presentation of the belief or religion in question.
- 3) Do not ‘attack’ the person, but examine ideas and opinions.
- 4) Don’t attack a person for presenting an idea you disagree with, when all the person presented were the different legitimate views on that topic.
- 5) Don’t do a ‘tafsir’ (commentary) on behalf of another faith as if that represents their opinion. Just require that vague terms and statements be made clear and that they be taken to their logical conclusion.
- 6) Don’t raise your voice when you are reinforcing your argument.
- 7) You are not trying to make a bad person good, but a good person better. You are not trying to move from a bad religion or belief system to a good one, but from a good one to a better one.
- 8) The three probably most prevalent western perceptions of Islam are:
 - a. Islam is an Arab, Middle Eastern, or foreign religion incompatible with western culture;
 - b. Islam demeans women;
 - c. Islam encourages violence and aggression.

These three notions are so firmly rooted in western consciousness that most sincere seekers of faith in God in Europe and America would never think of Islam as a religious option.

- 9) Do not oppress a person with whom you intend to dialogue by the choice of place, the number of people, appearance, language, and sometimes, the choice of a topic which you know that the person is totally ignorant of or not comfortable with, or such topics that can be considered too personal to that individual.
- 10) It is important not to be too brief on the assumption that the other party is very intelligent, or too long-winded on the assumption that the other party is stupid.
- 11) Don’t discuss the personality of the other person to avoid degeneration into slander and insult. Hold to the discussion of issues and ideas, not of personalities and behavior.
- 12) Do not handle some of the topics where Muslim scholars differ as if there were no differences of opinions - *“If the straight path is wide enough for other opinions, then don’t narrow it”*.
- 13) Beware of your purpose being defeated by your own arrogance, especially if you are knowledgeable and intelligent, and you know it. Appreciate the importance of spiritual and intellectual humility and *Ikhlas* (sincerity/purity of intention).
- 14) Do not sacrifice brotherhood (a “*fard*”) which is compulsory, for anything of less value, whether it be by the topic chosen or how, when, where, or by whom it is handled.
- 15) Violence can do nothing more than distort Da’wah in the path of Allah (ﷻ). Let us learn from the approaches of early Prophets e.g. Musa and Haroun (P) towards Pharaoh (Qur’an 20:43-44).
- 16) Those in Da’wah should be very cautious about their involvement in politics. It has been one of the greatest distractions, diversions, and disuniting factors in Da’wah work. It may be advisable in Muslim minority areas in particular, for those in Da’wah to be able to influence politicians without joining them. Exceptions to this may exist.
- 17) Beware of how wanting to take credit for Da’wah can work against the objectives of Da’wah in the cause of Allah.

18) Debates may be entertaining to Muslims, but probably torture to some non-Muslims. Torture never wins hearts. It is possible to win a debate, but lose the hearts of others. Also, in debates, the Muslim side

usually gets access to an audience in which non-Muslims are a minority, while the non-Muslim side usually gets access to a majority Muslim audience (to their advantage). A 50:50 Muslim to non-Muslim audience ratio might be preferable.

19) Don't be apologetic about Islam — Islam with all its aspects, principles and practices, is a perfect religion, given to humanity by Allah. There is therefore nothing to hide, apologize for or be ashamed of. Don't be upset if anyone criticizes or rejects any aspect of Islam. Our role is to explain Islam as best as we can—whether or not someone accepts it is not our responsibility, but is entirely in Allah's hands. (We must however be fair in acknowledging where Muslims fall short — we are all human beings and therefore fallible.)

20) Avoid suspicion and distrust: rather find an excuse for a person's misbehavior and help in the improvement of his/her words and deeds. Allah says in the Qur'an (53:32) — *"Therefore, justify not yourselves: He knows best who it is that guards against evil"* and warns against suspecting fellow human beings: *"O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): For suspicion in some cases is a sin"* (49:12). The Prophet (ﷺ) also says in this respect: *"Avoid suspicion for suspicion is the false element in a talk."* (Authenticated by all authorities.)

21) "Middle Eastern Arabian culture appears to dominate the Muslim communities of America and Europe far beyond what scholarship, ritual, and piety demand..." (Jeffrey Lang: Even Angels Ask)

22) This domination is sometimes an unnecessary obstacle to the presentation of Islam as a universal religion. The same observation may be made about the presentation of Islam in other countries where there is a dominant Muslim community or ethnic group which has mixed its own cultural limitations with Islam.

23) You 'fight' ideas with ideas, not with loudness, insults, silence, etc. The emotional content of a dialogue should be minimal.

24) Beware of subjective "proof" or "evidence" such as dreams, healing miracles, etc. They can not be verified!

9. SELF IMPROVEMENT OF THE DA'WAH WORKER

1) Da'wah workers should not become too involved in giving out information at the expense of learning or reading. Otherwise their knowledge can become progressively irrelevant and redundant. There is always the need to refuel (*"Read!"*). They should also encourage their own families in this respect.

2) Trying to guide others helps you grow intellectually, but don't forget to cater for your own spiritual growth and closeness to Allah.

3) For those who would do their Da'wah in public, there is always an extra need to continuously check and purify intentions. Be careful of showing off that you are a good speaker, or very knowledgeable. Seek to please Allah and not to impress people.

4) Accommodate the possibility that you could be too extreme, or too liberal, unreasonable or ignorant of some issues/topics. You are not an expert in all.

5) Don't conclude that you know a topic well enough before having listened to the various opinions on the topic, the criticisms for or against these views, and the rebuttals or answers to those criticisms.

6) Accommodate the possibility that you may be wrong. Acknowledge that God knows best and ask that He may forgive you both (or all) where you might have gone wrong.

7) Have a good understanding of the boundaries and limits of reasoning and common sense.

8) Have a good understanding of the differences between Islamic ideals and the present reality of Muslim societies/countries.

9) Reflect on the lessons for Da'wah in the stories of Allah's Prophets in the Qur'an, e.g. Yusuf, Ibrahim, Musa, Nuh, Shu'aib, etc. and reflect over Allah's response to the criticisms and excuses of their people.

- 10) Read from the writings of “converts” or new Muslims. They can sometimes come up with new insights and perspectives regarding a lot of what most born Muslims take for granted.
- 11) If someone is asked about something he does not know, he should say: “I don’t know”. If a learned man fails to understand the wisdom of the saying “I do not know”, his judgement would be faulty. “To say I don’t know is half of knowledge” (Abu-Daud).
- 12) Be a good listener. Do not have a “dialogue of the deaf” where each party concentrates on his own utterances and never listens to what the other has to say. Some advice given by Al-Hassan, son of Ali, to his son, (may Allah be pleased with them all) follows: “If you sit with scholars, my son, be more interested in listening than in speaking. Learn good listening just as you learn good speaking. Never interrupt a speaker, even if he takes long, until he comes to an end.” Remember that the foundation of understanding is willingness to listen.
- 13) Do not spend 24 hours a day on Da’wah. Spend some time for other things of life i.e. on your job/occupation, your family, your health as well as intellectual development.
- 14) Do not be a signpost that points towards a direction but never goes there. Always practice what you preach.
- 15) If for fear of failure in Da’wah you fail to even try it, you fail automatically. Moreover failing to plan is itself a plan to fail.
- 16) Avoid first person pronouns singular or plural. Expressions like “in my opinion,” “in our experience” seem pedantic and egotistical to some hearers. It might also be indicative of self-praise and mixed intention. Therefore it would be more tactful to replace such expressions with “examination would reveal”, “experts have discovered”, “in the opinion of some scholars” and the like.
- 17) Co-operation in seeking truth is inherent to religion, but sincerity in the pursuit of truth can be distinguished by certain conditions and signs. A diligent seeker of truth may be compared to one who is looking for his lost property. It would be immaterial for him if he or another person should be the one to find it. Likewise, a sincere truth-seeker would perceive his partner in discussion as a helper rather than an adversary, and would be grateful to him if he should guide him to any aspect of truth.
- 18) You are hardly ever alone in any little thing you do. And you all contribute to the cumulative positive or negative impact of what you do. Every little step counts!

Section B

THINGS TO BE MINDFUL OF DURING A DIALOGUE

1. The basic world view and teachings of Islam are straightforward, clear and accessible to reason.. The Qur’an challenges us repeatedly to use our reason.

Let your presentation reflect this clarity and reasoning. The other person may not rush to accept Islam, but at least he will appreciate why many people do so.

2. Do not attack or defend a person, but the idea or opinion put forward. The objective of dialogue is to clarify opinions, improve understanding, and distinguish truth from falsehood. It is not meant to convert or defeat an “enemy”.

3. Have a good sense of priority when choosing topics to discuss. Is it an issue worth discussing? Could the time be better utilized by other topics, or even something other than a ‘discussion’?

4. Never underestimate the ‘eloquence’, ‘charisma’ and value of non-verbal Da’wah. Actions speak louder than words. Remember that “*Hikma*” (wisdom) in verbal Da’wah has also to do with knowing what to say, how to say it, where to say it, when to say it, who should say it, who should it be said to, and which language and tone to use.

5. Try to seek truth in what the other person may be saying. Do not be geared to destructive criticism. She/he may be correct. Beware of your own arrogance.

6. Start with “diagnosis” and active listening. Ask questions so as to clarify and confirm assumptions. Learn about a person’s belief from him or her. And always remember the following questions:

- ◆ What do you mean by that?
- ◆ Where do you get your information (or explanation) from?
- ◆ How do you know it is true?
- ◆ What happens if you are wrong?

These questions can also be useful in awakening reason.

They can help a person crosscheck the basis of his/her beliefs, what actually it is he/she believes, and whether or not these beliefs are true.

Creating doubt in one’s beliefs is essential in truth seeking and for the re-examination of already accepted beliefs.

7. Where necessary, ask the other person for the context of his or her question, or the direction the questioner is coming from. Or simply ask “*Why the question?*” Also ask yourself whether you can or should handle it.

8. Do not buy or grant an assumption, otherwise you may have to buy the conclusion. Crosscheck assumptions for their truthfulness. For example; “*Jihad only means fighting*”, “*Fredrick, Ngozi and Nilanka are not Islamic names*”, “*The Qur’an speaks about the Bible*”, “*Zulqarnain was Alexander the Great*”, etc.

9. Beware of valid and relevant questions laden with important wrong assumptions that are irrelevant to the question or issue being discussed. For example; “*Does Muhammad not say or write in the Qur’an that a man may marry up to four wives, but that a wife can only have one husband?*” The wrong assumption in the question is that Muhammad says or writes in the Qur’an.

10. An explanation is not a proof. Distinguish “*what is meant*” from “*why it must be true*”. Remember: “*For example..*” or “*it is like..*” or “*it changed my life*” etc. are not proofs. For example, analogies explaining the Trinity as being similar to an egg or triangle, etc. are not proof of why it must be true. Be sure that what you asked for (proof) is what you are given.

11. Repeat to the other person in your own words (i.e. paraphrase) the question you are asked or the point being made, if in any doubt of its meaning, so as to prevent misunderstandings, especially if the question or point has vague or “loaded” words or statements that may have more than one meaning.

12. Be sure you both mean the same thing when you use the same or similar words and phrases. For example, “*Prophet*”, “*revelation*”, “*read*”, “*word of God*”, “*salvation*”, “*sin*”, “*reasonable*”, “*infallible*”, “*fundamentalism*”, “*enjoyment*”, “*anti-social*”, “*development*”, “*progress*”, “*well-being*”, “*soul*”, “*Holy Spirit*”, “*Jinn*”, “*religion*”, “*faith*”, “*fear of God*”, “*People of the Book*”, “*peace*”, “*freedom*”, “*God*”, “*divine*”, “*children of God*”, “*Hell*”, “*Angel*”, “*Savior*”, etc. There is need to understand each other’s definitions of these terms.

13. Have a good understanding of the logical structure of your argument. Have clear in your mind the point(s) you want to make, the evidence or proof required, and the steps (the shorter the better) required to make your point.

Beware of diversions, distractions, irrelevant things and non-issues.

Do not move to the next logical step in your argument until the first is well understood and established. You do not build a third floor of a building if the foundations, pillars and/or lower floors are weak or absent. It may be worth verifying their existence and strength before going ahead with work.

14. “Tit for tat” does not deal with the underlying issues. For example, someone says: “*Your Qur’an has mistakes in it!*” and you reply: “*But I can show you a hundred contradictions in your scripture!*” Or a person says: “*Your religion is aggressive and violent!*” and you reply: “*But yours has the worst record of violent aggression in human history.*” These responses may be true, but you have not dealt with the question “*Are there mistakes in the Qur’an?*” and “*Does your religion teach violent aggression?*”

15. Setting “traps” (if necessary) should not be to humiliate, but to help clarify a point. “*There is no coercion (or compulsion) in matters of faith (or religion)*”. For example you may ask: “*What would you say of any scripture that describes God as being ‘like one drunk from wine’ or as having ‘rested and refreshed Himself’?*” The person may readily agree that such a description does not sound like an authentic revelation from God, only to be shown the reference in the Bible (Psalms 78:65). Leave him to think about it rather than embarrass him by forcing him to admit that there is something amiss with his scripture.

Try to make the truth clear without making it more ‘bitter’ or difficult to accept.

16. Seek the logic or ‘equation’ in an argument or opinion, and test for its general application and validity. For example; “*The name of Jesus appears in the Qur’an more often than the name Muhammad. Therefore Jesus is more important or special to God than Muhammad.*” The “equation” or logic here is “*The more often the name occurs, the more important or special is the bearer*”. But what if this criterion of “specialness” is applied to other names such as “Satan”, “Moses”, “Pharaoh”, “Mary”, etc.?

Or “*The Bible is older than the Qur’an, and therefore it is more authentic*”. The logic or equation here is “*the older the scripture, the more authentic*”. But what happens when this criterion of “age” is applied to the Old and New Testaments, or the Buddhist or Hindu scriptures, some of which are very ancient?

17. Beware of words, statements, quotes and issues being taken out of their true contexts. Make sure all quotations are authentic, true and accurate - especially if they are translations. For example, Allah says in the Qur’an: “*How shall I have a son*” (Q3:40), but what came before and what comes next? Who is the speaker? Or “*Woe to the worshippers*” (Q107:4) (without the next phrase which says which kind of worshippers are in trouble).

Beware also of “ghost verses” being quoted, where references and quotations are given that are supposed to be in the Qur’an or Hadith, but which do not really exist there.

Again words such as “*kafir*” are often mistranslated as “disbelievers” or “non-Muslims”. “*Zawj*” is often mistranslated as “wife” instead of “spouse”. Others include “*jihad*”, “*Qada*”, “*Injil*”, “*Tawrat*”, “*Zabur*”, “*Akhirah*”. Some words can have different meanings depending on the context.

18. Beware of having words put into your mouth, especially when you are being ‘quoted’. For example, someone may say “*As you rightly said or implied...*” when that was not exactly what you said or implied. Correct such misquotations without delay.

19. Beware of being dictated to with regard to what your proof should be, or of being given the answers to choose from. Beware of the “*either-or*” (“*double bind*”) type of question or statement, when the answer could be none of those offered.. For example, “*When Jesus (P) said he was God, he was either telling the truth, or he was telling a lie, or he was crazy. Which one is it?*” or “*The Prophet Muhammad (s) said that the voice of a woman was ‘awrah, and should not be heard in public. You either accept what the Prophet said as a true Muslim should, or you reject it as a hypocrite would.*” Or “*Are Muslims good people or not, before I start listening to you?*”

20. Truth and reality are not necessarily based on what a democratic majority thinks. Because many people say or believe a thing does not prove it is true. “*It is generally believed that...*” or “*the majority of people believe that...*” is not proof that it is true. For example, “*A majority of Muslims believe that the Injil is the Bible.*” Or “*Most Muslims say that every non-Muslim must go to Hell.*” A majority can even be mistaken. After all, a few centuries ago the majority of people believed that the earth was flat.

21. Distinguish verifying the source or authority (i.e. who the author may be) of any information from challenging that source or authority. For example, a Christian may ask: “*How can you point out mistakes in my scripture? Who are you to imply that the All-Knowing God makes mistakes?*” Or a Muslim may ask: “*How can you say that a father can not force his daughter into marriage, when the Prophet (s) said that a father has the right to do so? Who knows more about Allah’s Will, you or the Prophet (s)?*”

The above two examples may be answered by making a clear distinction. It is not the authority of God or the Prophet that is being challenged but the claim that what is being said is actually from God or the Prophet (s).

22. Because an opinion has not yet been proven correct, it does not automatically follow that the opposite opinion is correct. Beware of being the only one who has to prove his/her point. For example, your inability to prove God exists does not imply that someone else has proved that God does not exist. The other person must also bring his explanation of how the universe and living things and human consciousness came into existence in the absence of any Creative Power or divine will.

23. Because a thing is “possibly true” does not prove it is true, nor necessarily mean it is even “most probably true”. For example, “*With God all things are possible*” is not proof that the Trinity is true. Otherwise *five in one* could be just as true as *three in one* because it is also possible. Because the Qur’an could possibly have been revealed by aliens (or UFO’s) from other planets does not prove that that is true. Because it is possible that every Muslim historian could have been biased and untrustworthy this does not prove that it was so.

“*Conjecture is no substitute for truth*” or proof. Beware of words and phrases such as “*perhaps...*”, “*maybe ...*”, “*I think...*”, “*Probably...*”, etc.

24. Take an unreasonable statement or opinion to its natural and logical conclusion and implications. In other words, try a “*total impact assessment*” of an unreasonable proposal. For example, someone says “*regarding the witness of women, we need two female witnesses and a male before we can trust the information.*” One could then ask: “*Would that not imply a rejection of most of the Hadith related by Aisha the wife of the Prophet?*” Or for example: “*The Jews and Christians of today are different from those referred to in the Qur’an and Hadith as ‘Jews’ or ‘Christians’ or Ahl-ul-Kitab (The People of the Book).*” One could then find out if that is actually true and whether that would imply an abrogation or irrelevance of anything or everything in the Qur’an and Hadith concerning Jews and Christians in today’s context. Or for example someone says: “*It is only fair that if a man can have up to four wives, a wife should also be allowed up to four husbands*”. Go ahead and examine what this proposal would mean in practice: problems of identifying a child’s father, pressure on women for sexual activity and constant pregnancy and childbirth, as well as domestic responsibilities beyond their capability, all leading to total destruction of the family.

25. Force an “arm-chair critic” to provide better alternative answers or solutions to problems, or to settle for the “lesser evil”. For example, when someone attacks the conditional permissibility of polygamy (as is permissible by Islam), let him or her provide a better and more realistic alternative to it, for solving problems such as those of excess women, an infertile wife, etc. And if a better alternative is not possible, then let him or her acknowledge polygamy as the “lesser evil”.

26. Do not turn “lesser evils” into ideals. For example, do not in defending the permissibility of divorce in Islam, find yourself promoting it as something that is encouraged. Do not defend the institution of slavery as if it was not meant to be gradually eradicated.

27. Beware of double standards used in criticism. “*It is wrong if it is found in your religion, but all right if it is found in mine.*” For example some Christians may say that since the Prophet (s) took part in battles against the idol-worshippers, and he also had polygamous marriages, he could not be a man of God or a chosen Prophet. Yet Abraham, Saul, David, Solomon, Moses etc. all either took part in battles or had polygamous marriages and yet are regarded by Christians as great men of God, chosen by Him above all others. This should be exposed as a double standard.

The statement that some Muslims have engaged in war, therefore Islam teaches war and not peace, cannot be accepted unless the same judgment is applied to Christianity (for example) since some Christians (like the Crusaders or the Spanish Conquistadors or the western imperialists) also waged war and terrorized peaceful populations in the name of their religion..

28. Beware of “special pleading”. This is the biased selection of evidence to support a claim, when there exists evidence of equal or even greater authority that supports the contrary view. For example, one is shown prophecies that are supposed to have been fulfilled as proof that a scripture is divine in origin, though there may be numerous other prophecies in the same scripture that have not been fulfilled in the manner or at the time predicted. The same applies sometimes when some Muslims and non-Muslims pick certain verses of the Qur’an and Hadith to “prove” a point where there exist other verses and Hadith that prove the contrary with even greater authority, for instance in matters such as the meaning of the term “*Jihad*”, females going to the mosque, or veiling the face, the practice of contraception, listening to music, the fate of the apostate, relations with non-Muslims, etc.

29. A criterion for determining truth is only acceptable if it is applied impartially. For example, performance of miracles, healing the sick and “casting out demons”, etc. in one religion does not prove that religion is uniquely true if the same things are done in other religions. A dream guiding you to one religion is not a valid criterion if others have been guided to various other religions by dreams. The same applies to other subjective experiences. It is sometimes useful at the beginning of a dialogue to agree on a criterion or criteria for accepting or rejecting information or opinions, unless it is known that all concerned are people who use their reason.

30. “Ask those who know if you do not know”. In areas of ignorance or uncertainty, have the intellectual and spiritual humility to admit your weakness. This actually earns you respect and trust.

31. Diffuse tension throughout the discussion as much as possible. Leave a topic before it gets too heated. Try to always end on a cordial note. There is always the peaceful alternative of agreeing to disagree. “*You have your way (deen) and I have mine*”.

32. Pray to Allah to guide you both (and all) closer to Himself, “*for He (alone) knows best those who have strayed from His Path, and those who receive guidance.*” (Qur’an 16:125)

Section C

HANDLING NEW MUSLIMS

INTRODUCTION

When a **W**born Muslim introduces a new Muslim to the practice of Islam and helps to integrate the new Muslim into the Ummah he needs to stretch his mind to understand the experiences the new Muslim is going through. Converts are likely to be very happy about the sense of “*home-coming*” through their reversion to the truth. But they may pass through a stressful time with their families, their friends and their communities, as they introduce changes in their ways of life.

The duty of the born Muslims is to facilitate these changes, to be available to comfort and advise. They should avoid swamping the new Muslim with their own ethnic cultural practices - some of which may even be un-Islamic. They should not expect the new Muslims to transform themselves overnight, but help them to understand the wisdom behind Islamic injunctions, prohibitions, practices and ways of thought so that they willingly work towards an Islamic life-style.

Some Muslim individuals and families are excellent role models in this respect, while others are quite insensitive towards new Muslims and inadvertently repel them. This may be either because they are

ignorant and negligent of Islam or because of a bigoted insistence that their own understanding of Islam is the only valid one.

Likewise Mosques may be havens of peace and knowledge or venues for obscure disputes between people of different ethnic groups or schools of thought, each of whom believes he has the “*true faith*” and is not ready to see another point of view.

This section, the bulk of which comes directly from the books of Dr. Jeffrey Lang, is designed to highlight a number of issues relating to new Muslims to help the born Muslim to understand them and be a blessing to them and not a hindrance. Many of the points are based on experiences in Muslim-minority countries, especially in the West, but the general principles have wider relevance.

The term “*convert*” has generally gone out of favor, and the terms “*revert*” and “*new Muslim*” are in more common use. The two are used interchangeably in this book, as sometimes one is more appropriate than the other according to the context. In some passages quoted in this book an author has preferred to use the word “*convert*”, and this has been retained so as to avoid changing his words.

I **PRACTICES OF SOME MUSLIMS (INCLUDING REVERTS TO ISLAM) WHICH DISAPPOINT AND REPEL NEW MUSLIMS**

Beware of ‘revert repellent’ practices. Muslim communities are often the very cause of difficulties in the reverts appreciation and understanding of Islam. Certain (usually culturally influenced) practices by Muslim may result in either driving such reverts back out of Islam or impeding their progress in it. Examples of such revert-repellant practices are:

- ◆ Insisting that new female reverts automatically start wearing complete hijab.
- ◆ Preventing women (reverts inclusive) from attending mosque functions, which goes clearly contrary to the Prophet’s instruction.
- ◆ Most converts take Arabic (wrongly called “*Islamic*” or “*Muslim*”) names, even though early non-Arab converts to Islam (at the time of the Prophet) like Salman the Persian and Bilal from Ethiopia kept their non-Arabic names, with the approval of the Prophet. Except for those with names having Islamically unacceptable connotations, nearly all of the early converts to Islam kept their traditional names - Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, etc.
- ◆ When devout (Western) Muslims appear in the news, they are usually dressed in Middle-Eastern garb.
- ◆ Muslim converts with Arabic names and dress usually help perpetuate the misconception that to be Islamic is also to be Arab. Should we not appreciate, respect and acknowledge our “*nations and tribes*” especially when that is what is Islamic?
- ◆ Almost all Muslim communities in Muslim minority societies now include “*home-grown*” reverts, but their influence on the practices and viewpoints of their communities is usually negligible. In most mosques and Islamic centers, the number of reverts is still very small. Also, the criticism reverts make of the practices or views of Muslim immigrants (or “*born Muslims*”) are often dismissed as essentially western and, hence, un-Islamic.
- ◆ It is not long before the convert realizes that some mosques are divided into several factions, each vying for control of the mosque and recruitment of reverts. Each group is usually informing the revert that the others are straying from true Islam. The impression is soon given that even though Islam severely condemns rumor-mongering and backbiting, Muslims are habitual gossips; it appears to be a common preoccupation.
- ◆ Before long, when one group criticizes members of another group, the revert joins in their criticism.

- ◆ Regarding reverts, many Muslims seem to take on a scrutinizing and patronizing tone when speaking to them, as if the revert had not previously studied Islam or was totally immoral before becoming a Muslim, or as if the revert would not remain a believer for long.
- ◆ Even though the Muslim community in the West is now fairly large (there are about 5 million Muslims residing in North America alone), it is still quite politically timid, and reverts tend to become frustrated by what they see as the Muslim community's extreme passivity.
- ◆ Some Muslims scare women from handling the Qur'an by adopting hard line opinions concerning their handling it when in the state of physical impurity.
- ◆ Many Muslims also try to push female converts into getting married as soon as they become Muslims. Though the intention behind this is usually good, many of the new-Muslim sisters are not sufficiently grounded in Islam or aware of the extent to which many Muslims' beliefs and practices are influenced by their own native culture. It is therefore difficult for them to make objective and fair judgements regarding a good Muslim husband. Consequently, many female converts to Islam have been exploited, abused and seriously disappointed by such "imposed" marriages.

II

REPELLENT AND DISAPPOINTING IDEAS

- ◆ Almost all Muslim leaders still uphold the classical "*dar al-Islam/dar al harb*" ("*abode of Islam or peace/abode of war*") concept, which makes it appear to be fundamental to Islam. According to this theory, a perpetual state of war exists between Muslim and non-Muslim territories. This naturally poses a very difficult dilemma for many new Muslims, because it seems to them that to become Muslim, they are required to become enemies of their own countries. This theory is upheld by many Muslims in spite of the fact that many Muslim scholars have to seek refuge in non-Muslim countries from their own Muslim leaders!
- ◆ The theory of abrogation in the Qur'an (upheld by a majority of Muslim scholars) appears to claim that God placed superfluous verses in the last revelation to mankind and that He had to correct Himself frequently during the process of revelation. This perception is hard to square with the Qur'an's depiction of God. Not surprisingly quite a number of converts to Islam have been shocked and had their faith shaken when they first came across this theory.
- ◆ Although Muslims say Islam is for all times and places, a non-Muslim can easily get the impression that Muslims want all people to squeeze themselves into a singular moment and place in history.
- ◆ Some Muslims out of ignorance seize hold of a purported "*Hadith*" (which may be "*weak*" or even of dubious authenticity), which is repellent to reason and does not agree with well-established teachings of the Qur'an or of other Hadith. Such Muslims often promote such weak "*Sayings*" at the expense of Qur'anic teachings because they seem to give license to their own wishes or weaknesses. This can be confusing and discouraging to a revert.

III

NON-MUSLIMS' FEARS AND CONCERNS ABOUT CONVERSION (And non-Muslim Society's Response)

What are the most salient obstacles to reversion to Islam in the West? What are the main reasons that cause people to hesitate to embrace this religion, even when it appeals to them?

For Muslims living in the West, many of whom feel it is their duty to bear witness to their religion, these are important questions — yet ones that are seldom asked of reverts. If potential new Muslims anticipate harm from their societies, perhaps the Muslim community could help allay or address these fears. If

certain actions or behavior of Muslims are discouraging potential new Muslims, then one would think that the Muslim community would want to know what these are.

The following observations are by an American revert, Dr. Jeffrey Lang:

- ◆ *“Many converts fear job discrimination and keep their faith secret from their employers and co-workers. In my case, some colleagues have displayed ill-feeling and disapproval about my commitment to Islam, but I do not believe it has greatly affected my career. Others have endured much worse, especially women who embrace Islam in the West.”*
- ◆ *“A man can become a Muslim without substantially altering his outer appearance and hence can conceal his religious identity whenever he chooses. The Muslim community, however, puts tremendous pressure on female converts to adopt the most conservative styles of traditional Islamic dress; even though it often leads to terrible hardship and makes them easy targets for threats and insults. My wife is not a convert, but she has been chased, screamed at, cursed, struck, and refused employment, because of her dress.”*
- ◆ *“When a man converts to Islam he may be considered eccentric, a little strange, an independent thinker, a rebel, perhaps even brave; but when a woman converts, the hand that rocks the cradle commits cultural treason. Every society seems to pin its honor, traditions, and stability on its women, so that when a female steps out of line, all hell breaks loose. The female convert to Islam, much more than her male counterpart, becomes caught in a cultural tug of war in which she becomes the rope, as both societies—the dominant western society and the traditional Islamic subculture residing in it—fight to assert themselves in opposing directions through her. This felt pressure from both sides causes many women who see much that is positive in Islam to remain non-Muslim and many others who embrace the religion to keep apart from the Islamic community.”*
- ◆ *“As noted, estrangement from friends and relatives and job discrimination seem to be the two biggest worries that initially confront potential converts to Islam in the West. Overcoming these anxieties can be very difficult. While most converts attest that reactions to their decision to adopt Islam were mostly cool, they also admit that their worst fears were never realized. Surmounting these anxieties is only one of the social obstacles to becoming or remaining a Muslim. Many western apostates—and there have been many—claim that the Muslim community presents a greater problem.”*

Other concerns of would-be reverts are as follows:

- ◆ New Muslims from Asian backgrounds are more likely to face problems with their families e.g. the Chinese fear losing their ethnic identity. One must reassure them that, in accepting Islam, they become Muslims and do not switch over to another ethnic group.
- ◆ A question arises regarding the Islamic status of the marriage of a female revert whose husband is non-Muslim. The Da’wah worker should approach with sensitivity and caution the question of whether a female revert should divorce her husband immediately. The choice should be of the lesser evil and what is in the long-term interests of Islam and its objectives.

IV

A NEW MUSLIM’S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS/HER SOCIETY AND WHAT HE/SHE GOES THROUGH

The following observations are made by Dr. Jeffrey Lang:

“The biggest obstacle to acceptance of Islam by potential converts is the anxiety over society’s response to that decision. The questions I am asked most frequently by non-Muslims considering conversion to Islam are about my family’s and friends’ reactions to my becoming a Muslim.”

“The first reactions of relatives and friends to new converts to Islam in the West almost always involve some degree of shock and dismay. Some new Muslims meet with blind prejudice and intolerance, and there have been rare cases where parents or friends sever all relations with the convert: but most often the parents and friends come to accept the convert’s choice, and quite frequently to respect it, especially if he or she seems happier and more at peace with him/herself in the new found faith. Usually, if the relationship between a parent or friend and a convert was close before Islam, it will remain so after conversion. In addition, converts can help to reduce tension by being reasonable and non-aggressive when discussing Islam. The latter is no small feat, because the attitudes that confront new Muslims are often prejudiced and combative, making it all too easy to respond in kind. However, the Qur’an disapproves of such a response:

“And indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear God’s messages rejected and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse, for then indeed you would be like them.” (Qur’an 4:140)

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and the best of speech; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.” (Qur’an 16:125)

“And do not dispute with the People of the Book except with means better, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong. But say, ‘We believe in that revealed to us and revealed to you; Our God and your God is One and it is to Him we have submitted ourselves.’” (Qur’an 29:46)

V

POTENTIALS AND RESOURCES OF NEW MUSLIMS

- ◆ The revert is a *Muhajir* and often appreciates Islam more than most of us. The first generation of Muslims, the companions (or *Sahaba*) of the Prophet (s) or the constructors (with Allah’s help) of our golden prototype “*Madinan society*” were all reverts. These reverts were and are (as a whole) “*Muhajirun*” (migrants) from an ideology of ignorance and disbelief to one of submission to Allah (*Islam*). Naturally, the average revert appreciates Islam even more than the average born-Muslim. This is mainly because he/she has experienced what it is like to be “*lost*” and therefore appreciates guidance much more than the average born-Muslim who usually has no clue of what the experience of being “*lost*” really means.
- ◆ We should also remind ourselves that new Muslims often come with some stunning and insightful perceptions and comments, which are truly instructive for the *daiyah*. Westerners, for instance, tend to question everything and are often quite skeptical - one needs to explain things in detail, reason things out, to convince them. If you don’t know, politely say “*I don’t know*” rather than dismissing the question as unimportant.
- ◆ The *Muhajir* knows the way. We know and complain about the enormous amount of misinformation about Islam among Muslims, let alone non-Muslims. Whether it is from the activities of some so-called Muslim scholars ‘*Alhajis*’, politicians, emirs, local religious teachers, ‘*Sheikhs*’, ‘*secular*’, or ‘*extremist*’ Muslims, self-righteous groups or the non-Muslim media (the list is endless), there often seem to be more people propagating what Islam is not (in the name of Islam), than there are true Muslims propagating what Islam really is. But with all the obstacles between non-Muslims and what Islam really is, the revert has (with Allah’s help) often been able to maneuver and navigate his/her way to the truth. Would the revert not be among the most qualified to advise on Da’wah methods and strategies for other non-Muslims to find their way to Islam? Do we usually have reverts with us when planning for Da’wah?
- ◆ How much effort, time, money and expertise is invested by those interested in Da’wah to non-Muslims in trying to give non-Muslims the opportunity to ask questions about Islam? And even after getting the attention of a non-Muslim, there is often the need to establish trust, acquaintance and familiarity to facilitate the flow of information and understanding - the probable reason why Allah would call His chosen ones to prophethood only after the establishment of a good sense of familiarity within their communities.

- ◆ The revert to Islam is a source of attention or attraction for those who know him. Nearly all his family, relations, friends and associates would want to know from him/her why he/she has turned to Islam. They would like to know what was special about Islam, what was defective in his/her former religion, what are the revert's “new” answers to the ultimate questions of origin, purpose and destiny in life? They want to know about *hijab*, *jihad*, relationship with other religious ideologies and nearly all the objections or reservations non-Muslims have about Islam. These are questions, which if answered well could clear the path for many to appreciate and even revert to Islam. Do we train reverts to handle with *Hikmah* (wisdom) the sudden onslaught of questions and accusations that they encounter just after reverting, or are we too busy trying to turn them into jurists?
- ◆ The *Muhajir's* knowledge may be little, but most of it is put to use. Our knowledge may be comparatively more but how much is utilized? The revert may not be “very knowledgeable” about Islam (as we see it), but he/she surely knows and appreciates enough of it to attain the necessary faith in Allah (*iman*) to forsake if necessary his/her family, friends, relations, “connections”, wealth and property. (No wonder his/her past sins are forgiven!) If the revert has in many cases sacrificed more than what most born-Muslims will ever be ready to sacrifice for Allah, there may be the need to think again about who knows more what type of knowledge non-Muslims and Muslims require to understand and appreciate Islam better. Would it be wrong to say that a revert usually has a higher percentage of useful knowledge compared to most of us, and has a better sense of priority in terms of useful information for Da’wah and societal reform?
- ◆ Those who choose Islam soon discover that, for the rest of their lives, they will have to face the following question repeatedly - “Why did you become a Muslim?” Perhaps it would be good for born Muslims to be regularly challenged to explain why they are Muslims and what they believe.
- ◆ There may be more for us to rethink about in the Da’wah potentials of reverts regarding their advice on the contents and methods of Da’wah to Muslims and especially non-Muslims, and on the ways we could train and handle those who join the fold of Islam. We may also find that many suggestions from male and female reverts would be useful in helping us get more “reverts” from among born-Muslims who have drifted away and whose difference from some immoral non-Muslims is for all practical purposes unclear.

But how easy is it for us to learn to listen to a supposedly “ignorant”, “new”, “converts”? Would our own self-righteousness and spiritual arrogance not make us part of the obstacles to Da’wah and the process of Islamization?

VI

MEETING NEW MUSLIM’S NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The following observations are by Dr. Jeffrey Lang:

“*The Muslim communities in western countries can do much to counter the pressures felt by newcomers to their religion. First and foremost, they could take a much more active role in fighting discrimination. Up to now, the Muslim community is one of the most passive and disorganized minorities in the West. If an American or European Muslim chooses to fight discrimination, it is usually a solitary battle.*¹

“*Second, the Muslim community in the West should put less pressure on its female members to adhere to strict traditional dress codes. The dangers and hardships that some of these women face can be very severe, and there is no social system established to support and protect them. The enjoining of modest dress and behavior for both sexes should suffice for now.*

¹ However, I must commend the efforts of the American Muslim Council (AMC) and the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) for their outstanding efforts in fighting prejudice and discrimination against Muslims.

“Third, the mosque must become much more of a haven and buttress to new Muslims — a place where they can turn for comfort and encouragement. At the time of Prophet Muhammad, the mosque certainly served this function; today, however, new Muslims not only feel estranged from their own western cultures, but often from what should be the very center of Muslim community life. This is especially the case with female converts, for they — and women in general — are often made to feel unwelcome in the mosque.

“We should aim to make every new Muslim (especially the females) feel as comfortable and ‘at home’ as possible at our centers which should be places where they can simply be themselves, and enjoy the company of sincere fellow Muslims, as well as learn about Islam. They should not feel in any way out of place.

“Some converts search not only for a set of beliefs with which they could agree, but also for a community that lives and represents those beliefs as well — this is sometimes hard to find for the average convert.”

- ◆ Muslims should be encouraged to visit new Muslims, and to invite them to their homes. They should also try to arrange for new Muslims to meet up with others who might have reverted to Islam before them, and would be able to share their experiences.

VII

PROFILE OF A TYPICAL WESTERN REVERT

- ◆ Many reverts to Islam were formally atheists or agnostics, and in America, a large number of white reverts come from Catholic families.

“The following is an attempt at a personality profile of the potential western convert to Islam: Relatively young, between the ages of 25 and 40. Idealistic. Self sacrificing. Non-conformist. Periodically reclusive. Prefers the company of the society’s disenfranchised. Non-materialistic to ascetic in nature. An activist. Liberal to radical politically. College educated. Capable of sudden drastic changes in view points. Very curious. Highly opinionated. Stubborn. Argumentative. Confident. Contemplative. Tends toward rationalism as opposed to spiritualism in religion. Critical of others. Loyal to overzealous in commitments.

“The majority of Western converts to Islam are socially and politically liberal. This is not surprising, since few conservatives would contemplate something so radical as becoming a Muslim. Many converts — men as well as women — were feminists before conversion, and may continue to be so after becoming Muslims. Their entry into the Muslim community creates a volatile situation.

“The modern Muslim community is quite suspicious of philosophy and is uncomfortable with what it often sees as an overtly rational approach to religion among converts, while many converts perceive that the views held by many Muslims conflict with a liberal or reasonable outlook.

“Some of these qualities can work against an individual once he or she enters the Muslim community. The great emphasis the community puts on emulating all of the Prophet’s habits can be at odds with a non-conformist personality.”

VIII

ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND ORIENTATION OF NON-MUSLIMS AND NEW MUSLIMS

Concerning the following of the Sunnah, the non-Muslims and new Muslims should know that a minority of Muslims (converts inclusive) believes that we must remain cognizant of the historical

context of Prophet Muhammad’s actions and sayings, and that if we are to apply his example correctly, we must be alert to the many differences that exist between his time and ours. These people prefer to search for general ethical and spiritual lessons through the study of the Prophet’s biographies, rather than to copy his daily routines. The main assumption behind the stricter approach is that the best and most efficient way to derive moral and spiritual benefit from Prophet Muhammad’s life example is by imitating him as closely as possible. The principle aim of the more liberal approach is to understand the intentions behind and effects of the Prophet’s actions and to duplicate them. This less conservative application of the Sunnah seems self-serving and disingenuous to stricter Muslims. The more conservative approach seems illogical and overly restrictive to more liberal believers, who feel that we can easily produce the opposite of what Prophet Muhammad (s) intended by ignoring the historical and societal background of his acts.

- ◆ Take time to understand, correct or reinforce what must have attracted the revert to Islam. For example: Was it an event? A dream (of having seen a prophet etc.)? A particular attitude/behavior of a Muslim? Appreciation of Islamic principles and appeal to human reasoning? Or just a curiosity/experiment: “*Let me try something new*”?
- ◆ Don’t push the person, talk to his conscience. His conscience should guide him. Let him know that “*Allah does not place a burden on a person greater than that which he can bear.*”
- ◆ Encourage the person further, but don’t turn him off by disturbing him too much. People don’t like to be forced to accept anything even if it is true or good. Be careful not to exaggerate about Islam or Muslims. When he discovers the truth, he will begin to distrust not only you, but every nice thing he hears about Islam and Muslims.

But don’t relax, follow up with wise diplomacy and periods of silence. Giving/lending useful literature and audio/video materials are effective “*Hikma aids.*”

- ◆ Adapting to a routine of periodic acts of worship, especially Sal?t and fasting is a challenge that new Muslims usually face. Practical “*Ibadah aids*” such as alarm clocks to wake for *Fajr*, relaxing and fruitful activities in the day time of Ramadan, etc. will help reduce the shock that converts face and make them enjoy Islamic acts of worship.
- ◆ When introducing Islamic principles to people in non-Muslim countries or to people who have recently embraced Islam, as well as to newly committed Muslims, emphasis should not be put on either minor issues or controversial issues like sitting on a mat, *Tahajjud* keeping, wearing of hijab etc. but on fundamentals. Efforts should be made to correct their concepts and understanding of Islam before anything else. Once the correct beliefs are firmly established, then one can begin to explain the five pillars of Islam and gradually to emphasize those aspects which make a Muslim’s belief and practice compatible, and his entire life an embodiment of what is pleasing to Allah. The Prophet himself recognized this fact when he sent Mu’adh to Yemen. He told him:

“You are going to (meet) people of a (divine) scripture, and when you reach them call them to witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. And if they obey you in that, then tell them that Allah has enjoined on them five Sal?t to be performed everyday and night. And if they obey you in that then tell them that Allah has enjoined upon them Sadaqah (Zakah) to be taken from the rich amongst them and given to the poor amongst them.” (Authenticated by all authorities).

- ◆ The use of a few specific Arabic expressions has (unfortunately) become one of a number of external measures of a reverts progress in the faith. This attitude among Muslims should be changed and education should be focused on helping the new Muslims attain the practical skills to enhance their Islamic life. It is very important to introduce reverts to the principles of Shari’ah or the principles of what is *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (prohibited). These are important as they outline briefly the guiding principles of thought of an Islamic mind or mentality. They help him to use his “*Islamic common sense*” which is very important in intellectually improving the new Muslim in his/her daily life.

- ◆ New Muslims should know that Islam does not view faith as principally a “spiritual” experience. The spiritual side of Islam is only one aspect of a comprehensive holistic understanding of life. Also Islam does not offer persons instant sainthood: spirituality matures by patiently sticking to a religious program and using discipline.
- ◆ Once the decision to accept Islam is made, the first thing almost every revert wants to know is, what do I do now? This is because conversion seeks fulfillment; it needs a way or a program to perpetuate the experience of self-surrender. Exposure to various sources of knowledge, Da’wah activities, social activities etc. is therefore very important to new Muslims.
- ◆ The decision to revert formally to Islam is seldom an easy one. However, it seems that the greater the difficulty in coming to that decision, the more steadfast is the revert in his or her commitment to Islam. Perhaps this is because such persons already have considered and accepted most of the difficulties and problems that come with being a Muslim in a Muslim minority context.

The time spent studying Islam before actual conversion was long for most educated western converts. Therefore treating converts or new Muslims as though they know nothing or very little about Islam can very easily (and justifiably too) be interpreted as an expression of spiritual arrogance, which in turn usually worsens the relationship between new Muslims and born-Muslims.

- ◆ Every new Muslim needs to learn at least some Arabic, however little, if only to participate in the Salat, since Arabic is the liturgical language of Islam. In striving to develop an Islamic lifestyle in western countries, many new Muslims also feel it advantageous to study Arabic grammar in some depth in order to have first hand access to the revelation and to the Prophet’s Sunnah.
- ◆ The convert (like many born Muslims) may easily stray far from his original motives for embracing Islam. He involves himself more than most Muslims do in attending and participating in the various activities of the Muslim community, and may even become more concerned with obtaining the respect of the community than with his or her relationship with Allah.
- ◆ Some converts have a zeal to practice Islam which is extremely to their disadvantage as far as realities of life and principles of Islam are concerned. The level of activity may be too taxing and they may not be undergoing a healthy, natural and gradual change. Therefore, attempts at attaining a steady pace of growth for the convert are desirable and during that period of zeal, it may be worthwhile to direct his/her passions to the reading of the right books.
- ◆ Encourage the reverts to freely express their doubts or discomfort with their understanding of Islam and Muslims. If the doubts are suppressed or not satisfactorily cleared, they may lead to rejection. If they are satisfactorily cleared it leads to deeper conviction.
- ◆ For many who had been agnostic or atheists, their decision to accept Islam was partly due to a feeling of emptiness in life and isolation from any spiritual relationship with a higher being. Make such people understand the Muslim relationship with God, with emphasis on His intense love and mercy, and the spiritual and psychological fulfillment, as well as immeasurable joy derived from this relationship.
- ◆ Don’t present Islam to new Muslims as a totally new way of life. A new Muslim doesn’t have to discard everything (name, personality, dress-style, etc) but only that aspect of culture which is at variance with Islam. He should not feel he has to drop his entire culture, and totally erase his social, cultural, or national identity.
- ◆ Islam does not disapprove of anything good and wholesome, regardless of its cultural origin. Only that which is harmful (from diverse perspectives) is prohibited.
- ◆ It is crucial to the new (especially intellectual) Muslim’s appreciation of Islam, that the position of Hadith is clearly understood. Practical elaboration and application of Qur’anic teachings can be seen in the Prophet’s Sunnah, but distinction must be made between the eternal and universal spirit and wisdom of the Sunnah and the particular ways and manners by which the Prophet demonstrated this Sunnah e.g. his style of dressing being suited to the culture and climate of his region.

- ◆ Muslims should also bear in mind that though male circumcision is a highly recommended practice (“*Sunnah Muakkada*”), it is not compulsory (“*fard*”). Some new Muslims have been driven out of Islam as a result of the premature over-emphasis on it by some insensitive and/or ignorant Muslims. Let the new Muslim’s growth in faith (*iman* and *taqwa*) be the main source of motivation toward circumcision, and not just the approval of others.
- ◆ Converts should be exposed to questions related to faith and reason. These are questions worth having good answers for, as many agnostics and atheists remain so due to unsatisfactory answers to these questions. See “Even Angels Ask” and “Struggling to Surrender” both by Jeffery Lang for some interesting answers to these and more questions. For example:
 If God is All Merciful and All Compassionate, why does He expose us to suffering?
 If Self-Sufficient, why does He require us to worship Him?
 Of what value is prayer, if all is predestined (as some Muslims believe)?
 How does one reconcile divine justice with “predestination”, or divine love with punishment?
- ◆ Let reverts soon learn to lead the *Sal?t* (prayers). This motivates them more towards learning the basics of *Sal?t* and *Tahara* (purification). It also adds a greater integration into the community.
- ◆ It may be necessary to attach a new Muslim to some selected brothers or sisters who would be responsible for their Islamic education.
- ◆ It is worthwhile for converts to have early exposure to misconceptions about Islam, so that they can clear up such misconceptions whenever they are asked.
- ◆ Regarding some un-Islamic practices which the new Muslim may find difficult to suddenly abandon, such as drinking of alcohol, un-Islamic dressing, attending discos, working for a brewing company etc., the transition to a more Islamic lifestyle should be gradual. Some new-Muslims have left Islam due to the “instant angel” approach of some Muslims, where the new Muslims is immediately expected to be like Caliph Umar (RA). Remember, better a weak and growing Muslim than a hypocrite or a denier of truth (*Kafir*).
- ◆ Encourage new Muslims to read and learn more from other more knowledgeable converts. Have available good books, articles, video and audio tapes, etc. by them. Help new Muslims meet other converts to share their feelings, concerns, or fears with. This can give the new Muslim tremendous moral and psychological support. It may be worth considering the establishment of a Muslim Converts’ Association, where Muslims (and the converts in particular) concentrate on meeting the needs of new Muslims.

IX

THE PROCESS OF REVERSION

What makes a person become a Muslim?

- ◆ The boundary of difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim lies in faith in the “*Kalimah*” i.e. the declaration that “*There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger*”. This involves three stages:
 1. to accept the “*Kalimah*” and its implications whole heartedly
 2. to proclaim it sincerely and
 3. to put it into practice to the best of his/her ability.

Salat (prayer), *Zakat* (alms-giving), Fasting, dressing etc. can only be built on this solid foundation.

- ◆ Many western converts report that they had become rationally convinced of the truth of Islam before they embraced it (i.e. Islam’s intellectual appeal), but many also admit that their conversion was greatly influenced by Muslim friends and romantic interests.
- ◆ Nearly every convert - especially in the West — fears his/her society’s reaction. As the West is perceived to be anti-Islam, conversion is most often a very slow and gradual process. Very few Americans or Europeans jump into the religion, and when they do, they are not usually Muslims for very long. Most converts recall many key turning points on the road to conversion, long before the final decision to embrace Islam. “*Leaps of faith*” are not usual.
- ◆ Try to appreciate the implications of conversion. A potential convert may show hesitation in converting, not necessarily because he is yet to be convinced about Islam, but because the decision is a significant one, and social and economic implications cannot be ignored so easily.

X

WHY REVERTS ACCEPT ISLAM AND REMAIN MUSLIMS

Converts give many reasons for choosing Islam and describe many diverse paths to this religion. The most important question we should be investigating concerning western converts to Islam is not how they came to Islam, but rather why do so many of them remain committed? The answer obtained to the latter question is usually: the Qur’an. Virtually all committed converts to Islam ascribe their faith to an unwavering conviction that the Qur’an, in its entirety, is no less than pure revelation from God. One may often discover after some probing, that this certainty is based on a convert’s objective study of the Muslim scripture, but more so on his or her experience of it, or perhaps one should say, on his or her conversation with the Qur’an.

The Qur’an challenges one to test his own positions as against those of the Qur’an according to reasoning, coherence, and accepted truths. This is well suited to the western mind and its acceptance has been the first step for many who eventually converted to Islam. While the convert may subsequently experience persecution or disappointment from fellow human beings, he/she finds it impossible to deny the truth of the Qur’an and the relationship it gives him/her with Allah, and the way Islam makes sense and gives meaning to his/her life.

Section D

**HANDLING DISAGREEMENT
AND CONFLICT IN DA‘WAH WORK**

Introduction

The person conducting Da’wah does not operate in a vacuum. He/she interacts with other Muslims, in the mosque and the community and possibly belongs to an Islamic organization or more than one. These organizations themselves interact with members of other organizations and the wider society.

Muslims of different views are therefore bound to encounter one another in the course of their Da’wah activities, and this encounter may result in either co-operation for the common good or in disagreement, rivalry, conflict and disunity, depending on their approach to each other.

The different views of some Muslims based on their School of Jurisprudence (*Madhhab*) or their national or ethnic customs or their type of education (traditional or modern) and so on are potential sources of disagreement and even conflict.

This section of the book deals with differences of opinion among Muslims and how they may be handled in such a way as to enhance unity and avoid conflict.

I

ETHICS OF DISAGREEMENT

Introduction

Schools of Jurisprudence (*Madhahib*) are based on recorded works of juristic principles (*Usul*) and methodologies of the different schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence that appeared in the period of the first two centuries of Islam. These Schools of Jurisprudence were many but those that remain till today and whose principles are still employed in assessing issues and making legal judgements in Sunni Islam are those of Abu Hanifah, Malik, al-Shafe'i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. It is important to note that the collections and recorded works of each of the Schools of Jurisprudence are not the effort of only one scholar, but of many scholars which are based on researches from the Qur'an, the Hadith and their rulings under various situations and circumstances. None of these scholars claimed that he was infallible. Imam Malik said: *"The word of any person other than the Prophet (SAW) is sometimes accepted and sometimes rejected."* And Imam Shafe'i commented: *"My opinion is correct with the possibility of its being in error. An opinion different from mine is in error with the possibility of its being correct."*

The statements quoted from Imam Malik and Imam Shafe'i explained why there existed differences in opinions and legal judgements on certain issues not only among the scholars of the different schools of thought but even among scholars within the same school. With the passage of time, the Muslim masses began to stick to the teachings of only one school of thought and steered clear of the teachings of other Schools of Jurisprudence no matter how cogent they might be. Some scholars even claimed that it was compulsory to follow the teachings of the four Schools of Jurisprudence. The consequence of such a stand is that it closed the door for *'Ijtihad'*, and created blind imitation. Independent reasoning withered and intellectual thought was abandoned. With the negative effect of refusing to accommodate differences of opinion, coupled with the increasingly complex nature of the society and the emergence of various contemporary issues, there is need once again to make research into the Qur'an and the Hadith with a view to proffering more appropriate solutions to some problems as well as answers to some questions of relevance to the contemporary situation. The advantages of this could be summed up follows:

Positive effects of differences of opinion

- ◆ It provides greater awareness of the various possible aspects and interpretations of evidence in a given case. This is likely to bring into the open a variety of hypotheses in tackling specific issues.
- ◆ It is also an avenue for generating a variety of solutions for dealing with a particular situation so that the most suitable solution can be found.
- ◆ Difference of opinion among genuine scholars is a source of blessing because it helps develop Islamic jurisprudence.
- ◆ It helps in establishing the relevance of Islam to changing circumstances which safeguards public welfare.

It is quite unfortunate that differences of opinion later degenerated in some communities into one of the most critical and dangerous factors of disunity and internal strife among Muslims.

Its also became a scourge which dissipated much of the energy and potential of the Muslim Ummah, causing it to become deeply involved in matters of no practical relevance to its welfare.

Different approaches of Muslims towards copying the Sunnah

Allah says in the Qur'an: *"You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for him who hopes in Allah and the Final Day..."* (Qur'an 33:21). The Sayings and Practice of Prophet Muhammad (s) are called his Sunnah. Along with the Qur'an, the Sunnah is a primary source of the Shari'ah and guidance for Muslims. But how do we follow the Sunnah?

There are basically two approaches of understanding and applying the Sunnah. These are:

1. Every act and saying of the Prophet (s) was directed by revelation (*Wahy*) and the Muslim is expected to copy everything. In other words, the way he used to eat, sit, dress, appear, live and earn a living etc must be adopted irrespective of the social context and circumstances that surrounded him.

Evidence: *"Nor does he (Muhammad) say (ought) of (his own) desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him."* (Qur'an 53:3-4).

2. The Prophet exercised his personal judgment/reasoning (*Ijtihad*) in certain circumstances wherein he was not directly guided by any specific revelation. Therefore, in following his guidance one should consider the spirit or intention and the context or circumstances surrounding his non-ritual actions. This however does not imply that his actions are irrelevant to today's situation.

Evidence: The Prophet was corrected for focusing his attention of the Quraysh leaders rather than the blind Muslim questioner (*Ibn Maktum*): “(The Prophet) frowned and turned away, because there came to him the blind man (interrupting). But what could tell you but that perchance he might grow in purity...?” (Qur’an 80:1-3).

Further, the Prophet (s) once forbade for himself the consumption of honey, and Allah corrected him thus: “O Prophet! Why do you hold to be forbidden that which Allah has made lawful to you: you seek to please your consorts...?” (Qur’an 66:1).

There are also a number of Hadith according to which, when his opinion was based on his human reasoning and not on revelation, he accepted others' opinions based on their experience. For example:

Hadith on date-palm cross fertilization (in which he accepted correction from experts).

Hadith on position of the army for fighting at *Badr*

Hadith on position of the army for fighting at *Uhud*

These Ahadith show that the Prophet (s) did not claim to know everything and responded to expert advice.

Muslims who follow the first approach insist on strict compliance with daily routines of the Prophet (s) irrespective of the social context whereas those who follow the second approach see that sticking to compliance without consideration of the existing societal context could even result in the opposite of what the Prophet's intentions were.

This means there is the need for greater tolerance and accommodation on the part of the Muslims for what may at first appear as being too conservative or too liberal. However, most Muslims adopt one of these two approaches or a mixture of the two depending on the issue in question.

Causes of differences of opinion and their possible benefits

- ◆ Ignorance of a text available elsewhere.
- ◆ Certain texts or expressions accommodate more than one interpretation.
- ◆ Difference of opinion is natural and good provided it does not exceed its limits.
- ◆ It is a law of nature that variety and differences will always exist among people. Everywhere and at all times there have been diverse colors, tongues, customs, concepts, intellects and degrees of knowledge (Qur’an 30:22):

“And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are signs for those who know.”

- ◆ The external variations reflects internal variations, variations of opinions, attitudes and objectives as stated:

“If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people; but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His mercy: and for this did He create them.” (Q.11:118-119)

- ◆ The diversity mentioned in the above verse has among other meanings the diversity in abilities and dispositions, the choice of different professions, and this makes for stability in the world. There is in the creation of humans the propensity for variation in learning, view points and feeling; and this in turn leads to variation in wills and preferences; and in faith, obedience and disobedience.
- ◆ But for those endowed with Allah's mercy, they will be free from the control of desires and whims, will not fail to arrive at truth if they diligently search for it (Qur’an 30:30), and develop their concept of *fitra* which is the inner disposition to truth.

- ◆ We should remember that to differ is not a sin. A scholar will be rather rewarded in the Hereafter even when he errs in his judgement and will be doubly rewarded when he is right. This is a great incentive for scholars to exert themselves and reason out controversial issues with a view to resolving truth and suggesting the best available course for the community. This is a manifestation of the great wisdom of Allah.

Right to one's opinion

It is unfair to accuse a person of “*religious extremism*” simply because he has adopted the “hard-line” juristic opinion of certain fuqaha (jurists). If a person is convinced that his opinion is right and that he is bound by it according to Shari’ah, he is free to follow it even if others think that the juristic evidence is weak. He alone is responsible for what he thinks and believes even if in so doing, he over burdens himself, especially since he is not content with limiting himself to the categorical obligations required of him but also seeks Allah’s pleasure through supererogatory performances.

Therefore, we do not have the right to condemn another person’s choice of *Ijtihad* or following a particular *Madhhab* (School of Jurisprudence) because he differs from that which various scholars (especially in the contemporary world) expound or vice-versa. Example of this: Differences of opinions concerning coverage of women’s Hijab - hands and face exposed or veiled and gloved; position of Islam on singing, music, drawing, photography, apostasy, jihad, polygamy etc. Caution should be taken not to condemn any Muslim should he adopt a hard-line opinion based on juristic judgement through which he/she seeks Allah’s pleasure. We have no right to force him to abandon his opinion or ask him to follow a line of behavior, which is contrary to his convictions. Our duty is to appeal to him with wisdom, argue with him patiently and gently, and try to convince him by citing evidence in the hope that he may change his mind and accept what we believe to be the truth.

We should likewise avoid imposition of our hard-line opinions on some who may wish to follow a path of ease. (Qur’an 2:185 - “*Allah intends every ease for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties.*”) The Prophet (s) said: “*Make things easy for people and do not make things difficult*” (Authenticated by all authorities). It was reported that “*whenever the Prophet (s) was given a choice between two opinions, he always chose the easiest unless it was a sin.*” (Bukhari, al-Tirmidhi).

Thus, we must refrain from complicating matters for people and causing constraint in their lives as it is contrary to the most outstanding qualities of the Prophet (s). For example, he said in this respect, “*If any of you leads people in Salat, he should shorten it, for among them are the weak, the sick, and the old and those with business to attend; but if any of you offers Salat alone, then he may prolong (it) as much as he wishes.*” (Bukhari)

Similarly, it is also excessive and over-burdening to require people to observe supererogatory acts of worship in the same way as they would observe the obligatory acts, or hold them accountable for the things which are merely *Makruh* (distasteful) as if these were *haram* (prohibited). In fact, we should require that people observe only what Allah (A) has categorically commanded. The additional forms of *Ibadah* (worship) are optional. This is evident in case of a Bedouin who once asked the Prophet (s) about the obligatory acts required of him in response to which the Prophet (s) mentioned only three:- *Salah*, *Zakat* and *Siyam*. When the Bedouin asked if there was anything else which he must do, the Prophet (s) replied in the negative, adding that the Bedouin could volunteer to do more if he so wished. As the Bedouin was leaving he swore never to increase or decrease what the Prophet (s) had asked him to do. When the Prophet (s) heard this he said, “*If he is saying the truth, he will succeed*” or (said) “*He will be granted Jannah*” (Bukhari).

Therefore, we must accommodate any Muslim who at least could observe the *wajibat* (obligatory duties) and avoid the most heinous of the *muharramat* (prohibited acts), as long as his/her loyalty is to Allah and His Messenger (s). Even if he commits some minor *muharramat*, the merits gained by his observance of the five daily *Salawat*, *Salat at-Jumu’ah* (Friday Prayers), *Siyam*, etc. will expiate his small faults.

The Qur’an says “*Good deeds remove those that are evil*” (Q.11:114) and “*If you (but) avoid the most heinous of the things which are forbidden, We shall expel out of you all the evil in you and admit you to a state of great honor*” (Qur’an 4:31).

In view of the above evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah, how could we reject a Muslim from the fold of Islam merely because of his commitment to certain controversial matters which we are not sure are *halal* or *haram*, or because of his failure to observe something which we are not certain is *wajibat* or *mandub* (desirable)? For this reason both the hard-line and the contemporary 'ulama should respect each other's position with tolerance and open-mindedness.

Some basic ethics to bear in mind

- ◆ Be always sincere in your argument.
- ◆ Be humble. Avoid wanting to get the better of the other person by being unwilling to find out the truth or clarify what is right.
- ◆ Don't allow your ego, or selfish desire for psychological satisfaction to suppress all concern for the truth (*Qur'an 4:135 - Don't then follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice*). Other references *Qur'an 6:56, 2:87; 38:26; 23:71 and 6:119*.
- ◆ Always assess the worthiness of an argument - is it worth the argument? For example minor or subsidiary issues like saying *Amin* aloud after the recitation of *al-Fatiha* (Opening Chapter of the Qur'an); saying *Bismillahi al-Rahmani al-Rahim* at the beginning of *al-Fatiha*; whether signs of the Last Day are complete or not; the reality of the descriptions of the Hereafter etc.
- ◆ Avoid comparison of various opinions presented for or against a particular controversial issue when they are all in line with the Qur'an and Sunnah. But expose the rationality of each for better understanding and choice making.
- ◆ Avoid disagreement as much as you can. This is evident in a Hadith narrated by Abdullah Ibn Umar. He said: - "*One day I called upon the Messenger of Allah (s) during the midday rest. (While I was there), the Prophet heard two men arguing loudly in disagreement over (the meaning of a Qur'anic verse). The Messenger of Allah (s) went out with anger showing on his face and said: 'People before you perished only because of their disagreement about the scripture'.*" (Ibn Hazim al-Ahkam, 5/66).
- ◆ Be God-conscious and avoid personal whims. This will ensure pursuance of truth alone, the only goal.
- ◆ Adherence to Islamic norms of behavior during argument such as politeness, amicableness, avoidance of vile and insulting language and willingness to listen to each other's point of view.
- ◆ Avoid hypocrisy and flattery as far as possible. Exert every effort to investigate issues objectively. This would force the disputants into either accepting the other point of view or advancing a better opinion.
- ◆ Each disputant must have evidence or proof (*dalil*) to authenticate his argument, otherwise the argument is invalid.
- ◆ It is a grave sin and unforgivable offence for someone to allow any difference of opinion to break the solid wall of Islamic brotherhood. Preserving brotherhood is an important form of worship through which we can achieve nearness to Allah and overcome all the obstacles facing the spread of Islam.
- ◆ It is prohibited for anyone to accuse someone who differs with him on any issue of unbelief (*Kufr*), corruption (*fisq*), or innovation (*bid'ah*). On the contrary, he should try to seek justification for the one who differs with him so as to strengthen the bond of affection between them and secure mutual respect, love and brotherhood.
- ◆ No one has the right to refute an interpretation of a text advanced by others as long as the interpretation can be sustained by the text and is not in conflict with other legal texts.
- ◆ We need to understand that most of the laws pertaining to subsidiary and practical matters formulated on the basis of *Ijtihad* change with the passing of time. These laws may also vary according to the differences between individuals in proportion to their capacities and circumstances. This must be appreciated as part of the mercy of Allah to His servants, which allows adequate scope

for the exercise of analytical thought and judgement through logical process in the light of Qur'an and Sunnah. Allah says in the Qur'an that *"He has laid no hardship on you in (anything that pertains to) religion."* 22:79. In another passage of the Qur'an He says: *"Allah desires that you shall have ease, and does not desire you to suffer hardship"* (Qur'an 2:185) and *"Allah wants to lighten your burdens"* *"for Allah knows that man has been created weak."* (4:28)

Ibn Burhan says:

"Divine laws are policies through which God regulates the affairs of His servants. The way of dealing with people in this regard varies according to the differences in time. Each period of time requires a type of regulation which caters to the general welfare specific to that time. In the same way, each nation has a type of regulation which is in its general interest, even though it may result in vitiating rights when applied to others".

- ◆ We must avoid sternness and sterility and undue stress while applying juristic judgments (the get-tough approach).

It was reported that an Andalusian monarch once asked the Maliki Jurist Yahya Ibn Yahya al-Layth (d.234 A.H). What he should do to atone for having intercourse with his wife during the day time in Ramadan. Yahya told him that he had to fast for two consecutive months. When he was asked why he had not given the monarch the first option of setting free someone in bondage, he replied: *"He is capable of setting hundreds of slaves free. Therefore he must have the harder punishment, which is fasting."*

This attitude of making things difficult for people portrays virtues in Islam as *'the tougher the more rewarding'* concept. It is worth noting that this attitude or approach at times precludes some other more important virtues. For example, freeing a slave would be considered more important than sixty days of fast by the monarch for it solves a human being's problem.

II CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN DA'WAH WORK

(The Word "Conflict" in this section refers to conflict of ideas.)

Conflict: The Myth and the Reality

1. *Myth:* Conflict of ideas or disagreement is dysfunctional.
Reality: When properly managed, conflict of ideas can help towards goal achievement.
2. *Myth:* Disagreement is caused by lack of communication or miscommunication
Reality: Disagreement will occur due to clashes of ideas and values whether or not there is lack of communication or miscommunication.
3. *Myth:* Conflict will go away, if unattended to.
Reality: Minor conflicts may disappear with time, but major ones will degenerate into big crises.
4. *Myth:* All conflicts of ideas can be resolved.
Reality: Not all conflicts of ideas can be resolved, but all can be well managed when appropriate steps are taken.
5. *Myth:* There must be a winner and a loser
Reality: Conflict of ideas can end with a winner - winner result and even strengthen the relationship between conflicting parties.
6. *Myth:* Conflict demoralizes the parties.
Reality: You may not only come to understand the other party during a conflict of ideas, you may also come to realize your own shortcomings and become motivated to change.

Why deal with conflict?

Muslims should be interested in dealing with conflict in their individual as well as collective capacity for the following reasons:

- ◆ Muslims like any other people, change as they learn and grow, and change is a precursor to conflict; thus the need to manage change.
- ◆ Communication and globalization is bringing Muslims with different backgrounds and values into contact, therefore the need to understand, tolerate and accept their differences becomes vital.
- ◆ Dealing with conflicts equips the *Ummah* and its leadership with the skill and ability to handle problems so that the *Ummah* does not lose direction or degenerate, but rather becomes a stronger and more effective team.

Grounds for conflict:

Sometimes, conflict may arise from issues not relating to ideology or differences in values or background. For instance, conflict may arise because:

- ◆ a younger person is engaged in Da'wah to an older person;
- ◆ a less knowledgeable and experienced person is engaged in Da'wah to a more knowledgeable and experienced person;
- ◆ a woman is engaged in Da'wah to a man;
- ◆ racial, tribal or class differences amongst people engaged in Da'wah may involve superiority complexes or inferiority complexes.

The scenario could be a young American female *Da'wah* worker talking to older, knowledgeable, experienced, conservative Arab man. There ought not be any problem here because Islam teaches respect on the part of the *Da'wah-worker*; learning constantly from cradle to grave; equality among mankind of either sex and any race; and that the best of them is determined by level of piety. However, *Da'wah* workers should look out for such areas of potential conflict and take necessary steps towards averting them.

HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT

When do you accommodate opposing views?

- ◆ When it is more important to preserve the relationship than argue the issue (Qur'an 20:94).
- ◆ When the issue is more important to the other person than to you.
- ◆ When you want to exhibit some degree of reasonableness and maturity.
- ◆ When there is the need to encourage others to express their own point of view.
- ◆ When it will be more effective for someone to learn from his choices and actions.

When is it appropriate to avoid resolving conflict:

- ◆ When other people are more effective at settling the conflict.
- ◆ When both groups see the issue as minor (unimportant).
- ◆ When foresight or foreknowledge indicates that the issue will have a negative effect on both groups.
- ◆ When time is inadequate to handle the conflict.
- ◆ When both groups want to take time to cool-off. For example in the heat of an argument, when emotions are high and no peace or compromise is at sight, someone can just say: "*Assalamu Alaykum, why don't we rest the issue for a moment and discuss later, when everyone has cooled down?*" The brother or sister should not forget to be the one to raise the issue again at the appropriate time.

When it is appropriate to collaborate with others?

Collaboration is an effective tool for resolving conflict and it is perhaps the most difficult. Here, there is equal concern for the topic of discussion and for unity or maintenance of the relationship. But for collaboration to succeed:

- ◆ there must be sincerity and willingness on all sides concerned;
- ◆ there must be willingness to probe into the true sources and causes of the conflict and resolve it;
- ◆ there must be the willingness to be considerate even when there is cause for differences. This involves accepting, understanding and validating the other people's feelings too.

However, collaboration can be employed:

- ◆ When there is the need to preserve important objectives which cannot be compromised, while still maintaining the relationship. For example, if two sects or groups of Muslims want to use a common Mosque or theatre for their different programs at the same time;
- ◆ When there is need to share experiences with people who have diverse background and ideology;
- ◆ When there is need to break fresh ground. This requires exploring alternatives together which neither group had previously envisaged;
- ◆ When our surface conflict could be resolved by examining its root causes which has hindered progress over a long period of time.

When do you keep silent?

Silence is difficult for most people. Particularly during conflicts, we are prone to speaking instead of listening. However, the person who disciplines himself to imbibe this "silence-system" will easily acquire more information from the speaker and the more silent he is the more information the speaker reveals.

How do you listen and respond to the excessive talker?

This is difficult but achievable. In order to channel the conversation to get the information and resolve the conflict, you may employ the following tools:-

- ◆ Interrupt the speaker but choose your diction properly; e.g. "*Excuse me but...*" or "*I don't know if I am getting you, are you saying...*" or "*Can I seek a clarification? I want...*"
- ◆ Help him to focus by simply saying, "*The bottom line of your explanation is...*" or "*So, your point is...*"

You have to use these two tools frequently in order to curtail the excess of the verbose speaker.

Constructive Criticism:

Constructive criticism is usually employed to evaluate performance. It is well intentioned and thus focuses on issues, not persons or personalities. Its appraisal of the issue and the recommendations should not be viewed as a personal attack.

Ask yourself these questions when you want to give constructive criticism:

- ◆ Is the issue that of performance or behavior?
- ◆ If it is performance, which agreed standards or goals are not being met and where specifically is improvement needed?
- ◆ If it is behavior, specify the dates, times and give a detailed behavioral analysis and specify what changes are expected.
- ◆ What specific suggestions do you have for improvement? You must provide this in order to be constructive.

Destructive Criticism:

Constructive criticism is intended to promote progress and reduce differences, while destructive criticism provokes conflicts and widens differences. It attacks the person rather than the issue of performance or

behavior. It is employed to dominate the other person. It is devoid of the fear of Allah and sincerity of intention.

Receiving Criticism:

Most people are good at giving criticism but are unwilling to accept it. While managing conflict, you must be ready to accept criticism even if people's intention to embarrass or humiliate you is very obvious. This goes a long way to show your maturity and noble intentions and it also enables you to review yourself and make changes where and when necessary.

When do you accept Criticism?

1. When the criticism is accurate: Once you know that a criticism is valid employ the Negative Assertion technique to accept the criticism. Negative Assertion is a non-defensive response used to confirm criticism leveled against you. Once you agree with it when it could be true, you will have put an end to the conflict. It will not escalate any further.
2. When the criticism is questionable: You may not understand the criticism, but you can still avoid opposing the criticism by using the Negative Inquiry technique. Negative Inquiry allows you to question the criticism for more specific information. The more you question, the more facts emerge as to the accuracy or not of the criticism.

There is however a secondary aspect to using either of these techniques. Some people like to criticize simply in order to start conflict. In the case of Negative Assertion, just agree with the criticism (when it is right) and you will stop the conflict instantly. For Negative Inquiry, by asking for specifics, you give the other person the responsibility of clarifying the problems. If he has specifics you have an opportunity to accept criticism and make changes, if he does not, he loses grounds for conflict.

How do you avoid giving destructive Criticism?

- ◆ Do not react when you are angry.
- ◆ Make sure you concentrate on the issue not the personality.
- ◆ Avoid accusing words when commencing your criticism (e.g. "*You are the..*"). The person becomes defensive the moment you accuse him or her.
- ◆ Show your intention of achieving resolution and progress. This creates a non-defensive environment.

How do you handle other people's anger?

Knowing how to handle angry people is an effective tool of conflict resolution. Criticism may engender anger from any side, and once emotions are high, it is practically impossible to resolve differences. You may use two methods to deal with the situation:

- ◆ Allow the emotion to be discharged by the other group. It is very important not to take things personally when attempting this first step. Use a phrase like "*I can understand your anger..*" or "*I can see that you are angry..*" This shows you understand and are concerned, but not necessarily that you are giving in to his position or argument.
- ◆ After the person has relieved his anger, you can then deal with the content (i.e. re-examine the reasons for that feeling). You can thereafter use the Negative Inquiry technique and possibly Negative Assertion (where necessary).

Conflict Resolution and Shura:

A Muslim leader is expected to practice *Shura* (Consultation) with capable advisors in decision-making (Qur'an 42:38) and to be guided by their views. However, he is expected to make everyday decisions in the course of his work, and may have to make important emergency decisions when there is no time for consultation. Since he was chosen because of his leadership qualities he is expected to have enough sense to do this wisely.

If nevertheless a conflict brews as a result of his decision he should return to *Shura* (consultation) and they should jointly review the situation. What has worked? What didn't work? How could it be done differently next time? However, nobody should use phrases like "*Didn't I warn that..*" in this evaluation process.

Conclusion:

Everyone should keep in mind that a member's failure can lead to the delay or destruction of others' efforts and the entire team's efforts may ultimately be jeopardized.

III LESSONS FROM DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN COMPANION AND SCHOLARS

1. Differing views can all be correct

During the Battle of the Confederates, the Prophet is reported to have said to his Companions: "***Do not perform the mid-afternoon ('Asr) Salat until you get to the (Place of) Banu Qurayzah.***" While still on their way, the time of the Salat came. Some of the Companions said, "*We will not perform the Salat until we get to the (Place of) Banu-Qurayzah*" while some others said, "*We shall pray. That (saying of the Prophet) will not prevent us (from praying now).*" When the matter reached the Prophet, he approved of both sides. (See Fath al-Bari commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari 7/313, Sahih Muslim, the Book of al-Salat.)

Lessons to be learned:

- ◆ There was disagreement, based on each group's understanding of how to apply the Prophet's instruction, but they did not let it lead to discord among them.
- ◆ They referred the matter to a higher authority (i.e., the Prophet).
- ◆ He approved of both groups' action without even stating which group was more correct.
- ◆ Each group felt that its action was right, without considering the other group to be wrong.

2. Respect for scholarship:

When the Prophet died, opinion differed as to where he should be buried. Some said: "*We should bury him in his Mosque.*" Another said: "*We should bury him next to his Companions.*" Abu Bakr then said: "I heard the Messenger of God (s) say: "*Whenever a Prophet died he was buried where he died!*" Thereupon the bed on which the Prophet died was raised and his grave was dug beneath it. (Al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Hadith 108). The conflict was put in check by simply referring to Sunnah.

When disagreement arises, refer it to a more knowledgeable and authoritative source, be it a person or literature.

3. A Lesson in Diplomacy:

The Controversy over who was to succeed the Prophet

Following the death of the Prophet, it was narrated that some one came to Abu Bakr and Umar and said: "*A certain group of the Ansar has gathered in the meeting place of Banu Saidah. They have sided up with Sa'd Ibn Ubadah. If you are concerned about the affairs of the Ummah, hasten to these people before the matter gets out of control.*" This piece of news reached Abu Bakr and Umar before the body of the Prophet (s) was ready for burial. On hearing it, Umar and Abu Bakr went to see what they were about.

Umar related what happened next. He said: “Abu Bakr with wisdom and sagacity was able to disentangle the problem from the framework in which the *Ansari* spokesman had placed it. He commended them for their contribution to Islam and to their brothers in faith (*Muhajirun*), and mentioned other merits not said by their spokesman. But he approached the issue from a broader perspective showing the Ansar the practical disadvantages in their succession. He said that the interests of Islamic propagation (Da’wah) would be greatly determined by who succeeded the Prophet. If it went to the *Ansar* the rest of the Arab community would not accept it. They would only submit to the Quraysh. And if unity was not achieved then the message of Islam would not be destined to cross boundaries and spread outside the Peninsula. Thus the interests of Islamic propagation (Da’wah) required that the Succession (Khilafah) to the noble Prophet should be from among the Quraysh in order to carry forward the message and keep hearts together. Abu Bakr then requested them to choose between two people from the Quraysh whose excellence no one could doubt: Umar Ibn al-Khattab and Abu Ubaydah Ibn al-Jarrah. He himself withdrew. Abu Bakr’s recommendation was about to be overturned by another *Ansar* and there was much talk and people raised their voices so loudly that Umar feared disagreement would ensue - so he straight away took Abu Bakr’s hand and gave him his allegiance. Then the *Muhajirun* followed suit and then the *Ansar*. Thus was the problem settled.

This was a matter on which Qur’an and Sunnah were silent. It was resolved with *Hikma* (wisdom) and a high level of diplomacy in the interests of Islam and whole Ummah.

Lessons to be learned:

- ◆ Leave an important matter for a more important or urgent one.
- ◆ Patiently and actively listen to the other side until the person feels sufficiently satisfied that he has expressed himself.
- ◆ Acknowledge legitimacy of an opposing view if it is legitimate.
- ◆ Appreciate and understand your opponent’s concerns or basis for holding his point of view, and express your appreciation and concern.
- ◆ Present your views and the basis for such views, and address the concerns or fears your opponent may wrongly have about your view. Let him see what he and all others concerned stand to gain by considering a different view.
- ◆ If your opponent’s view has been from a narrow perspective, expose him to wider perspectives on the issue. Let him appreciate other aspects of the issue, which he forgot or failed to consider.

4. Tolerance And respect between scholars

The *Qunut* supplication was a voluntary practice of the Prophet, and Imam al-Shafi’i strongly recommended and practiced it. On the other hand Imam Abu Hanifah did not emphasize it. Imam Al-Shafi’i is reported to have performed *Salat al-Fajr* near the grave of Abu Hanifah and did not make the *Qunut* supplication. When asked about this he replied: “*How can I deviate from him (i.e. practice what he did not do) in his presence*”. He is also reported to have said: “*Perhaps we have inclined to the School of Jurisprudence (Madhhab) of the people of Iraq.*”

The report demonstrates that even though one scholar may disagree with another on an issue, there should be the compassionate assumption of the other’s sincerity. This could be seen applied in al-Shafe’i respect for Abu Hanifa’s opinion and his going to the extent of adopting Abu Hanifa’s opinion because that was the opinion that was popular in the locality.

5. Misguided Ijtihad can be fatal

Jabir, a companion of the Prophet narrated: “*We went out on a journey and one of our men was hit on the head by a stone. He then had a wet dream and so asked his Companions ‘Can you find a ruling which would give me a dispensation to make dry ablution (tayammum) (instead of having to take a bath)?’ They replied: ‘We do not find any dispensation for you while you can obtain water!’ So he had the bath but subsequently died. When we got back to the Messenger of Allah and told him what had happened, he (may the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said: ‘They killed him. May God kill them. Why did they*

not ask if they did not know? The cure for the one who does not know is merely to ask. It would have been sufficient for the deceased simply to make the tayammum, or he could have bandaged his wound and passed his wet hand lightly over the bandaged area and then washed the rest of the body.”

Lessons to be learned:

- ◆ Wrong *Ijtihad* can have very serious undesired consequences, hence the Prophet’s stern reproach to those companions.
- ◆ If one hasn’t sufficient knowledge concerning an issue, he should not guess, rather he should enquire from more knowledgeable and reliable sources (Qur’an 16:43) or simply admit his ignorance on the subject.

6. What of brand new interpretations?

Abu Dawud and al-Hakim quoted an incident concerning ‘Amr ibn al As, who said:

One cold night during the Dhat al-Salasil campaign, I had a wet dream. I feared that if I performed ghusl (necessary bath after ritual impurity) I would die (from the cold). So I performed tayammum (dry ablution) instead, then performed the dawn Salat with my companions. This was mentioned to the Prophet who asked: ‘Amr! You performed the prayer with your companions while you were in a state of impurity (Junub)? Whereupon I recalled to him the verse of the Qur’an: “And kill not yourselves. Indeed God has been most Merciful to you.” The Prophet laughed and said nothing. (Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith 334, Fathal Bari commentary of Sahih al Bukhari, 1/385; Nayl al-Awtar. 1/324.)

This narration shows that when one is faced with a situation where there isn’t any clear or elaborate injunction, he should choose the easier option as long as

- ◆ It gives him peace of mind
- ◆ He feels confident enough to face Allah with his decision.

The Prophet’s tolerant response to Amr’s *Ijtihad* demonstrates that a new interpretation should be accommodated if it can be shown to conform with the principles of Islam, especially if it will have positive impact.

End ***** End

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